

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

DE-ROUTEING AND RE-ROOTING OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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PREFACE

As one goes through life there are some unanswered questions. I have long been concerned by the thought that the Catholic Church, in which I have been a priest for forty-one years and a religious for 47 years, could have held for many centuries the view that my fore-parents were disqualified or underprivileged for eternal salvation, due to the accidents of birth in a South Asian country. We have been in difficulty as to how to understand and explain our rather ambiguous Christian inheritance of thought and action, including our peoples' persecution and that of many others as in the colonies that Europeans set up in the lands "discovered" by Columbus, or conquered after Vasco da Gama.

In this one is torn between a fidelity to the Church and an identification with the victimised peoples, sex, races, cultures and other religions. Nor is there an adequate way to reconcile the beauty of the gospel with the Church attitudes towards women, the exploited poor and nature itself. Lived experience tells me that there has been something fundamentally wrong in the way Christianity has been presented during many centuries. I cannot believe that Jesus is responsible for this situation.

Christian theology has, of course, evolved considerably in this half century, but some major problems still remain. Thus even today Christians in Sri Lanka and in some Asian countries are accused of proselytism. Christian "Fundamentalists" are very active throughout the world preaching, with much funds, that salvation is only in Jesus Christ. Women are still not accepted as equal in dignity and rights, especially in the Church. Very many still hold the old theology. Most catechisms and the general preaching in the churches in not really witnessing to even the rather limited openness of Vatican II and of the central authorities of other churches. Meanwhile the situation of the poor and of Nature is worsening in the world at large.

Our difficulties in seeking an acceptable theology are worsened by several factors such as the lack of source material, ignorance of languages, thought domination in the traditional churches, the weight of a certain scholarship that retains the past mistakes as part of the authentic church tradition, the marginalisation of those who disagree with the received orthodoxy, and even the ingrained fear of eternal punishment to those who question the defined dogmas. All the same some of us have sought to respond by going deeper into these issues. Probing further I found that two crucial issues were the Church's interpretation of the human predicament and the way Jesus is presented in the traditional theology.

In recent times that theology has changed. But has the purification gone far enough for us to be able to face the issues involved with the respect due to other religions, women, the poor races, cultures, and Nature itself? Within these circumstances I have been searching for over seven years. I find that "right relationships" among all persons with Nature and the Divine is a common core of thinking among those who seek meaningful process is to try to see where and how Christian theology got "de-routed from Jesus and the early Church, and how a "re-rooting" can be in the Founder and the early founding centuries themselves.

During this period I have shared my views with theologians and groups in many countries. I have been greatly encouraged by the exchanges, though not all would agree with all the points of view proposed. These views are presented in this issue of Logos for discussion by a limited reading public. I realise that this is an incomplete search, and the book has many shortcomings. I shall be grateful for comments which would help me to work further on these issues. Thanks to them, I hope, Deo volente, to publish a revised version in book form in the near future.

I am grateful to all those who helped me in this work, especially the staff of the publications and printing departments of the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo.

Tissa Balasuriya, OMI

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*Chapter 1***Introduction**

Christian theology has come a long way during this second half of the twentieth Century to respond to the problems faced and posed by human beings in the modern world. There has been an openness to the advance made by science and the scientific study of the scriptures.

Human freedom is more respected within the churches. In many parts of the world the churches are among the principal defenders of human rights. Theology has been open in several areas to the understanding and support of the struggles of the poor for justice. The dialogue of the religions is moving the churches to accept the other religions as equals in promoting human welfare and salvation. The rights of women to equality are being gradually recognized in some of the Churches. The care for the environment and for nature is also a growing concern of the churches.

The commitment of the churches and of Christians to the common good of their countries is better in South Korea and the Philippines. Inter-religious dialogue is more advanced in Sri Lanka and certain areas of India. In South Korea the number of Christians is growing in a spectacular manner, in good measure due to the commitment of the churches to democracy and human rights. Vocations to the priesthood and the religious life are also considerably more numerous throughout the Asian churches than in Western Europe, North America and Oceania at present.

Despite their significance, these changes are inadequate in the Sri Lankan and many Asian situations to render the churches genuinely acceptable to our peoples. Churches are seen by many as opposed to the other religions and to the integral liberation of the people. Despite our efforts at dialogue, there are still serious suspicions among many persons of other religions that Christians, especially Catholics, want to convert them or their peoples to Christianity. This may be due to their bitter memory of the activities of the Christian churches and the European powers from the period after Vasco da Gama up to recent times. We Christians would perhaps like Asians to forget these events without our changing our deepest orientations and motivations.

The changes made in our thinking and pastoral practices do not go far enough to convince ourselves or the others that our goal is not to convert others to our religion. Many in the leadership of the churches, and the vast majority of the Christian pastoral workers, still think that Christianity is the privileged path to salvation. Jesus Christ is thought of as the unique and universal saviour of all humankind. Hence we Christians have the privilege and responsibility of working for bringing all peoples to a recognition of this salvation in Christ. Due to this even the good intentions and social activities of the Christians are viewed with suspicion by the more conscious persons of other religions.

While some particular groups are deeply concerned with the problems of Asian countries, the normal run of life in the parishes and church organizations remains more or less what it has been for several decades. Such activities are more individualistic, person-related and not significantly concerned with the total social good of the country. In a certain sense, the satisfaction that such church related activities give the faithful tends to make them somewhat complacent about themselves despite the troubles in the country.

Worsening World Situation

During the 1980s and 1990s the world has become for many a much harder place to live in, though a sizeable minority have never had it better in material terms. The poor in most poor countries have suffered a worsening of their conditions of life. Even in the very rich countries a new class of underprivileged poor has been generated during the apparently prosperous 1980s. Unemployment is a condition that seems to be the rate of 5-10% of the work-force in the United States and Britain. In these two countries widespread homelessness recalls the great depression of the 1930s.

Far worse, however, is the rapidly deteriorating social situation in the poor countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, including the Caribbeans and the Pacific Islands. Poverty has increased in absolute terms for large numbers of the population, as for about 300 million in India. While some countries have experienced high rates of economic growth in the 1980s, e.g. the newly industrializing countries (N.I.C.s) Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, growth rates have been very low in some others, especially in Africa. Unemployment is quite widespread in many of the countries of the so called Third World. Inequality is increasing within and among the countries.

The world's rich, are accumulating vast wealth, especially through the transnational financial, industrial and service corporations. They are taking over the lands and economic enterprises in the poor countries. The powerful countries and corporations of the world have succeeded in making the market forces of "supply and demand" determine the prices of commodities. This favors the big corporations, which control the production and marketing of many goods in the modern economy.

With the failure of historical socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, world capitalism seems to have an unchallenged supremacy. This is not without much harm for the poor countries and the poor of the rich countries.

The terms of trade of the poor countries have been generally unfavorable to them as producers and exporters of raw materials. The external debt of the poor countries has reached a position in which they can service it only at an enormous cost of cutting down on their essential expenses, such as on food, health services and education, not to mention capital investment. The relationship of population to land in the world has worsened as the population in the poor countries increases.

Arms production and sales continue to be a principal activity of many rich countries; arms exports fuel the wars in the poor countries. Wars, insurrections, vigilante groups, violence, horrible violations of human rights characterize the third

world countries. Authoritarianism is growing in many countries, despite the trends towards democratization in several countries.

Corruption is rampant in most poor countries and is pandered to by the powerful and the big companies including the banks with secret accounts. Drugs and AIDS are increasingly menacing the lives of persons and the welfare of families.

While the world situation is thus worsening, the concern of the churches about the human condition of many who are poor, and for nature itself, is woefully inadequate to make any significant difference to this grave crisis. Christians, by and large, are not seriously motivated to be active about improving the situation. Their consciousness is more diverted to intra-church matters by the activities of the churches themselves, while secular society often distracts their attention by other diversions.

That is a tragedy, for these are very important matters for the Christians, because they are among the world's rich, and because most of the very rich countries call themselves "Christian". Further, the very process of building up this present world system has been closely associated with the life and theology of the churches during the last five centuries.

The European and their First World dominated world system is and has been grossly unjust during the whole of the modern period since the initial European expansion into the other continents of the world. It may be said that there has always been injustice in the world; but the international injustice in the modern world is very much a work of the European Peoples, with Japan and the NICs of East Asia joining them. The setting up of "Fortress Europe" and the tightening of immigration regulations in the rich countries make the fate of the poor in the poor countries much worse in the 1990s.

Corresponding Theology and Pastoral Orientation

Theology has been significantly responsible during the past centuries for the churches activity and inactivity. This is not merely a matter of the earlier centuries, or of the period prior to the Vatican Council II, but also of the period since the 1970s.

The traditional Christian theology is a cause of the attitudes of Christians towards human problems and nature itself. This is due to a misplaced accent concerning the identity, role and function of Jesus Christ. Jesus has been thought of more as the divine savior of the whole of humanity without much insistence on the content of his message of love of God and love of neighbor. Correspondingly the mission of the church was believed to be the conversion of the whole human race to Christianity as the unique means of salvation.

This may not be the thinking of many in some churches today; but there is still a powerful carry over of the pastoral implications of the earlier message and of the consequent understanding, or misunderstanding of mission. Many of the institutions in the churches were set up on the earlier concept of mission. Thus many religious congregations were founded in the last five centuries mainly for the conversion of persons of other religions to the catholic faith. Their spirituality, formation of members and organization of activities were for this primary objective.

The presentation of Jesus has been responsible for his followed not recognizing his real message, and for persons of other religions finding him unacceptable because the claims attributed to him seem to deny any serious validity to other faiths.

Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. begins his book on “Church – the Human Face of God”¹ with two declarations of the Catholic Church that are mutually irreconcilable. The first is from the universal Christian council of 1442, held in Florence-Ferrara where the council fathers arrived at the following declaration:

“The holy church of Rome firmly believes, confesses and proclaims that no one - not just the heathen but also the Jews, heretics and schismatics – outside the Catholic church can have a part in eternal life, but that they will go to hell fire ‘that is prepared for the devil and his angels’ (*Matt. 25. 41*) unless they allow themselves to be received into the church before their life’s end”

This is in the Denzinger-Schonmetzer Enchiridion of church documents no. 1351. Schillebeeckx mentions in a note that “we find repetitions of it until very recently, see e.g. ‘the holiest of all dogmas that no one can be saved outside the true, Catholic faith’ (*Gregory XVI in 1834, Mansi 51,570*); Pope Pius IX in 1863 (*Denzinger-Schonmetzer no. 2867*); in the schema of the First Vatican Council, 28th November 1867 (*Mansi 49,624 f.*)”

By contrast the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in its Constitution “*Lumen Gentium*”, no 16, declares in just as official a way as before:

“Those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.”

Centuries of tragedy lie between these two official church statements. The first is a recipe for exclusivity and conflict.

S. Radhakrishnan, the Indian philosopher wrote over 60 years ago in 1927:

“It is not fair to God or man to assume that one people are the chosen of God, their religion occupies a central place in the religious development of mankind, and that all others should borrow from them or suffer spiritual destitution

The intolerance of narrow-monotheism is written in letters of blood across the history of man from the time when the first tribes of Israel burst into the land of Canaan. The worshippers of the one jealous God are egged on to aggressive wars against people of alien cults. They invoke divine sanction for the cruelties inflicted on the conquered.”²

Given the historical exaggeration and misrepresentation of Jesus that has taken place in the church during one and half millennia, how can he be rethought so as to be

¹ *Crossroad*, New York, 1990 p. xvii.

² S. Radhakrishnan: *The Hindu View of Life*; George Allen and Unwin, London, 1927, pp. 50-55.

true to himself and presentable to the majority of our people who expect liberation from the numerous oppressions placed on them? When we reflect on this situation we see the need for certain fundamental changes in our understanding of Jesus and his mission.

Christian Mission as Not Good News

In the background of the world situation and past history, Sri Lankan and Asian Christians have to ask ourselves: why has the Christian mission often been bad news to the majority of our people despite so much self sacrifice by the apostles of Christianity? In the whole of China, 1/5 of the human race with 1.100.000.000 persons, hardly 1% have accepted Jesus as their religious leader or rather the Church as their spiritual guide. India with 810.000.000, 1/6 of humankind, has also a similar percentage outside of the Churches in Kerala and Tamilnad, which are said to be from apostolic times. There are significant increases in some areas such as North East India. South Korea, Saba and Sarawak.

Since the first European ships landed on Asian shores in the early 16th century, Christians have in many places been viewed as a danger to our culture, values and religions. The person to person social services such as care for the sick, the children and the aged are appreciated. The educational services, to which so many have dedicated their lives, have despite admiration for them been suspect as basically anti-people. Even today the term “missionary education” is used to describe the ill effects of an urban oriented, elitist, westernized education – often overlooking its contribution to the people’s advancement in learning and modernization.

The role of world Christianity is even more questionable. Prof. S: Radhakrishnan raised this issue in his Upton Lectures delivered at Manchester College Oxford, 1926:

“The spirit of old Israel is inherited by Christianity and Islam... We cannot have religious unity and peace so long as we assert that we are in possession of the light and all others are groping in the darkness. That very assertion is a challenge to a fight... When two or three different systems claim that they contain the revelation of the very core and centre of truth and the acceptance of it is the exclusive pathway to heaven, conflicts are inevitable.”³

How is that the disciples of the kind, loving and just Jesus have been responsible for or accomplices of some of the most heinous crimes of the past five centuries? Is it not mainly persons who call themselves Christians that have built the present world system with its mal-distribution of land, resources, wealth, incomes and power? This history is well remembered by the peoples who have been at the receiving end of Western expansion. Christian persons, powers and churches have often been, consciously or unconsciously, in collusion with those responsible for the present situation of

- the accumulation of wealth by a few nations, and families
- the extinction of whole peoples and civilizations

³ S. Radhakrishnan: *The Hindu View of Life*; George Allen and Unwin, London, 1927, pp. 55-58.

- the forced migration of entire populations often as slaves,
- the systematic global persecution of other religions,
- the oppression of women in society and the churches,
- the development of a system of industrial production that is devastating Nature and exhausting the non-renewable natural resources,
- the control and reservation of the available land resources of the earth mainly for Western peoples through racist immigration laws,
- the manipulation of the United Nations system to the advantage of the powerful nations and companies

Not Fault of Jesus

Christianity being bad news for many people is not due to Jesus or his teaching. It is not due to the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels, or by his early disciples, in the “Acts of the Apostles”. The people of the poor countries admire the Jesus of the gospels. They can identify with him as one of the most remarkable Asian spiritual leaders. He lived in Africa during some of his childhood years as an exile in Egypt. His own life and teaching are unblemished and sublime. The gospels inspired Asian spiritual leaders like Mahatma Gandhi in his spiritual and political life, including development of the theory and practice of non-violence.

Jesus life and teaching, as in the gospels, were simple, limpid, clear and straightforward. He spoke often in parables. He lived close to nature and was inspired by the beauty and harmony of nature which were a revelation of the love and providence of God towards all. He did not mince his words when he had to call a spade a spade, or Herod a fox. He had no elaborate philosophical elucubrations to explain his personality or sophisticated theological elaborations to tell what his mission was. He did not define or describe his relationship to God in philosophical terms such as “consubstantial”. He did not present himself as a “hypostatic union” of two “natures” in one “person”. Apostles like Peter and James would probably have been surprised if they were asked to comment on the Nicene debates concerning “Homoousios” – Jesus being of one substance with the Father.

His relationship to God was that of a trusting child. His prayer was not a complicated ritual; it surged forth genuinely in the midst of his life preoccupations. He did not burden his followers with detailed canonical laws and regulations. He was strongly committed to love in human relations for bringing about the fulfillment of persons.

His community of disciples was bound together in communion and partnership in loyalty to him and their mission. He did not set up a rigid hierarchical structure to govern his disciples they were sent to minister as servants and not dominate others as superiors.

How, then, did Christians acquiesce in these evils for so long without building a strong and determined opposition to this exploitation of peoples and the earth? Some may well want to say that these are things of the past – let bygones be bygones. But the reality is that Christians are still somewhat distrusted in our countries as wanting conversions to Christianity. We have to ask ourselves how did this happen historically? Is it merely due to the cursed selfishness of the Europeans? If it is merely

that, the judgment on the past would be very hard; very little goodwill would be seen in them. On the other hand we know that there were quite a few good persons and self-sacrificing groups among them. There were saints and mystics, scholars and seers, artists and architects of a great culture. The gold from the Americas did not perhaps benefit much the European working class for a long time, since they were the exploited proletariat of these capitalist countries, as seen in the writings of Karl Marx.

A similar question is seen in the relative indifference of the European peoples to the cruel and ongoing exploitation of the third world today by the rich countries mainly through their companies. It would be an act of goodwill on the part of the victims to think that they are misled than to attribute to them conscious exploitative and genocidal desires and acts. Likewise we can see that the women have been, and even now are, discriminated against in many spheres of life. This is not simply bad will among the males. A long process of socialization of this exploitation has led the males to take the prevalent situation for granted. They consider these unfair gender relations normal and even see in them a divinely ordained pattern. To think so is not to excuse the males, but to try to understand the situation giving some credit to the goodwill in the males.

In the same way we see a mental and cultural conditioning of the European peoples, including the working classes, during centuries to think they are the chosen people of God. Many of them are good and generous; they perceived themselves as bearing the white man's burden of civilizing, christianizing and saving the rest of the unfortunate and poor world. The prevailing theology conditioned them to think so and feel complacent about their activities in other countries.

Throughout Asia there are still issues that need further theological and practical development, such as:

- the identity, and salvific function of Jesus Christ,
- the consequent understanding of the mission of the church,
- the relationship of the laity and the hierarchy in the church,
- the place of women in the church and in society,
- the Christians and social justice within the countries, morality of world justice,
- the care for nature, and natural resources,
- relations of Asian churches and their Euro-American centers
- inter-religious relations in theology and practical life,

The Misplaced Priority of the Churches

Due to this theology during many centuries the Christian Churches understood their mission more as a conversion of persons and peoples to the Church rather than to the love of God and neighbor. This conversion to the Church was said to save souls for eternity and hence give happiness to God.

Christian Mission was understood in relation to activities for:

- the preaching of the gospel thus interpreted
- biblical apostolate, translations, interpreting it
- converting and baptizing persons to Christianity
- implanting the Church throughout the world
- safeguarding the Christians from error
- sacramental ministry: baptism, penance, marriage, burial...
- pastoral counseling
- teaching catechism to children; Catholic schools
- liturgy ... Sunday worship; church building
- confraternities, lay apostolate, Legion of Mary, S.V.P.,
- Choir, Youth clubs, altar servers,
- vocations to priesthood, training of the clergy
- developing active and contemplative religious life
- defence of Catholic rights

The pastoral activity and priorities of Christian communities were decided on this basis. e.g. Education of Catholic children in Catholic schools. All these are valuable elements in the life of a community. But how related were they to the core teaching of Jesus? Were the conversion of mind, heart and will to love of God and neighbour the primary and essential feature of Christian life? If Christians had made genuine love the touchstone of being a follower of Jesus, the history of Christianity would have been quite different. Then robbers, exploiters and arrogant cruel rulers could not have been members of the Church. Though Henry VIII of England could not be a Catholic if he married another woman while his first wife was alive, there was hardly any sanction against Christian rulers, soldiers and traders who destroyed whole communities of people as in the Americas and Oceania.

Even today the perpetrators of Apartheid in South Africa, the decision makers of big transnational corporations whose policies lead to starvation of many poor people and arms producers and sellers who foster and participate in the numerous wars in the poor countries are not challenged concerning their Christianity. Artificial birth control is considered sinful in the official Catholic teaching, but there is as yet hardly a recognition of the murder due to mal-distribution and waste of food in the rich world. The sin of sexism is hardly recognized. Christians have been conditioned to consider their views as right.

Chapter 2

Evolution of Theologies

A theology is an [intellectual] elaboration of a faith concerning God, human life and the universe. Theologies do not come directly from God. Theologies are human made. A theology is not necessarily the faith. Theologies can condition faith and shape the worship and ritual of a religious community. Theologies emerge, evolve, develop and even decay in time due to the influence of several changing factors such as the history of peoples and their inter-relations.

Jesus did not give a ready-made manual of theology. Within one faith tradition there can be several theologies. Even within the New Testament there are different theological visions. The way Luke presents the birth of Jesus is different from the prologue of John which begins with: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Theologies can condition faith, and shape the worship and ritual in a religious community. The worship can in turn give a direction to theology. *Lex orandi est lex credendi*. Theologies are human-made. They are the product of many influences within a given culture.

1. Several Elements Impact Theologies

Christian theology has been formed by an admixture of several elements viz:

i) Jesus as the founder, and his disciples' message, first preached, then written in the books of the New Testament meant for different churches as of Rome and Asia Minor, and understood by their recipients in their socio-cultural context.

ii) The canonical Bible, and understanding of inspiration,

iii) The copying, translation and interpretation of the scriptures over several centuries, in different contexts,

iv) The understanding of different words, metaphors, and symbols in different times and climes e.g. myth taken literally as historical truth, understanding of different paths to salvation.

v) The culture, philosophies and popular religiosity of the peoples who joined the Christian communities: especially the Jews, the Greeks and Romans. The Jewish Old Testament including its mythology, Greek philosophy and the Roman empire and its legal system impacted the evolution of theology,

vi) The dominant powers in society and in the Church were more directly responsible for the formal expression of this theology, through the scholars whom they accepted and affirmed. This may be called the ideology that influenced theology.

vii) Imagination of theologians and church magisterium, as many issues on which doctrines were evolved were things beyond human ken and competence. Thus at the Council of Florence-Ferrara in the mid-15th century there was deep division of opinion concerning whether souls, after death, go straight to heaven or hell or stay a shorter or longer time in purgatory. They were also long divided as to whether and how the Third Person of the Holy Trinity proceeded from the Father and the Son, or not ... the famous "*filioque*" debate that divided the Latin and Greek churches. Scholars on each side quoted scripture texts in support of different views, or sometimes interpreted the same texts for their differing views.

viii) Faith expressed in worship, ritual, and preaching; these depended very much on the culture of the different peoples.

ix) Dogmatic definitions as at the ecumenical councils of the Church. Thus the emperors have had a major say in the formulations of doctrine by ecumenical councils from Nicaea 325, onwards. The emperors had a say in the convoking of councils, in the attendance of bishops, the agenda, the debates and even their termination. The fate of bishops after a Council had also relation to their support for the position favored by the emperor. Some bishops who disagreed with the emperor, or the 'dominant theology, were exiled from their sees as happened in the Arian controversy concerning the incarnation.

x) Church tradition accepted as divine revelation.

The influence of these factors on theology can be good, bad or indifferent. Theology may thus confirm, neutralize or negate the core message of the religious founder and of the primeval spiritual insight that led to the foundation of the religion.

A natural tendency to exalt the founder of the religion tends to present Jesus as the unique son of God, universal redeemer of all humanity – things Jesus himself does not seem to claim even according to the New Testament witnesses. Other founders of religions also have been praised and attributed qualities of a superhuman nature; or they are given a reverence and veneration that is close to that for a divinity. The words of the Koran are taken as literally from divine revelation.

In later centuries as the Church became the religion and a unifying force of the, Roman Empire, different theological interpretations were elaborated by the church authorities, partly to settle religio-political debates. The church evolved the process of ecclesiastical councils for determining doctrinal issues. In this way theological teachings were adumbrated concerning Jesus Christ and proposed to the faithful as divinely revealed truth.

The church, being the supreme religion in the world then known to Europeans or in contact with them, made its own norms for deciding doctrinal issues. The Church claimed to be and became the sole authority on and interpreter of Jesus' teaching. It is not surprising that as the church became allied to the secular power she neglected the radically liberating and challenging message of the gospels.

In the search for the understanding of Jesus we should also consider the ways in which the religious institution has consciously or unconsciously interpreted him to

suit the interest of power holders in the Church. We can then evaluate them taking as our point of departure the position of the victims of the theology and of the power holders who benefitted from it. This will help us question, if not eliminate, many of the historical accretions in the presentation of Jesus which are not from him or of evangelical origin and perspective.⁴ Jesus needs to be liberated from the captivity to the Church establishment, which itself has been, and seems, somewhat collusively allied to the dominant powers of the world.

The evolution of Christian theology has depended on the presuppositions and assumptions made by the Christian community in interpreting the life and message of Jesus. Theology hinges on the view concerning issues such as the origins of human life and the explanation for the human predicament of life and death, the desire for good and the proneness to evil, attachments and insatiable aspirations, and the means for working out one's salvation.

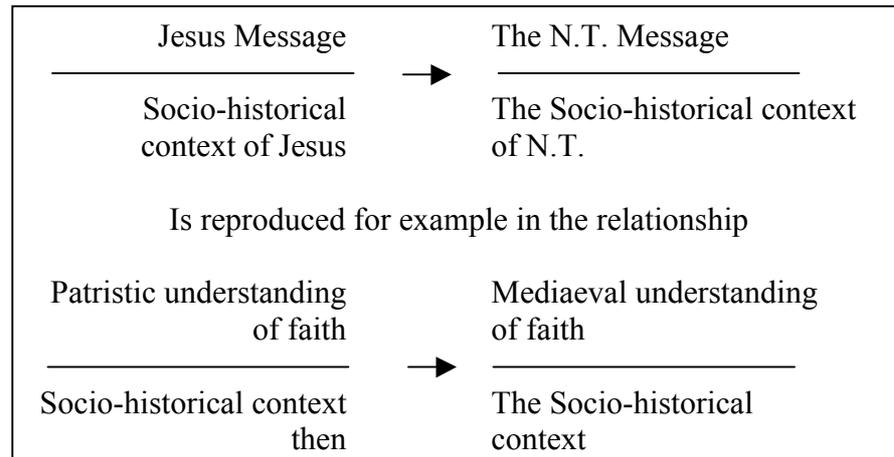
In evaluating a theology we should remember that there are certain issues concerning which theologies deal but are inaccessible and incomprehensible to the human mind. Among these are:

- a) the nature of the Absolute.
- b) the origins of the universe, and
- e) the origin, ultimate nature and destiny of humanity or of a human person; the means to realize a destiny beyond this life.

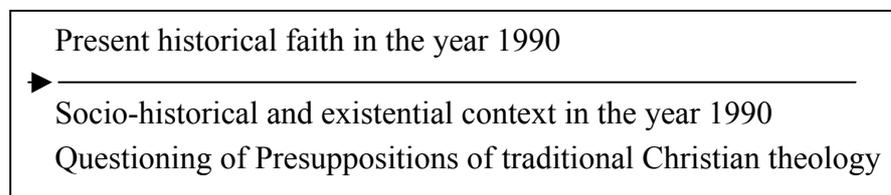
Each of these, the Absolute, the universe and the human person is a mystery for the human mind. The inter-relations among them are also clouded in mystery. Hence we cannot fully comprehend the relationships between the Absolute and the universe, the Absolute and the humans, the universe and humanity. Even the relation between two humans has an element of mystery of the incomprehensible, unfathomable and unpredictable. We cannot know for certain what ultimate human fulfillment after death would be. Yet it is concerning these and their relationships that theology purports to explain, if not pontificate. In a given theology we should try to discern the various influences that have gone to form it.

Edward Schillebeeckx explains the evolution of Christian teaching with the following diagram:

⁴ *My Mary and Human Liberation*, Chapter 3, on Presuppositions in Theology, Logos – Vol. 29, CSR, Colombo, July 1990.



and this relationship, given and reproduced, must ultimately be reproduced once more in the following relationship or articulation:



Schillebeeckx continues

“If we think of the solemn statement of the Council of Florence Ferrara, for the council fathers of the time this statement really meant (in retrospect) that for them Jesus Christ was the only access and living way to God; they could not imagine anything else for their own belief. That is correct. But essentially bound up with this was their mistake in failing to see God’s work of salvation outside Christianity so that they scorned anything that was not Christian. At an even deeper level, the mistake lay in confusing a personal experiential conviction with an ‘objectifiably knowable truth in itself’, extrapolated from faith, which anyone could have discovered had they taken the trouble and been sufficiently open! So according to this argument, non-Christians lack good will, a view which has all kinds of baneful consequences.” (*op.cit.* p. 43)

2. Construct of Traditional Catholic Theology

The traditional Catholic theology that prevailed in the church from about the 4th century till recent decades (and still prevails in some areas) was built on the foundation of the Bible and church tradition alongside myth, presuppositions, imagination, ideology and definitions of doctrine by the church authorities. The traditional Catholic theological teaching may be summarized as follows (even at the risk of being too sketchy):

- **God** – eternal, omnipotent, transcendent, Trinity, creator
- Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in a state of original justice
- Original sin – fall of all humanity from divine grace Alienation of all humanity from God; human beings are thus, by nature, incapable of

realizing their eternal salvation and destiny which is the beatific vision of God seen face to face.

- **A Redeemer** is therefore necessary to reconcile humanity to God. The redeemer cannot be a mere human being as all humanity is fallen and alienated from God and divine grace.
- Incarnation of Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit; Jesus God-man; Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Logos, born in human form; Jesus is two natures united in one person. He is not subject to sin and Satan; is human and divine and hence capable of reconciling humans to God.
- life and sacrificial death of Jesus, God – man, is redemptive of all humankind. At-one-ment. Human nature is thus saved or restored by Jesus to its potential for eternal salvation.
- Jesus Christ is the unique, universal and necessary saviour of all human beings from creation to the end of time.
- **The Church** is established by Jesus to continue the work of redemption; the church, inspired by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, has a universal mission for the salvation of all humanity.
- the church is the repository of the redemptive merit of Jesus; and transmits the salvific merit of Jesus or divine grace especially through the sacraments, established by Christ and entrusted to the care of the church.
- the church has the duty and the right to teach all nations concerning Jesus Christ and his saving grace. The church is an unerring teacher on faith and morals and a sure guide in the path of holiness.
- Jesus confided authority in the church to the apostles and their successors viz: the Pope and the college of bishops. The Pope is the vicar of Christ on earth with jurisdiction over the universal church.
- The church will continue till the end of time when Jesus Christ will return in glory as the judge of all humanity.
- The final judgment ... and eternal reward or punishment.

A characteristic of this synthesis was that salvation and grace were understood as principally connected with the next life. This was linked to the interpretation of the human predicament and the understanding of the impact of redemption by Christ. There was a neglect of the relationship of grace and the spiritual life to the person's inner dispositions, to the person's inter-personal and social relations and to the overall socio-political reality in which one lived. This neglect was implicit in the theology concerning the sacrament of baptism as a means to eternal salvation. The other sacraments principally penance and the eucharist were also thought of as 'ex opere operato' based on the merits of Christ and the ministrations of the church.

In such a context the Christian life could tend to be thought of without much serious concern for the social demands of the teaching of Jesus. This was **a grave misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the gospel of Jesus**. It was in effect an abandonment of the principal command of Jesus love of neighbour and thereby the love of God. Christianity was evacuated of the kernel of its message. Hence its core

values were not a social force even though the society called itself Christian and considered others pagan. The idolatry of capitalism and the direct genocide of imperialism go hand in hand with the 'practice' of Christianity as religious experience was termed.

This theology was associated with and responsible for the **pastoral orientation of the churches** during many centuries. The concept of mission was derived from it. Catholic spirituality was rather otherworldly. Redemption was thought of as salvation in the next life through the ministrations of the church. The church had the truth; those who disagreed with it were wrong; those who opposed the church were regarded as the enemies of God.

Catholic education was conceived of as a preservation of the Catholics from contamination by the fallen world, the occasion of sin. There was a neglect of the value of creation, and a negative attitude towards nature, the human body, sexuality, other religions, and society itself. Social justice was not seen as essential for the mission of the church and of Christian education. In fact, some prominent Christian educators thought of the education of the elite as a means of furthering the interests of the church. Consciously or unconsciously they compromised with the unjust social system, and colonialism.

The effective rethinking on Christian education must therefore include fundamental reevaluation of this traditional theology of the churches. A debate is going on in the Catholic Church, since Vatican II, concerning a basic re-imagining of Jesus and his message.

3. Questioning Presuppositions of Traditional Christian Theology

In multi-religious Asia there are several different responses to the basic questions raised by the perennial quest for the Absolute, the meaning of the universe and of human life. These depend on the claims of different religions to divine revelation, many cultures, philosophies, varied myths and their interpretations, often related to the ideological interests of power holders and religious establishments. In such a context it is to be expected that the presuppositions of each religion will be subject to question. This is especially so of Christianity as, when in power it has claimed uniqueness, exclusivity, infallibility and has been very intolerant of others.

Some presuppositions of Christianity that are questioned are:

i) revelation by God, and that exclusively in Jewish history, through Jesus and the church. Is revelation closed? Is there divine revelation in other religions? Is contemporary experience a revelation of God?

ii) relation of God to the universe: creation, pantheism; dualism, monism, pan-entheism?

iii) concerning the human predicament: how can we know about the creation, state of original justice, fall, and redemption and the communication of divine grace through means such as the sacraments?

iv) how can the claims made about Jesus Christ being divine-human be verified? Do we presume to be able to know and define the relationship between the Absolute and a conditioned human existence? How do the claims concerning Jesus correlate to those made for other founders and seers of religions.

v) the nature and powers of the church in relation to human salvation; Is the church necessary for salvation?

vi) do the different paths of religions lead to the same ultimate goal of human salvation; if so what was wrong in its earlier teachings on other religions?

These are a few of the fundamental questions raised in the multi-religious context. Several other issues would be raised from other perspectives such as of feminism, Marxism, secular humanism

4. A New Paradigm in Christian Theology

The concept of paradigm change has become current in modern science. The analysis of paradigm change, elaborated by the physicist and historian of science, Thomas S Kuhn⁵ is applicable to theology also. Paradigm change refers to a very substantial change in a whole discipline as when the entire focus, method, object, conclusions and consequences of theology are altered. A previously valid model of explanation is replaced by a new one or “paradigm”. Such transformations occur when there are wholesale changes in society, in issues involved, ways of thinking and life.

These periods of change are usually times of much intellectual ferment, debate and even turmoil within the church. At each stage, those for the tradition (*traditionalists*) would clash with those who are for change (*progressives*). Some would see hope in change; others, of the earlier orthodoxy, would bemoan the times, and yearn for the past. Pope John XXIII, in opening the Second Vatican Council in 1962, called the church to be open to the future with hope, and not to be prophets of doom.

Hans Kung in his *Theology for the Third Millennium*⁶ mentions several nodal points in history when such paradigm changes occur:

1) from the apocalyptic-eschatological paradigm of the original Jewish-Christian first community to that of the Greek and early Fathers of the Church, such as Irenaeus, Clement and Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian, Athanasius and the Cappadocians.

2) The new paradigm of the medieval period with the contributions of Anselm and Abelard, Thomas and Bonaventure, Scotus and Ockham.

⁵ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1962.

⁶ Hans Kung: *Theology for the Third Millennium*, an Ecumenical View, Doubleday, N.Y., 1988, chapter B 11 pp 123-169.

3) The theology of the Protestant Reformation with Luther, Zwingli and Calvin; though differing among themselves, they proposed a conception of Christian living irreconcilable with the medieval Roman Catholic model.

4) The late 20th century grappling with the scientific spirit, hermeneutics, rationality, secularity, democracy, equality of persons, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue and new schools of theology: existential, political, process, liberational, black, feminist, African, Asian, global...⁷

The traditional missiology held that growth of the church and service to the Christian community were the main objectives and priority of the Christian Church. Thus in Sri Lanka, in this perspective, the Christian community was organized in parishes and dioceses. Christian schools were founded for the formation of Christian children in faith and general education. After the Dutch period (1656-1796), the Catholic church was more free to be above ground. During the next one and a half centuries, 1815-1960, the Catholics built up their denominational school system with great dedication and self sacrifice. But these schools were seen by others as giving an advantage to the Catholics over the rest of the community. They were mistrusted as means for converting children to Catholicism. In the 19th century this was indeed a motive in Christian education. These factors were among the principal causes for the schools take over in the early 1960s.

The health and other social services, such as orphanages run by the church, were intended to be a witness to the church. They were also suspected by others as means of conversion to the church. The lay apostolate organizations were also primarily church-centered.

The acceptance of right relationships or the Kingdom of God as the mission of the church would make for a paradigm shift in Christian theology, concept of mission, spirituality and priorities of pastoral action. The disinterested service of all human beings – irrespective of their creed – would be the primary goal of the church, and its best witness to Jesus.

If a priority is given to the values of the Kingdom of God, the disciples of Jesus would have to be primarily concerned with the common good of all persons in their entire personal and social lives. The liturgy, catechesis, and pastoral action of the church too would have to be concerned with the life of the human community as a whole and of all persons whether they be Christians or not. The mission of the church would be the building of persons and human community guided by the values of the kingdom: truth, freedom, equality, justice and peace.

Such a major paradigm shift in church life, would change its use of personnel, resources, and institutions. Whereas the earlier object of mission required study and action for the growth of the church as such, the new orientation would seek the common good of all persons and groups in actual life situations, along with other religions and persuasions. Already some changes have taken place in these directions. Thus, the present church relief services to the million refugees in Sri Lanka, have

⁷ Kung p.128 op.cit for chart.

been organized with this vision, and are well received by most people. The tensions within the churches can be understood partly in relation to the paradigm changes taking place today in the world and the churches.

Much deeper and broader rethinking is required for the churches to relate adequately to the contemporary challenges. For this we envisage a re-thinking of theology around new approaches that could be summarized in the following themes.

5. Themes for a renewed Theology

Much deeper and broader rethinking is required for the churches to relate adequately to the contemporary challenges. For this we envisage a re-thinking of theology around new approaches that could be a summarized in the following themes.

1) Given our past experience in the Asia region, that, Christianity had been presented as inimical to our traditional religions and even cultures, we have to adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion towards the way Christianity was understood in the past and is even presented in the present. We should not too easily take for granted as necessarily true or right whatever is taught and/or done by the churches. We can keep in mind the saying “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”, “the church is to be always reformed.”

2) Since Vatican II, the church has declared itself open to dialogue with other religions; now, it further states that other religions can be means of salvation of persons in the next life. This is a **fundamental shift in the position of the church** on a major issue of religious doctrine. Is this a contradiction of past positions? How did the church come to this new point of view? Is it a mere (*opportunistic?*) adjustment of teaching to the new situation of Christianity not being the religion of the dominant powers in the former colonial countries? If not, are there deeper theological reasons for this change? If there are such reasons what are they; and how far have we to go in the process of correction of our past errors?

3) In such a context we can inquire **how theology has been developed** over the centuries. How much was what was presented as doctrine really from Jesus Christ, or from the Bible? What other influences came to bear on the formulation of doctrine? Were particular philosophies, cultures, ideologies, presuppositions, interests of class, sex, race or even religion responsible for the elaboration of theology? Did political powers interfere in the elaboration of dogma and in supporting particular doctrines or opposition and exiling supporters of opposing views? Were there philosophical or mythical presuppositions and interpretations that influenced the evolution of doctrine? Are any of the teachings concerning matters about which humans cannot have any historical evidence or divine revelation? Are they matters beyond human comprehension? A theological rethinking requires a critical re-examination of the presuppositions on which traditional theology has been developed.

4) In such a complex situation when various factors contributed to the formulation of theology, and its consequences have been disastrous for some peoples, religions and cultures, can we have a hermeneutical principle for discerning what is of God or Jesus and what would be due to extraneous factors such as presuppositions, prejudice, vested-interest of groups, myth, imagination or even pragmatic opportunism? We propose a **twofold hermeneutical principle** for such discernment:

whatever doctrine or practice is dehumanizing for persons or a section of humanity cannot be from God or Jesus; whatever is truly ennobling for all humanity is from God, the source of all goodness.

5) When we push the inquiry deeper into what went wrong with the church in the Asian context (as perhaps also elsewhere) we see that fundamental positions concerning the understanding of human nature, sin, human fulfillment and salvation, God, redemption, role and mission of the church are involved. The basic decisions on these issues have been taken by the church in the 4th and 5th centuries of the Christian era. These were articulated as dogmas by the ecumenical councils of the period. This consideration takes us to a reflection on the church teachings in the **first three centuries of Christianity** prior to the conciliar definitions of Nicene in 325.

We see in those times a grappling with these same issues, and a certain openness of the churches to different points of view on these debated issues. We consider this period of church history a relevant source for theological rethinking because these Christians were closer to Jesus and the apostles, rather open to inter-religious pluralism and not yet tied to an alliance with the dominant Roman Empire which considered them, counter-culture and oftentimes persecuted them. The so called “Fathers of the Church” and their debates are a valuable treasure for “re-sourcing” theology today.

6) **Human nature is basically good**, as is all of God’s creation. It is good that the church no longer holds that infants without baptism are in sin and in enmity with God. Unfortunately this was the position from about the 5th century when the views of Pelagius in this regard were rejected by the church authorities. Human freedom is capable of doing good, (with the ordinary support of God, if need be), without the need of a special divine redeemer. This means not positing a condition of original sin in which human nature is considered fallen, and this original sin is communicated by generation.

7) **God’s grace and revelation** are available to all human beings of all times. Salvation is a mystery of God’s saving will and of the human conscience according to its own enlightenment. Hence the respect for the inalienable human dignity, freedom and rights of each person. God has spoken to human beings in many and diverse ways both before and after Christ. We cannot restrict revelation to the Bible, to a particular period of history, to a given people or gender.

8) We must respect the **ineffable mystery of God**. The Absolute cannot be comprehended by us or contained and confined to our theological discourse and definitions. It is a deep intuition of the Asian religions and philosophies that the Transcendent is absolutely beyond human comprehension and cannot be contained in our formulations of theology or philosophy. This perception is very important for our search for the Truth and for meaning in our lives. It can help in the promotion of understanding and dialogue among the religions and ideologies. Christianity erred much in the past by thinking of itself as especially privileged by God, and even persecuting religions.

9) **The Spirit of God** is present to and in all persons, communities, periods of history and movements of peoples including the other religions and secular

ideologies. The presence and operation of the Spirit of God is prior in time to the birth of Jesus and the work of the church.

10) The **religions are an ambiguous admixture of positive and negative values.** The positive values are an indication of the presence of the transcendent; the negative need purification. The efficacious role of organized religion is limited to what it can realize and motivate in this life. Organized religion is not known to operate beyond life on this earth. The salvation of persons after this life by organized religions is therefore a non-issue, though it has long been a hotly debated theological problem. Religions can be and are meaningful for personal and community life in this life. The core values of religions are similar. These can be the basis of inter-religious cooperation for the common human good.

11) **The Christian understanding of redemption** and salvation in and through Jesus Christ has to be rethought without the presupposition of the classical doctrine of original sin, but conscious of the existence of good and evil in persons and in the world. The message of Jesus is more a call to personal and societal conversion to love, righteousness and justice. Jesus preached the kingdom of God or the reign of righteousness. Christian's mission is to help in the realization of truth, love, sharing, equality, freedom, participation and mutuality in human relations and among communities.

This, rather than the establishment of a church as a religious organization for the eternal salvation of souls, was the priority of Jesus. The content and process of the redemption in Jesus Christ is in relation to this message of universal love. This is more important than theological debates on the definitions of the identity of Jesus Christ as a divine-human person, which is something beyond human comprehension. Jesus did not present the set of doctrines or dogmas, concerning himself as God or on God as a Trinity, that was made the core of christian theology in later centuries.

12) The Christian mission has, therefore, to listen and respond generously to the presence of God in all persons and movements of peoples. It is a call to conversion addressed all persons and groups, in the context of historical evolution and conjuncture of social forces. It can be understood in relation to the core message of the other religions and movements personal and community betterment. The mission and task the church is to be performed on this earth, in relation to life. The consequences for the next life have to be left to providence of God. Our responses to the challenges to love God and neighbour in our present human relations are the indicators given by Jesus concerning our rewards and punishments in the next life.

13) The churches have misrepresented the priorities the message and mission of Jesus partly due to an undue alliance with the powerful of the day and partly due to an erroneous view concerning the basic human condition consequent on the hypothesis of original sin as interpreted during centuries by traditional theology. They placed the accent on belonging to the church and its sacramental life to the neglect of right relationships among persons, communities and with nature. This amounted to an abandonment of Jesus and his message. We see in this a fundamental de-routing of theology away from the real core of Jesus teaching.

Some churches or groups within churches are now correcting themselves by a return to the priorities of Jesus and humanity. On the other hand the fundamentalists among Christians are perpetrating further calamities by neglecting justice and the realization of the values preached by Jesus. They are continuing to be allies of the unjust social establishments that exploit the poor and the weak in the world.

14) The traditional **spirituality** of the church was evolved after the compromise of the church with the Roman Empire and the corresponding adjustments of theology. This spirituality was based very much on the fear of the body, and the world as sinful. The church through the sacraments was conceived the principal means of personal salvation and sanctification. The virtues of obedience and humility were emphasized; obedience to the authority of the church was presented as the safe way to virtue. Identification with Jesus was understood in relation to his passivity at his trial and crucifixion rather than with his message and prophetic life style which led to his death. A renewal of spirituality would have to be in taking seriously the core message of Jesus concerning love of God and neighbour in the present social and world context.

15) Consequently the **pastoral action of the churches**, including the life of the parishes, religious congregations, lay movements and other church groups should be rethought. Movements such as the Pentecostal groups would fail in their Christian responsibilities if they neglected the social and global dimension of the demands of the Spirit of God, as borne witness to by Jesus. The sacraments of the church must relate to redemption in real life on earth by the establishment of right relations among persons, as well as with Nature.

16) In addition to injustices within countries, **the whole world system is grossly unjust**. The radical transformation of the world order should be a primary object of Christians and of the churches. This is necessary so that human beings may live peacefully and justly on this earth sharing equitably its resources. This will require an immense and unprecedented effort in the coming years. The enemies of the common good of humanity must be identified, exposed and opposed. Unfortunately the churches have tended to be in alliance with the world's exploiting agencies. Even today this trend is operative. It provides, perhaps, the principal challenge to the Christian mission and its credibility in the world.

17) The Christian mission has consequently to be fulfilled in **openness to and dialogue with other religions and peoples movements**. The churches are not out to overcome or destroy other religions, as it was thought in previous centuries. Christians can cooperate with persons of different religions and persuasions in working for the common human good, guided by their shared core values. The churches, other religions and movements all have liberative elements which can be supported, as well as negative aspects which need to be purified. Religions and movements can be mutually supportive of the common good and of the needed purification of each of them.

18) Since human life is possible only within a well balanced **natural environment**, and as human beings have the capacity to care for or destroy our natural habitat, the care and concern for nature as a whole must be one of the primary responsibilities of disciples of Jesus. This has to include an equitable and caring use of

the natural resources of the earth, which are presently being exhausted and destroyed by wanton human waste and negligence. This implies an inter-generational contract by which each generation cares for itself and succeeding generations in the use of natural resources and the stewards of nature.

19) Christians are **called to struggle** against all forms of discrimination and exploitation: particularly of gender, race, ethnicity, color, tribe, caste, class, religion and nationality. Each of these requires a transcending of one's natural group and interests and identification of those of the wider human community. Combat against the forces of personal and societal exploitation would be an essential element of christian spirituality and of the mission of the church.

20) This struggle against the forces of evil in each one and in the world requires a clear **analysis of the forces** that are operative in the world. There has to be an identification of the allies and enemies of human fulfillment and consequently of God's plan for humanity. The friends and foes must be identified within each of us, in our countries and at the global level. One of the advantages of the modern situation is that it is easier to establish the connections between poverty and conflict in the poor countries and the global systems of exploitation linked to the big companies and the international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The role of the global transnational corporations has to be evaluated in relation to both their positive and negative aspects. For better or for worse they are among the principal forces for the development and unification of the world. Power in these companies is with the small group of extremely rich persons and families in the world. Such an analysis should lead to an option for the values of the kingdom, i.e. an **option for the liberation of the oppressed**, and therein the liberation of all from the oppression of sin.

21) **The alliances**, that can help bring about an integral liberation of the women and men of our time, will be indicated by the analysis of the social forces operative at different levels. Given the global nature of the social, economic and cultural system and of their mechanisms of oppression the alliances for liberation too will require a global dimension. Networking among groups for integral human liberation will be essential for success against the forces of evil and death that dominate the world. Such activities will bring about, and in turn be motivated by, related understandings of spirituality and holiness.

22) **Strategies of action** for integral human liberation ... What are we to do, given the immensity of the problems? Where can we begin? We seem so helpless and hopeless in this situation. Need to begin with issues that social forces bring to the surface e.g. European unification, changes in Eastern Europe, the Gulf crisis in the second half of 1990, or local issues with their global connections such as drugs and arms production and sales.

An essential element of strategy of liberation is the self-purification of groups in the process of the struggles, so that the different groups may understand each other and cooperate for the common good and victory against the overall forces of domination. This is a challenge to each group such as: workers, women, third world movements, religions, human rights groups, apostolic movements in the church. Each group has to see that it is necessary to work towards global objectives being

concerned with one's own particular objectives. Each has to consider whether it is a problem for others. Thus the dialogue among 'first' and 'third world' groups in the women's movement. Groups would have also to ask themselves whether they include (or exclude) wider concerns in their agenda. Thus trade unions in rich countries and the needs of poor workers elsewhere, the gay and lesbian movements and international issues.

Human beings, however, will not easily change substantially. Change is prevented by ignorance and attachment to one's self interest even when this is seen as harmful to others. Religious legitimation and other rationalizations may come between the somewhat informed conscience and the effective goodwill of persons and groups. The social conditioning of the affluent prevents them from appreciating or seriously sympathizing with the plight of the poor in their countries and especially in other countries. Hence, the resistance to change even among persons of apparent good will.

23) **The liberation of the Whites** is one of the most important and necessary but difficult tasks in this process of humanization of the world, and for furthering the values of the kingdom of God in the 1990s. The Whites have set up the present world order as well as its legal, and ideological legitimation as well as its military defenses. This is one of the biggest challenges to the Churches as these too have been captured by the Whites. Christian theology has been re-interpreted to suit their dominance in this world and for the next.

The immense goodwill among ordinary White Christians needs to be harnessed for the transformation especially of the so-called Christian countries. Such a conversion of Christiana is a highest priority of the churches. The mission in foreign countries undertaken by Europeans and Americans can serve as an eye and heart opener for the affluent Whites. They should not be satisfied with the traditional work of the mission: building the church overseas, or with social work in the poor countries. They can use their awareness of the exploitative system to generate consciousness and action in the seats of powers in their home countries. Hope for the poor in the poor countries depends in good measure on the contestation of the evils of the system from within the centres of power.

24) **Third world elites** are often partners of the rich of the rich countries in the exploitation of the poor of the poor countries. Many of the influential Christians in the poor countries belong to this category. They seek their self-advantage to the detriment of the poor and of their countries. Sometimes the third world elites utilize popular or populist trends and movements to come to power e.g. communalism, ethnicity, caste, tribe, religion and nationalism. These forces can have their positive values and destructive aspects too.

The churches may have a major responsibility in converting their elite members not to exploit of the poor. This will require a re-education of the clergy and educators themselves. Very often the school system of the poor countries conveys the values of the affluent and exploitative society to the younger generation of the countries. The churches have had a great impact on education in many third world countries

25) The churches, at the present moment of human history can be valuable **multinational agencies of integral human liberation** and of the care for nature, provided they awaken themselves effectively to this historic calling and join with all others of good will in a joint action for the common cause of each person and of all humanity. The conversion of the nations to the core values of humanity and of the religions can be a prime task of the religions including the churches. From the Christian perspective of world history this could be a way towards the recapitulation of all things in Christ, understood in a cosmic sense.

26) The development and acceptance of theology evolved on such a basis could contribute towards a conversion of Christians to Jesus of the gospels, the one who presented the sermon on the mount as the way of life for all. Such a theology can help towards integrating the positive insights of the theory and practice of different movements such as: feminism, secularism, democracy, human rights, modernity, socialism, the religions, Pentecostalism, mysticism, popular religiosity, action groups, peoples' movements, cooperatives, co-dependency groups.

The return of theology to the respect for human nature and human creativity and co-responsibility leave room for many such trends that can cooperate towards forming better integrated persons and a more just and free world, motivated by the best inspirations of the Spirit of God expressed through them.

27) A re-orientation of Christian life and thinking in these directions will lead to conscious Christians contesting the dominant system of power in society at all levels and in the churches themselves. This will mean that Christianity will become once again a counter-culture opposing the evils in the dominant killer-system in the world and in their societies. Martyrdom in different forms will be the lot of those who thus opt for the values of the gospel. Christians would then have returned full circle to the basic orientations of the early disciples of Jesus. Theology would free them from their traditional irrelevancies and motivate them towards a commitment to present exigencies that human life demands. They would be glad to suffer, where necessary, for the same causes for which Jesus, the martyrs of old and so many in our time have given their lives. The cross will have a renewed practical meaning in our times. They will, at the same time, celebrate when truth, justice, love and life prevail, and hence the reign of *righteousness* is being built on earth. In the midst of the troubles of the 1990s, the ongoing liberation of the poor, weak and oppressed will be a message of hope and a sign of the resurrection through the crucifixion on the cross.

In this work we discuss some aspects of theology concerning God, Jesus Christ, the human condition and right relationships which may help in the reorientation of Christian theology.

Chapter 3

DE-ROUTEING OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

God and Jesus Christ

1. Introduction

The followers of Jesus as a new religio-social community had to identify their position in relation to the other religious and social groups. They had to explain how they were different from the Jews among whom they began. The Jewish leadership of the day rejected the message of Jesus for reforming the contemporary Jewish religion. As the Christians grew in numbers and expanded to other countries they had to face the challenges of the “*pagan*” religio-cultural philosophies, and of the thinking and religious practices of peoples other than Jews, including non-Jewish Christians.

Christians from the earliest times believed the apostolic teaching that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” *2 Cor. 5, 19*. This implied a relationship to God and a universal salvific role for Jesus. There was however neither clarity nor agreement concerning how these were realised or possible. The New Testament has different texts that indicate both the exceptional relationship of Jesus to God the father and his human weakness and fallibility. These texts were interminably quoted by writers and preachers according to their point of view.

Theologians and bishops debated theological issues, differing in views on issues such as the way in which the divine and the human were present in Jesus, and the human need of redemption through Jesus. Corresponding to the responses to these issues there were different approaches towards the spiritual life, the church, the role of the clergy and political authority.

Their concerns have been

God,

the explanation of human life, sin, redemption from sin, Jesus Christ, his identity and role, divine grace,

the church, and eternal life.

The debates, they were engaged in, will hardly be appreciated without an understanding of their cultural context and general philosophical background such as Platonism and Neoplatonism or later Aristotelianism. Thus for Platonists human existence was the soul’s experience of being trapped in the flesh and succumbing to its temptations. In that perspective the understanding of the incarnation would be dependent on the relationship of the eternal “*Logos*” to the humanity of Jesus, something about which there could be, and have been, different interpretations. The languages used were also important. “A Greek could certainly think of no greater opposition than that of ‘*Logos*’ to ‘*Sarx*’ (*flesh*)”, especially if the idea of suffering

and death were associated with it.”⁸ Did the formula ‘one ousia, three hypostases’ communicate to the Latins the same meaning as ‘*una substantia, tres personae*’? These could easily lead to misunderstandings.

In recent decades, different theological schools have been concerned with the reinterpretation and development of Christian theology, according to the concerns of each group or area.

European and North American white theologians are particularly interested in the contribution of biblical studies, science and technology, of modernity and secularity.

The Latin American theologians of Liberation have pushed the discussion ahead starting from the point of view of the oppressed classes, and peoples, especially under capitalism.

The Feminist movement, everywhere, is pinpointing the oppression and marginalization of women and the impact of patriarchy on the scriptures and on theology. They urge a new understanding of the nature, identity, and psychology of women within an acknowledgment of the basic equality of the two sexes.

In Eastern Europe the experience of socialist dictatorships has led to the growth of movements for democracy as well as economic and religious freedom, with Christians taking a leading role in them. The post-socialist experience is leading many there to appreciate some of the good points of their socialism.

The ecological and environmental concerns have accentuated creation, nature and the Cosmic Christ. Throughout the world, action groups and committed theologians are concerned about peace, human rights and social justice.

Inter-religious dialogue is also becoming an important element in the Christian churches in many countries, especially in Asia and Africa, that are multi-religious or growing in the consciousness of that reality. Further, Afro-Asian experience of European colonialism has left behind a memory of suspicion of Christian churches that cooperated with the foreign colonizers.

From the 1920s, the churches endeavored to appreciate the Afro-Asian people’s art and culture. Indigenization of the leadership of these churches was undertaken after World War II and the independence of the colonies. In recent decades with Vatican II and the General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches, Christians have been open to inter-religious dialogue.

Western Europe, North America and Oceania are also becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious particularly due to the migration of population from the South to the North and from East to West.

Monasticism and inter-religious spiritual search have led to deeper levels of dialogue in communion in religious experience.

⁸ Aloys Grillmeier: *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1, Mowbrays, London, 1975, p. 31.

Inter-religious social action is a common feature in many countries. Sometimes members of the different religions meditate or worship at the same place. When religious leaders met at Assisi in 1986 on the invitation of the Pope, they prayed at the same site, though separately. In more recent years some churches regard other religions also as salvific i.e. capable of being means of salvation of persons in the next life.

These very advances take the dialogue to deeper levels. Christians, particularly, in Afro-Asian countries are faced with the problem of understanding their past and seeking ways of being truly Christian as well as genuinely open to the values of the other religions and the rest of their people.

The large-scale ‘unchurching of Christians’ in the Western countries, along with the on-going decline in the vocations to the priestly and religious life is leading to significant changes in the functioning of the churches. The Western Catholic Churches will, in the not too distant future, be substantially priestless and religious-less. This in turn leads to and implies a questioning as to whether there has been some inadequacy in the understanding of the Christian mission in the world.

We Christians have to ask ourselves two basic questions:

- i) what were the theological reasons for our past attitudes towards others, including our mistakes?
- ii) Consequently, what re-orientations should be made in our theology and Christian living to meet today’s challenges?

2. Reasons for this Questioning

We, especially, in Asia and Africa, have to raise these issues because our peoples have traditions of alternative visions of the universe, of human life and of the Absolute Transcendent. There are different explanations of the human predicament as well as prescriptions for the good life and for social harmony. Most of the religions think all humankind will ultimately achieve a lasting happiness as part of the cosmic process. They have forms of meditation, prayer, worship, self-purification, placating the supernatural forces as does also Christianity in some of its different levels of religiosity. Some religions have also a great concern for monotheism; thus Islam cannot accept the concepts of the Trinity of three equally divine persons and the Incarnation of God.

In this background Christianity has, in the past, often been aggressive, arrogant and siding with the colonial and economic exploiters. Christian thinking and pastoral practice have been regarding the other religions and their teachings and practices as incorrect, incapable of leading persons to virtue and salvation and even positively harmful as false religions or superstition.

At the same time, Christianity asks us to accept, in faith, its hypotheses concerning the human predicament and the means and process of eternal salvation. It is understandable that we should exercise a critical approach, or a hermeneutics of suspicion, towards such hypotheses as they have been so damaging for our peoples,

religions and cultures. Hence we have to ask basic questions as to how Christians arrived at the theses which are accepted by them as the truth concerning human salvation and God.

When we push the inquiry further we see that Christian theology too is based on certain fundamental assumptions which are accepted on faith. The question then arises, what is the foundation of this faith: is it from Jesus, from the Bible, from the early church, from human reasoning, from political authorities? How is the faith expressed in human languages; and how were words understood then, and now? Why were there so many differing theories for explaining the faith? Why were there prolonged conflicts and church divisions over these interpretations? How were conflicts ultimately resolved and an orthodoxy arrived at? How much of the earlier orthodox positions are being given up today, and for what reasons? How does theology evolve?

3. Issues: the Christian claims

The critical issue on which we Christians hurt the other religions was in asserting that Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of the Father, that Christianity alone is salvific, and that other religions are not salvific, except when related in some way to Jesus Christ. Consequently these others were not true religions, and Christian powers could attack them. Further, the mission of the churches was to convert all persons to Christianity.

The debate within the Christian church was for many centuries concerning the way in which Jesus Christ was related to God, the nature of the human condition on earth, and how Jesus was the universal saviour of all humankind. These issues concerning human life, Christology and the Trinity were inter-related and inter-dependent. They involved elements which are of the realm of mystery and beyond human rational knowledge. At the same time there were quotations of scripture that could be, and were, invoked by different sides to the controversies. Personal and political factors too influenced the understanding and determination of issues.

Christians came to these positions in articulating their theology in dialogue with, Judaism and later Greco-Roman society. We can distinguish three main issues in this theological evolution:

- the presentation of Jesus Christ
 - a) as God co-equal to the Father in the Trinity.
 - b) as a divine and human in himself; and universal redeemer
- interpretation of the human predicament as due to “original sin” affecting all humans; and of redemption as only by Christ.
- Hence corresponding conclusions concerning the church; views on the absolute need of the christian mission for human salvation; and superiority of Christianity over all other religions. All human beings, including religious founders, are considered inferior to Jesus and in need of redemption by him.

With the alliance between the church and the Roman empire, and with Christianity replacing paganism as the religion of the empire, christian doctrine is

adjusted to the needs of the empire, and imperial power is used to maintain theological orthodoxy.

It may be asked whether these are not issues of the past, which would best be now forgotten? We do not think so because we have to ask where and how we Christians went wrong in so fundamental an issue for a religion such as the nature of salvation and the consequent attitude towards other religions and schools of thought and ways of life. Further these traditional views are far from absent in the churches at the local parishes or even at the highest levels of the teaching authority. In 7th December 1990, Pope John Paul II harked back to them in his encyclical letter on the “Church’s Missionary Mandate”, “*Redemptoris Missio*”:

“If go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Saviour for all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God ... This statement (there is salvation in no one else [*Acts 4: 10, 12*], which was made to the Sanhedrin, has a universal value. since for all people – Jews and Gentiles alike – salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.

Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind ... No one, therefore can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s one, universal mediation, far from being as obstacle on the journey towards God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.”⁹

4. Issues in Christology

A) Identity of Jesus: his divine-human nature, incarnation, his pre-existence, his consciousness, knowledge, the Cosmic Christ relationship to creation and universal history. On the one hand Jesus is closely related to God in the “Abba” Father –relationship. On the other, being human, he is limited and contingent and as such can never reveal God fully. In this sense we cannot say Jesus is the only way to God, or the only possible teacher of human ethical norms.

B) The personality of Jesus of Nazareth: kind, loving, compassionate towards all, sincere, authentic, iconoclastic of false gods and false spirituality, a courageous young man who contested the establishment of the day. Historically, his humanity was neglected during many many centuries up to our times.

C) Function or role of Jesus in human redemption: why was Jesus killed, or why did Jesus die? Impact of theories concerning human predicament. What is humanity to be redeemed from? Process of redemption: ransom paid to Satan, atonement for sin, sacrifice to God ... ? Such theories of redemption neglected the story of the life and death of the historical Jesus as narrated in the gospels; they neglected the social and relational nature of his message of love and justice. They gave salvation and religion an otherworldly objective and means and sidetracked the

⁹ John Paul II “*Redemptoris Missio*”; Polyglot Press, Vatican, 1990, No 5.

issues of human and social relations in the contemporary situation of the life time of Jesus or subsequently.

D) The message of Jesus: what is the core of his teachings? Jesus preached the kingdom of God, a rule of righteousness. The core values of gospel. Church and theology add to his core message of love of God and neighbor; tendency of theology to be legalistic, individualistic, to routinize the charism of the founder.

E) Mission of Jesus and hence of the church: interpreted as conversion to the church, and obedience to its authority. The mission which Jesus calls humans to is to a conversion to righteousness of life; a change of heart and will to love, rather than to an adherence to a body of doctrines and dogmas. His mission as liberative, redemptive, through right relationships among all persons, groups and with nature. Hence there would be a more understanding attitude of his disciples towards other religions and persons of no religious affiliation; and corresponding priorities and activities of the Christian mission.

F) The otherworldly concept of redemption did not make Christians think of the transformation by love of the attitudes and relationships of persons and of social structures as of the essence of redemption in Jesus and of the mission of the church. Hence the concerns and activities of the Christian mission did not include strategies for social justice; these were, at best, optional – as is now held by many Christians of goodwill. Salvation in Jesus can be thought of as a process that is operative within human experience – personally in oneself and societally in the community and at world level.

G) Spirituality of discipleship of Jesus depends on the understanding of the identity, functions, message, and mission of Jesus. Hence over the centuries, there have been different schools of spirituality, concepts of holiness, meanings given to the sacraments, understandings of the pastoral mission of the church according to the way God, Christ, Holy Spirit and response to the inner call to discipleship was understood.

5. The Life and Thinking of the Early Church

Jesus did not claim to be God, or equal to the Father. He did not teach that the whole of humanity was in sin, and that redemption was not possible without him. He did not ally himself with the dominant Roman or Jewish civil or religious establishments. According to A. Grillmeier, the New Testament, while holding the lordship and divinity of Christ, had different Christologies.

“We have, for example, the contrast between a messianic Christology (*the Acts speeches, the synoptic gospels*) and the Johannine idea of the Logos; the factors which determine a portrayal of Christ may be salvation history (*synoptics; Rom; Gal.*), cosmology (*Eph.; Col 1.15 ff*), liturgy (*Heb.*) or apocalyptic (*Rev.*). The portrayal of Christ given by the New Testament already shows sometimes predominantly Judazistic, elsewhere predominantly Hellenistic features ... Common to all sources is a firm recognition of Jesus transcendence and his central position in salvation history.”¹⁰

¹⁰ A. Grillmeier: *Christ in Christian Tradition*, John Knox Press Atlanta 1975, Vol. 1, p. 33.

a) **The apostles' life and teaching** were close to those of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles describes their life-style and beliefs.

“The group of believers was one in mind and heart. No one said that any of his belongings was his own, but they all shared with one another everything they had. With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God poured rich blessings on them all. There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned fields and houses would sell them, bring the money received from the sale, and hand it over to the apostles; and the money was distributed to each one according to his need”. *Acts*, 4. 32-35.

This practice is in keeping with the substance of the message of the four gospels, which are our best testimony on the historical Jesus.

Joining the Christian community had immediate social implications. Christians bonded in a sharing of goods. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus was witnessed to by the commitment to the group's community life. The teaching of the apostles linked discipleship of Jesus and holiness to truthfulness and love for the neighbour. St. Paul epistles stress the need of righteousness in one's life for salvation. *Rom. 6. 19; 12.1; Phil. 2.12 ff.* In their epistles, James 5, 1-6 and John (*e.g. 1 Jo. 2, 9-11*) are even stronger. Throughout the first centuries of the church, the “Fathers” laid great stress on the social implications of the gospel, regarding wealth and its use'.¹¹

Relationships in the early church were based much more on communion of life than on agreement on a set of dogmas that were defined by a church authority. Each Church interpreted the teaching of Jesus in its situation. There was a certain liberty of belief. One could speak of a pre-dogmatic church and theology that were more tolerant of others and more concerned with authenticity of life than formal acceptance of defined dogmas. Fortunately the Church authorities did not have a secular arm or military power to force their doctrines on others. Communion among the churches was in acceptance of the “*tessera*” or letters of attestation from the other churches. Hospitality, as the *Didache* testifies, was customary among Christians, without encouraging laziness or mere dependence.¹²

b) The *Didache* composed, probably, towards the middle of the second century is one of the earliest church documents available to us. Its teaching echoes the earlier “*Doctrina*”, and was carried over in the later texts such as the 3rd century “*Didascalia*” and the 4th century “*Apostolic Constitutions*”. The *Didache*, announces the way of life and the way of death, the core message of love of God and neighbour:

“The way of life is this: first, you shall love God, who made you; second, your neighbour as yourself; and everything that you would not have done to you, do not do to another” (1, 2).

¹¹ cf. Boniface Ramsey: *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, Paulist NY., 1985, chap. X on Poverty and Wealth, pp. 182-196.

Charles Avila: *Ownership – Early Christian Teaching*, Orbis NY., Sheed and Ward London. 1983.

¹² Quasten, Johannes: *Patrology Vol 1*, Newman Press, Maryland, 1950. p. 34 on how visiting Christians are to be received.

It recalls the moral teaching of Jesus as in Matthew : love your enemies. It insists on avoiding the capital sins, with an especial emphasis on truthfulness.

“You shall not be covetous or rapacious, or a hypocrite or malicious or proud” (2, 6). “Do not be stretching out your hands to take, and closing them when it comes to giving” (3, 5). “You shall not turn the needy away, but you shall share everything with your brother, and you shall not say it is your own. For if you share in what is immortal, how much more in mortal things!” (3. 8)

Thereafter, the Didache spells out the rite and significance of the thanksgiving.

“On the Lord’s own day, gather together and break bread and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions, so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no one who has a quarrel with his comrade meet with you until they are reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled.” (14, 1-2).

This teaching has the core message of Jesus; and does not contain the later theological elaborations concerning the nature of the human predicament, salvation by Jesus from a universal original sin and the identity and role of Jesus in redemption.

Christians were, then, a counter-culture in the Roman empire. They did not submit to the cult of the emperor or accept the false values of the empire. Their life and thinking were close to the poor and the marginalised. Suspected of disloyalty, they were persecuted several times during the first three centuries. Leadership in the church often led to martyrdom.

c) **Apocalypticism**

The early Christians awaited keenly the second coming of Christ, the parousia, which was in some sense considered imminent. The apocalyptic tradition coming from Zoroastrianism into Judaism is found in the New Testament too. Mark chapter 13 attributes to Jesus an apocalyptic discourse in which he announces both the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. He speaks of the abomination of desolation and the need for the disciples to be vigilant and ready for it. This tradition has the idea of a dualism, a conflict of good and evil forces, a cosmic drama, with the present domination of the evil forces. These will however be overcome by the good forces, the Messiah or God. This is linked to the second coming of Christ and a long reign of the just – later understood as a millennium; hence millenarianism.

Apocalypticism has a pessimistic view of the present world, with the hope for the just only in God. It was different from the concept of the kingdom of God which was understood as being inaugurated here and now by Christ. The early Christians being poor and dispossessed and often persecuted thought of the world in such terms of the triumph of the forces of evil and awaited the coming of the lord to deliver them their enemies.¹³

The first Christian generation thought that Christ would not delay in coming back, but by the time the gospels were written, they already understood that history had not yet reached its end. There is a gradual re-interpretation of the commitment of

¹³ *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Abingdon Nashville. 1986, Vol. I. pp. 157-161.

Jesus understood more as a mystical presence rather than an apocalyptic return in glory.

“Each major tenet of primitive Christian belief must be understood in this apocalyptic context; the very charter of orthodoxy, the command of the risen Lord to the apostles to make disciples and to teach them to observe everything that he had commanded was predicated on the promise and the prophecy that he would be with them until the consummation of the age (*Matt. 28 19 20*). When that consummation was postponed, it could no longer serve as the premise for affirmations of Christian doctrine, which had to be transposed into another key of course, the expectation of the end of the world was itself a cardinal tenet of Christian faith, too firmly embedded in the message of Jesus and in the “apostolic doctrine” of the early Christian community to be expunged by such trifles as the details of world history.”

“Christian apocalypticism reflected a supernaturalistic view of the world, which Christian believers shared with other religious believers of antiquity. This world view, in turn, formed the presupposition for Christian doctrine.”

“When the apocalyptic vision was eclipsed, however many of those words and deeds appeared enigmatic. Much of the history of the interpretation of the gospels during the second and third centuries does consist in the effort to make sense of apocalyptic passages when the presuppositions had shifted. The “end” in such passages as *Matthew 10: 22* came to refer to the death of the individual, not to the end of the age.”

“If the teachings of the early church and of Jesus could simply be described as consistent eschatology, we could then trace the decline of such an eschatology as the primary factor in the establishment both of ecclesiastical structures and of dogmatic norms ... It was nothing less than the decisive shift from the categories of cosmic drama to those of being, from the Revelation of St. John the Divine to the creed of the Council of Nicene.¹⁴

A study of this issue is interesting and enlightening to see how the teaching and expectations of the church have evolved over the centuries. It also raises the question of the knowledge of Jesus and of the understanding of his message by the early disciples and the subsequent generation of Christians. In *Mark 13*, Jesus is reported as saying “No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come – neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows. Be on watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will come.” This text was important in the Arian controversy as the knowledge of the Son was said to be less than that of the Father, hence Jesus could not be equal in divinity with the Father.

Apocalypticism is present in our times too especially in the so called “evangelistic” groups that preach the imminent second coming of Jesus as the saviour and judge and call for conversion to their fold. The cosmic drama aspect is taken up,

¹⁴ Jaroslav Pelican: *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine 1 - The emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*; University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1971, pp. 123-132.

at least implicitly, in those who consider themselves to be the righteous and advocate armageddon against others considered the forces of evil.

6. The Identity of Jesus

Jesus himself has not taught clearly concerning his identity. Following the teachings of the apostles, Christian thinkers wanted to assign a divine role for Jesus Christ. They had no formula for expressing this relationship without giving up monotheism. The explanation of the position that Jesus is God, “the Word made Flesh” and the universal saviour of humankind engaged the church in theological debates during several centuries. It led also to the disintegration of Christianity into separate churches such as the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Nestorian and Monophysitic and later Protestant communions ... each claiming to be of Christ.

Thus the Nestorian controversy was concerning the question as to how the complete God and the complete man can be united in one being. According to the Nestorians, the God-Logos assumed the nature of the man Jesus and dwelt therein, as in a temple. Hence Mary is not ‘*Theotokos*’ or mother of God. Cyril of Alexandria, opposing Nestorius, rejected the idea that Christ became an individual man, although he acknowledged all the constituents of humanity in Christ. Christ is the Logos which has assumed human nature; thus only can he be redeemer.¹⁵

The church was divided on such issues about which there is scant evidence and verifiability. Nestorianism continues to this day as a distinct line of thought within the Nestorian communion. Likewise many of the divisions of Christianity, which often began with distinctions on abstruse issues, but also involved personal rivalries and political power conflicts.

Relation of Jesus to God: Trinitarian Question

Much theological ingenuity was exercised in thinking out different combinations of nature and person, of body and spirit, of intellect and will to see how Jesus could be God-man, created and divine, human-born but sinless, sinless and freely redeeming, dying and living, universal and for Christians in a special way. This discussion had moral and soteriological implications that were more significant for Christian life than the exact relations within the Trinity, which are in any case wrapped in deeper mystery.

The different positions proposed have been well summarized by Peter Wallace thus:

- i) The Docetists claimed that Jesus was God who only *appeared* in the form of flesh,
- ii) Gnostics claimed that it was only by a *special knowledge* passed on by Jesus that a man could be saved.
- iii) Modalists claimed that the Father, Son and Spirit was only one person who was given different titles according to the way his work was seen – the *mode* in which he worked.

¹⁵ Adolf Harnack: “*Outlines of the History of Dogma*”, Beacon Press, Boston, 1957, pp. 280-286.

- iv) Patripassionism claimed it was the *Father* (not the Son) who suffered. The Monarchians who equate Christ with the Father make the Father die on the cross.
- x) Adoptionism claimed that Jesus was a *good man* who had been adopted by God.
- vi) Moralism saw Jesus as a *great moral figure* who could inspire others by his example.
- vii) Subordinationism (following the lead of Origen and Tertullian) claimed that the Son and the Spirit were *created by and lesser than* the Father.
- viii) Arius claimed that the Logos was created from nothing, but *before whose existence God was* alone. He denied that the Son was of the same essence as the Father, and so could only be an intermediary being, distinct from the Father.¹⁶

The first four, Docetists, Gnostics, Modalists and Patripassionists downplayed the human Jesus; while the second four, Adoptionists, Moralists, Subordinationists and Arianists emphasized his humanity and reduced his divinity. The variety and subtlety of the propositions indicate the extent to which there was diversity in the church as well as the role and scope for different philosophies and theological imagination in the evolution of doctrine.

Identity of Jesus

Reports in the Acts of the Apostles of the preaching of Peter, the epistles of Paul and the gospel of John bear witness to evolving interpretations of the identity and role of Jesus the Christ. Many legitimate Christologies can be found in the New Testament and the early church.

Many Fathers of the church, such as Irenaeus, Justin, Athenogroas, Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian, Origen and Novatian, were in favour of *subordinationism* as they were keen on safeguarding monotheism. *Irenaeus of Lyons*, (born about 140 A.D.), by far the most important of the theologians of the second century, sees the relationship between the Father and the Son as indescribable.¹⁷

The Fathers of the Church were conscious of the sense of mystery in doing theology and speaking of God, the ineffable. The 1st and 2nd century “Apostolic Fathers” had a pastoral approach rather than one of defining doctrines. Their doctrinal view was that Christ as the pre-existent Son of God collaborated in the creation of the world.¹⁸ During the first three centuries these issues were openly held and intensely debated in the Church.

¹⁶ Peter Wallace: *Christology*, Gowland & Co, South port, 1990, p. 11; numbers, italics and underlining added by us.

¹⁷ “Since, therefore, his generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be right in their mind, in as much as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable.” (2, 28, 6), cf. *Quasten*, op.cit. vol. 1. p. 295.

¹⁸ *Quasten*: op.cit., pp. 40-41.

Clement of Rome, according to Irenaeus the third successor of St. Peter in Rome, writes of Jesus Christ as “God’s ambassador ... with a message from God ... the beloved child of God ... high priest and guardian of our souls”.¹⁹

Ignatius, the second bishop of Antioch, presents Jesus Christ as Lord and teacher, who must be imitated in his love and suffering. He saw *martyrdom* as the perfect imitation of Christ; hence he asks that he be not prevented from following Christ. “Fire, cross, struggle with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crunching of the whole body, cruel tortures inflicted by the devil – let them come upon me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ.” (Smyrn. 4. 2)²⁰ In subsequent centuries this emphasis on suffering and martyrdom was soft-pedalled; and texts of Ignatius were utilized rather to strengthen the authority of the Roman Pontiff in the Church, and the bishop in his diocese. The martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, said to have been a disciple of the apostles, is borne witness to in the letter (A.D. 156) from the Church in Smyrna to the Christian community of Philomelium in Greater Phrygia. Martyrdom is the perfect imitation of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

St. Justin and his six companions were martyred, probably in Rome in 165 A.D. The sentence pronounced on them by the official court was “Let those who will not sacrifice to the gods and yield to the command of the emperor be scourged and led away to be beheaded in accordance with the law.”²¹

Justin, (100/110-163/167 A.D.), son of Priscus, the son of Baccheius was born in Neapolis, Palestine about the year 100 A.D. He was brought up as a heathen and was uncircumcised. He was well versed in the schools of philosophy of the day, including Platonism. In pursuing his philosophical search for the meaning of life going from scholar to scholar, he was converted to Christianity around 130 A.D. He would then have been in contact with persons who were close to the apostolic times. His father would have been born in the first century when John the evangelist was still alive, and his grandfather would have lived in the time of the apostles Peter and Paul.

After his conversion he was keen to share his faith with his Jewish and other contemporaries. He continued to be a “philosopher” (wearing the philosopher’s garb). He travelled widely and set up his school in Rome. Through his teachings and writings he was a principal 2nd century *apologist*. He courageously faced the trials and dangers of being a disciple of Jesus in those difficult times. “We will not cease acknowledging Him, even though men’s reproaches be brought against us, and though the most terrible tyrant tries to compel us to disown him”.²²

Justin and six other Christians were beheaded, probably in 165 A.D. at Rome “in accordance with the law ... as they would not sacrifice to the gods and yield to the command of the emperor.”²³

¹⁹ *Quasten*: op.cit., p. 45; p. 49.

²⁰ quoted in *Quasten*: op.cit., p. 71.

²¹ *Quasten*: op.cit., p. 178.

²² A.L. Williams: *Justin Martyr: The Dialogue with Trypho*, translation, introduction, and Notes by A.L. Williams, London, SPCK, 1930, 9,1, p. 19.

²³ *Quasten*: op.cit., p. 178.

Justin's "*Dialogue with Trypho*" is an interesting document for the type of inter-religious relations of the period within about a hundred years of the death of Jesus. Justin dialogues with Trypho, both being well versed in the Old Testament of the Jews as well as the philosophical writings of the Greeks. Though very acute issues are discussed sharply there is a cordiality of relations between Justin and Trypho, the partners in the dialogue.

His concern was to prove that **Jesus Christ is the Messiah** foretold in the Old Testament and expected by the Jews. Today the exceptional personality of Jesus Christ is taken for granted. The New Testament is, for us, a principal source for the understanding of Jesus Christ. In fact one of the present issues for our inter-religious dialogue is how such dialogue can be reconciled with what Christians consider is the "uniqueness of Jesus Christ".

In the mid-second century, the crucified Jesus Christ himself needed to be proved or accredited in relation to the, Old Testament. The question at issue with the Jews was whether he was really the Messiah and messenger of God. The proof had to be from the Old Testament. Jews, who were not Christians, did not accept the New Testament as inspired. The common ground between Justin and Trypho was the Old Testament which was accepted as inspired and was often interpreted literally.

To the pointed question of Trypho whether there is another God besides the Maker of the universe, Justin replies: "I will endeavour to persuade you of what I say, that as both exists and is mentioned in Scripture a God and Lord other than, and less than, the Maker of the universe, who is also called Angel (or Messenger), because he announces, to men whatever the maker of the universe, above whom there is no other God, desires to announce to them."²⁴

Christians who know Jesus "have the entire Logos, who appeared for our sakes, body, Logos and soul" (*2 Apol.*, 6, 3; 8, 1; 10, 1-3) There is in humanity a differentiated participation in the Logos by all human beings, with the disciples of Jesus having a fuller participation in the Logos.

The references to Lord, God, Angel, messenger, etc in the Old Testament, indicating a divine presence, are according to Justin to the Word or Logos of God through which the ineffable God carried out divine operations in creation and thereafter. This Logos is the one who according to the Prologue of John became incarnate as Jesus. Thus Jesus continues a divine work and enlightens all those who accept his message. He is the more complete revelation of the ineffable God.

His concept of God leaned on Platonic philosophy. God is without origin, ineffable. Since God is transcendent and beyond all human beings it is necessary to bridge the abyss between God and humans. This is done by the Logos. He is the mediator between God the Father and the world. The Logos emanated from God before the creation of the world; through the Logos God creates the world. "It seems that Justin tends to subordinationism as far as the relation between the Logos and the Father is concerned. This is evident from *Apology 2, 6*. His Son who alone is properly called Son, the Logos, who alone was with him and was begotten before the works,

²⁴ Williams: Justin: *Dialogue* (56.4), p. 111

when at first he created and arranged all things by him, is called Christ, in reference to his being anointed and God's ordering all things through him." Accordingly, Justin seems to suppose that the Logos became externally independent only in order to create and govern the world. The personal function gave him personal existence. He became a divine person, but subordinated to the Father.²⁵

Justin teaches that though the Logos appeared in his fullness only in Christ, 'a seed of the Logos' was scattered among the whole of mankind long before Christ. ... Thus, not only the prophets of the Old Testament, but even the pagan philosophers carried a germinating seed of the Logos in their souls, as for instance Heraclites, Socrates, and the Stoic philosopher, Musonius, who lived according to the directions of the Logos, the Divine Word. In fact, they were truly Christians, even though they have been thought atheists.²⁶

The Logos is, however, begotten of the Father, for the Father's work, and though called 'God' is only a secondary God. Justin lived and dialogued within the framework of the strong Jewish belief in monotheism as in the Old Testament itself. Hence there was no question then of placing Jesus as God equal to the one unbegotten God, the Maker of all things.

He relates the teaching of the Old and New Testaments to the Greco-Roman thought of the time. With Plato, he thought of God as transcendent, ineffable and without origin.

"For the ineffable Father and lord of all neither comes to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps nor arises, but abides in His place, wherever that is, seeing acutely and hearing acutely not with eyes or ears, but with power beyond all speech."²⁷

The Logos or Word, emanating from the Father, mediates between God the Father and the world. All the cosmological functions of God are attributed to the Logos. God the Father arranged all things of creation through him. The Father acts through the Son. All divine manifestations in the world take place through him.

"Logos" was a Greek category used by many even prior to Christianity. The Logos was understood by Justin as divine, but a secondary divinity. The functions of the Logos were in creation, in enlightenment as the basis of knowledge, in being the moral norm, psychologically the thought form as Word, and Word of revelation and mediator of salvation.²⁸

Justin bore witness to the Lord Jesus Christ before Rusticus the Prefect at Rome before his martyrdom as the Son (or Servant) of God, who also has been proclaimed beforehand by the prophets as about to come to the human race as the herald of salvation, and the teacher of good things."²⁹

²⁵ Quasten J., op.cit., p. 209. (*Dialog, 61*)

²⁶ Quasten: p. 209. (*Apology, 1, 46*).

²⁷ Williams: op.cit Dialogue, 127.1, p. 263.

²⁸ cf. A. Grillmeier: *Christ in Christian Tradition*. John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1975, Vol. 1, pp. 89-94 and 108-110.

²⁹ Williams: op.cit., introduction p.xi.

“Characteristically Justin refers the term ‘Christos’ not to the priestly mission of Christ the man, but more fundamentally to the creative and organizing function of the Logos.”³⁰

Justin is **subordinationist** in the relation of the Logos to the Father (*Apology 2, 6*). Justin seems to suppose that the Logos became externally independent only in order to create and govern the world. The personal function gave him personal existence. He became a divine person, but subordinated to the Father. “... God has begotten as a beginning before all His creatures a kind of Reasonable Power from Himself, which is also called by the Holy Spirit the Glory of the Lord, and sometimes Son, and sometimes Wisdom, and sometimes Angel, and sometimes God, and sometimes Lord and Word. Sometimes he also speaks of himself as chief Commander, when He appeared in the form of a man to Joshua the son of Nun.”³¹

For we worship and love next to God the Logos, which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since it is even for us that he became man, that he might be a partaker of our sufferings and bring us healing.”³²

In the intellectual and religious climate of the time Justin maintained the strict monotheism of the Jews. No terminology had been evolved for an equality of persons in God. Justin and the Apologists regard the Logos as generated by the free determination of the Father with a view to creation and revelation. Hence they suppose the Son to be subordinate to the Father, not only in regard to his origin, but also as regards his instrumental activity in creation and revelation.³³

For Justin not only followers of Jesus of Nazareth are Christians, but all those of any time who have lived or live according to the Word of God, the Logos. “Therefore, Christianity extends beyond its visible boundaries and exists prior to its historical appearance; but up to the incarnation the Logos-manifestation remained incomplete.”³⁴

“Those who have lived by the Word are Christians, even though they have been considered atheists such as among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them; and among the foreigners, Abraham, Elias, Ananias, Azarias, Mishael, and many others whose deeds or names we now forbear to enumerate, for we think it would be too long ... Those who have lived by the Word and still do are Christians, and are fearless and untroubled.”³⁵

Justin teaches that though the Logos appeared in his fullness only in Christ, ‘a seed of the Logos’, *logos spermatikos* was scattered among the whole of mankind long before Christ ... Thus, not only the prophets of the Old Testament, but even the pagan philosophers carried a germinating seed of the Logos in their souls, as for instance Heraclitus, Socrates, and the Stoic philosopher, Musonius, who lived

³⁰ Jacques Dupuis: “*Jesus Christ and His Spirit*”, TPI. Bangalore, 1977, p. 6.

³¹ cf. Williams: p. 127: Dial., 61,1.

³² *Apol.*, 13, 4-6.

³³ Williams: Justin: *Dialogue.*, ch. 61. 127, 128.

³⁴ 2 *Apol.*, 13, 2-3, 4-6; 10, 8; Dupuis, op.cit., pp.150-151.

³⁵ 1 *Apol.*, 46, 1-4, also 2 *Apol.*, 8.1.

according to the directions of the Logos, the Divine Word. In fact, they were truly Christians, even though they have been thought atheists.³⁶

Universality of Salvation

Justin argues that salvation is not through circumcision, or the observance of the Sabbath or the temple but through the righteousness or baptism of life. Thus God left Adam uncircumcised; Abel's sacrifice was acceptable though he was uncircumcised ... Before Abraham there was no need of circumcision, and before Moses none of keeping the Sabbath ... The circumcision required is the circumcision of the heart.³⁷

He showed that the observance of the precepts of the Mosaic law was not necessary for salvation, Trypho and his companions admitted that the just persons, who lived before Moses received the Law, were saved due to their righteousness without an observance of the law such as by circumcision and concerning the Sabbath.

This applies to the rest of humanity also beyond the Jewish people. Justin is thus expounding a universal principle concerning human salvation applicable to all peoples in all places before and after Jesus Christ. Of course, those who now know Christ and are convinced that he is the Messiah sent by God are obliged to honour him as such and follow his teachings.

Justin uses this argument to show that God was operative among all people long before Moses and Abraham. This divine operation was through the presence and appearance of the Spirit of God in Christ. He thus explains the theophanies of the Old Testament, as Logo-phanies. Jesus could thus set aside observances, the law of Moses, which are not necessary for salvation of their own nature, but were indicated by God only as a sign for the Jewish people, and partly due to the hardness of their hearts.

Justin has interesting arguments that have a relevance even for today's issues of justification as well as theology relating to gender.

“And the fact that the female sex cannot receive carnal circumcision (as thought by the Jews then) shows that this circumcision has been given for a sign, and not as a work of righteousness. For God made even females able to keep all the acts of righteousness and virtue as well as men. But we see that one fashion of flesh for male and another for female has been made, yet we know that neither one of them is either righteous or unrighteous for this reason but only for reasons of piety and righteousness.”³⁸

Justin in the process mentions the universality of the divine law of righteousness; it would be ridiculous and silly to think that “God has not desired that all mankind should always practice the same acts of righteousness”.³⁹

³⁶ *Apology*, 1. 46.

³⁷ *Dialogue*, 15, 23.

³⁸ *Dialogue*, 23, 5

³⁹ *Dialogue*, 23, 1.

“For He exhibits among every race of men the things that are righteous at all times and in all places ... Wherefore it seems to me that it is well said by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that all righteousness and piety are fulfilled in two commandments, which are these: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all/thy heart, and with all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself.”⁴⁰

Justin quotes Isaiah at length concerning the true fast and religiosity that is pleasing to God: [Is, 58, 1-11]:

Behold, ye fast for disputes and strifes, and you strike the lowly with your fists ... Break thy bread in pieces for the hungry, and gather the poor who have no shelter into thy house. If thou seest one naked, clothe him ... Then shalt thou cry out and the Lord will hear thee ... Circumcise therefore the uncircumcision of your heart, as the words of God require throughout all these words.”⁴¹

Further this salvific impact of the Logos was effective from the beginning of the human race as the Logos enlightened all persons to goodness. Their salvation was not from Jesus who was not yet born, but due to the Logos or Word of God. This Logos was not the same divinity as the ineffable God, maker of all things. Hence there was no question of redemption by a satisfaction to God for an original sin that is said to have offended God infinitely. In this period in Christian thinking the theology of three co-equal divine persons, of original sin, of an ontological redemption by the death of Christ have not been developed. On the contrary the subordinate position of the Logos as a mediating divinity could not make Jesus a God co-equal to the Father. Even the Logos was much wider in its impact than Jesus or the Church. It was the Spirit of God given to all humankind.

At that stage Christian thinking had a place for all persons of good will of all times. There was no question of not being saved outside the Church. On the contrary, in dialogue with the Jews, as when Trypho challenged Justin I, Justin says that

“those who conducted their lives according to the law of Moses should equally be saved.” He explains this within a broader principle: “Since they who did the things that universally, and naturally, and eternally are good, are pleasing to God, so they shall also be saved by means of this Christ of ours, as in the resurrection equally with the righteous who were before them, Noah, Enoch and Jacob, and any others there may be; together with those who recognize this Christ as the Son of God.”⁴²

There was then apparently no need of a divine person to redeem humankind ontologically by being God and transforming human nature as a whole, in view of a fall and an original sin as understood later. There is a reference to each one sinning after Adam but this does not include the later doctrine of original sin as such.⁴³ The death of Jesus saves us from the death that the sin of Adam brought us. The death of Jesus is willed by the Father as a healing for all humankind.⁴⁴ The emphasis in Justin

⁴⁰ *Dialogue*, 93, 2.

⁴¹ *Dialogue*, 15, 1-7

⁴² *Dialogue*, 45, 3; 47, 5.

⁴³ *Dialogue*, 88, 4.

⁴⁴ *Dialogue*, 95, 3.

is on the enlightenment that Jesus brings as the Logos and the need for all to accept his teaching of moral rectitude. Jesus gave a fuller light concerning God the Father of all goodness and love.

Justin puts forwards a soteriology that is acceptable to the modern world in the pluralist religio-cultural situations or for the unchurched or secular society. He was reflecting in a rational manner, insisting on the moral teaching of the gospels and the Old Testament without the exclusive positions which were taken by the Christian church in later centuries with a subsequent elaboration of dogma and growth of the political power of the Christians. This position of Justin is closer to the teaching of Jesus himself than the dogma concerning the need of the Church for salvation, that prevailed in the Church as orthodoxy during several subsequent centuries.

Christians had to prove that they could be saved without observing the Jewish law. Christians in dialogue with the ancient Greek philosophers used their ideas to express the Christian perspective. In the mid-2nd century Christians were on the defensive, being subject to persecution as well as ridicule and popular accusations of being irreligious. Justin begins his reply to the jesting companions of Trypho with a question:

“Is there any other fault you find with us, my friends, save this, that we do not live in accordance with the law, and do not circumcise the flesh as did your fathers, and do not keep the sabbath as you do? Or are also false accusation against our life and morals made among you? I say this, lest you too have believed of us that we eat human beings, and after a banquet put out the lights and wallow in promiscuous lust?”⁴⁵

The perspective of Justin offers an opening to the other religions, and to all persons of good will. In that period the understanding of Logos was not limited to Jesus Christ. Logos was a category used by many in and outside the christian community. If this perspective, which was then not unorthodox, had continued in the church, Christianity would have been much more open and tolerant. In the modern world we have had to learn the hard way that tolerance is a respect for God present in others.

Williams gives as a reason for the neglect of the Dialogues in subsequent centuries:

“may be that its theology left something to be desired from the point of view of theologians who lived after the Council of Chalcedon.”⁴⁶

Christianity was thus thought out in a period close to the life of Jesus and the apostles, and from a non-dominant position in society. It had to argue its case on the basis of the Old Testament or the light of reason. It could not impose its views with imperial authority as after Constantine.

⁴⁵ *Dialogue*, 10, 1.

⁴⁶ *op.cit.*, p. xiv.

Such a Christianity had a better disposition for dialogue with other religions and philosophies than the later post Constantinian Christianity when much depended on the weight of the political power. In fact the dialogue then was not limited to religions, but was concerned with the salvation of all persons based on the righteousness of one's life, even irrespective of organised religion. This is how Justin's dialogue begins with Trypho and his less respectful companions.

Irenaeus born 120/140 – death 202/203; bishop of Lyons in France, was by far the most important of the theologians of the second century. He had listened to St. Polycarp, and other immediate disciples of the apostles. His best known work : *Adversus Haereses* refuting the Gnosticism which had much influence in the East as well as Italy and Gaul. With a deep faith and a broad knowledge, he develops the positive presentation of Catholic thought. He is called the father of Catholic theology. He writes of the relationship between the Father and the Son as indescribable

“Since, therefore, his generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be right in their mind, in as much as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable.”⁴⁷

As Justin had said earlier, according to Irenaeus, the Logos is present in all things from creation itself, revealing the Father progressively. Creation is a divine manifestation. The Son is the visibility of the Father: “*Visibile Patris Filius*”. The human being is a high point of creation: *vivens homo gloria Dei*, a living human person is the glory of God; and the vision of God is the life of man. [*Adv. Haer., IV, 20, 6-7*]

Irenaeus too has a teaching on the progressive revelation of the Father beginning with Adam and the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and finally through the Son Jesus Christ from whom humanity has the fullness of revelation and grace; [*John 1,18*]

“All the Old Testament theophanies are applied to the Word; they are theophanies in so far as they are logo-phanies. In Irenaeus' own expression, the Word, or even Jesus Christ, was ‘present in’, ‘descended in’, or ‘passed through’ the O.T. economies; in the theophanies, he was present rehearsing his future coming in the flesh.”⁴⁸

In so far as God, through the Logos, was always present in all created reality throughout, it would seem to us to be a sort of immanence of the divine in all things, How far is this similar to the Hindu view of the immanence of Brahman in all beings? Further what is the form of such presence? Why has the presence of God in Jesus to be one of identity in a consubstantial manner? It was not seen by the early Fathers in this way in so far as they favoured a subordinationist position.

Quasten writing of *Athenagoras of Athens* unquestionably the most eloquent of the early apologists, says Athenogoras is much clearer and less reserved than St. Justin in defining the divinity of the Logos and his essential unity with the Father. *He*

⁴⁷ Quasten, Vol. 1, p. 295.

⁴⁸ Dupuis: op.cit p. 13.

avoids the subordinationism of the other Greek apologists as can be seen from the following passage:⁴⁹

Tertullian (Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus – about 200)

Tertullian, born about 160 in Carthage, was the son of a pagan captain; he pursued special studies in law and Greek. Impressed by the fidelity of Christians under persecution, he entered the church as an adult. His writings are from about 195-220. He is the first and most productive and distinctive writer of pre-Constantinian literature in North Africa. Until about 207 he was a convinced and declared member of the Catholic Church; thereafter he joined the Montanist movement, rejecting much of what he held previously.

Tertullian had to defend the church's tradition of the incarnation of Christ on two fronts: against Pagan polytheism and Christian monarchianism, as well as to combat the disruptive and divisive gnostic tendencies of Marcion and Valentinus. Tertullian had to defend the singleness of God and explain how Jesus Christ as Son of God does not destroy the singleness of God.

In *'Adversus Praxean'* he expounds the church's conception of the Trinity with a clarity hitherto unknown.

“In Christology and the theology of the Trinity, he employs a terminology which influenced subsequent developments in the Latin West; according to him Jesus Christ is true God and true man, both natures are united in one person but not confused. The expression *'trinitas'* as well as the term *'persona'* is found for the first time in Latin literature in Tertullian: in this Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are *unius substantiae, et unius status et unius potestatis'*. The Logos existed already before the creation of the world, but only became Son at the creation, and consequently as such is not eternal. The more precise relationship of the Father and the Son is viewed in a Subordinationist manner: the Father alone has the fullness of the Godhead; the Son has only a derivative part. The Holy Spirit too is thought of as a person: he is the real teacher of the church, who first of all led the apostles into all truth, but who is also operative as the representative of God and Christ in every Christian community, especially through Holy Scripture which is his work and in which his voice is audible.”⁵⁰

“Before all things existed God was alone. ... Yet even then he was not alone; for he had with him something that was part of his own being, namely his Reason. For God is rational and Reason existed first with him, and from him extended to all things. That reason is his consciousness of himself. The Greeks call it Logos, which is the term we use for discourse; and our people usually translate it literally as, ‘Discourse was in the beginning with God’.”⁵¹

“The Son is not other than the Father by separation from him but by difference of functions, nor by division but by distinction: for the Father and the Son are not identical but distinct in degree. For the Father is the whole substance [of

⁴⁹ op.cit., p. 232.

⁵⁰ Baus, Karl: *Handbook of Church History*, Vol. I: *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*; ed. Hubert Jedin & John Dolan, Burns Oates, pp. 248-252 [cf. *Adv.Prax.* 27; 3; 7; 9, 13]

⁵¹ *Adversus Praxeam*, 5-7.

deity], while the Son is derivative and a portion of the whole. He himself confesses, ‘the Father is greater than I am’ [*Jo 14, 28*]. And in the psalm it is sung he has been subordinated by the Father ‘a little on this side of the Angels’ [*ps.viii.5*]. So the Father is other than the Son, as being greater, as he who begets is other than the begotten, the sender than the sent, the creator than the agent of creation” (*ibid. 9*)

“Thenceforward God willed to create, and created, through the Word, with Christ as his assistant and minister.” (*ibid. 12*)⁵²

Bettenson points out that revelations and theophanies in the Old Testament, and all God’s dealings in judgment, were mediated by the Son:

“For it was the Son who descended from time to time to have converse with men, from Adam to the patriarchs and prophets; in vision” in dream, ‘in a looking glass, in an enigma’ [1 Cor 13, 12] always preparing from the beginning that course which he was to follow to the end.”⁵³

“For Tertullian, the deepest mystery of Christianity is expressed in the word monarchia, namely that God has a Son. This Son exercises the whole power of the one God in the world and for this period of world-time. Tertullian sees the monarchia first of all within the framework of the economic Trinity. God the Father remains ruler and he retains the sovereignty. But the administration of the rule is handed over to the Son. The monarchia is further guaranteed by the inner unity in substance of Father, Son (and Spirit).”⁵⁴

‘Spirit’ in Tertullian may mean the Third Person, or the divinity common to the whole Trinity, since ‘God is Spirit’.

“We are sure that Christ always spoke in the prophets, as Spirit of the Creator ... who from the beginning was heard and seen in the Father’s name, as the Father’s representative ... the Word and Spirit, that is the Christ of the Creator ... the Son and Spirit and substance of the Creator.”⁵⁵

“Thus as the Word of God is not God himself, whose Word he is, so also the Spirit, though called God, is not God himself, whose Spirit he is. Nothing is identical with its possessor. Clearly when something is ‘from someone’, and so is his, as coming from him, it can be something of the same quality as its source and possessor. Therefore the Spirit of God is God, and God’s word is God, as coming from God, but it is not identical with God from whom he is.”⁵⁶

“But those whose duty is to baptize know that baptism is not to be bestowed rashly ... And so it is more salutary to delay baptism according to the state and character of each person; but especially in the case of infants. For why is it necessary for sponsors to be involved in danger, who may fail to fulfill their

⁵² ed. Bettenson: *The Early Christian fathers*, p. 121.

⁵³ ed. Bettenson: *op.cit.*, p. 121.

⁵⁴ Grillmeier A.: *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. I; Mowbrays London, 1975, p. 119.

⁵⁵ ed. Bettenson: p. 131 [*from Adversus Marcionem*, iii. 6]

⁵⁶ ed. Bettenson: *op.cit.*, p. 137 [*Adversus Praxean 26*]

promises though mortality and may be disappointed by the development of a bad character [in the child]? The Lord indeed says, 'Forbid them not to come to me'. [Mk. 9. 39] 'Let them come', then, when they are growing up; let them come if they are learning, if they are being taught whither they are coming; let them become Christians when they are able to know Christ."⁵⁷

Clement of Alexandria – (about 150 – 211/216)

The special centre of Christological reflection in the Greek-speaking world of the third century is Alexandria, which maintained its leading role for a long time. Clement of Alexandria and Origen were its principal teachers and authors.

Clement, born of pagan parents about the year 160, was probably a native of Athens. He travelled to Italy, Syria, Palestine to the masters of Christianity and came to Egypt about 180, where he "found rest" with the eminent, teacher St. Pantaenus + - 200. He was led to Christianity while studying the works of the classical authors and the traditions of the various schools of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt. Pantaenus was the first known teacher of the famous "*Didascalía*", the 'school of oral teaching' which he directed for a long time. After the death of Pantaenus, Clement became the leader of the Catechetical school. Origen was one of his disciples there. His teaching came to an end in 202-203 at the beginning of the persecution of Septimus Severus, which necessitated the closing of the school. Clement then withdrew to Cappadocia and was with his former pupil Bishop Alexander of Cappadocia.

A person of prodigious learning, Clement was "an educator, a marvellous awakener of souls". He was a moral teacher; his three books on the "Tutor" present Jesus as the educator of souls, kind and firm, good and just. Clement was deeply interested in the search among the Philosophers in his teaching mission. He was a pioneer in the understanding of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, of reason and faith. The official School of Alexandria, which was most important at the time was influenced by his approach. The teachers like Clement and Origen, its real founder, were much concerned and influenced by the debate with Gnosticism.⁵⁸

He too emphasized the term "logos". The basic principle of his Christology remains that of Irenaeus. All personal manifestations of the Father take place through the Logos.

"It is through the Word who proceeds from him that the unknown can be known"⁵⁹

"The authentic guides of mankind are the ancient philosophers, who, truly inspired by God, acted upon by the Logos, have taught the nations divine truth".

⁵⁷ ed. Bettenson: op.cit. p. 145-146 [*De Baptismo*, 18]

⁵⁸ F. Cayre: *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*. Desclee, Paris. 1935, Vol. 1. p. 178.

⁵⁹ *Strom.*, V. 12, p. 15 . Dupuis.

Clement mentions along with others:

“The Indian gymnosophists, and other non-Greek philosophers, of whom there are two classes, the Sarmanae and the Brahmanas, ... Some, too, of the Indians obey the precepts of Buddha” [*Strom.*, 1,15]

This amounts to affirming in so many words, together with the presence of the partial Christian truth in Hindu religion, its positive significance in the history of salvation.⁶⁰

Dupuis quotes Augustine *Retractiones* 1, 13, 3 in the same direction:

“The very thing which is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, nor was it absent from the beginning of the human race, until the coming of Christ in the flesh, when the true religion which had already existed began to be called Christian. Therefore, if I have written: ‘this is the religion which exists in our days, the Christian religion’ the meaning is not that it had not existed previously, but that it took the name Christian only later.”⁶¹

Hippolytus of Rome first anti-pope, martyr, (235) saint, a disciple of Irenaeus?

“In that event he shared his master’s zeal for the defence of the Catholic doctrine against various heresies. However, in his violent attack on trinitarian modalism and patri-passionism as it was taught by Noetus, Cloemenes, Epigonus and Sabellius, he went too far and defended a theology of the Logos which had subordinationistic tendencies.” (*p. 164 Vol. 11*)

In his Christological doctrine Hippolytus thought in the terms of Apologists like Justin, Athenogoras, Theophilus and Tertullian. He defines the relation of the Logos to the father in a *subordinationist way as they did*. Moreover his subordinationism is worse than their’s. He not only distinguishes between the Word internal and immanent in God and the Word emitted or uttered by God as Theophilus did, he describes the generation of the Word as progressive development in three periods and teaches that the Logos appeared as a person only later, at a time and in the way determined by the Father. (*p. 198-199*)

Novatian His work “On the Trinity” is the first theological treatise of Roman origin to be written in Latin. It influenced Latin terminology and thought to a considerable degree, *una substania... una persona ...*

“Novatian follows in his Trinitarian doctrine the road entered upon by Justin, Theophilus, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and especially Tertullian. Thus he asserts like his predecessors that the Logos was indeed always with the Father, but that he was only sent forth by Him at a definite time for the purpose of creating the world.” (*p. 232*)

⁶⁰ Dupuis, p. 17.

⁶¹ Dupuis. p. 19.

“... the Son was born...He is eternally in the Father; otherwise the Father were not always Father. ... Of necessity, too, the Son must be less than the Father,... he has an origin... He is born of the Father, who alone has no origin... all things were made through him. Novatian tries to take a middle road between the two opposing tendencies of Monarchianism in which Christ is a man given divine power afterwards and patri-passionism in which Christ is a manifestation of the Father. Novatian wants to stress the unity of the Godhead... and hence he repeats the mistake of Theophilus, Hippolytus and Tertullian, making the son subordinate to the Father.” (p. 228)

Novatian mentioning Christ says he has been sent by the Father, sanctified by the Father (*ibid 27 Spck*)... Christ is always the servant of the Father who commands. (p. 229)

Novatian is so afraid of being accused of ditheism that he goes beyond the subordinationism of his predecessors. Logos is only a temporary and passing manifestation of the Father. (p. 229)

As the Son is less than the Father, so the Spirit is less than the Son. Spirit receives his message from Christ. (p. 230)

Origen (+- 185 - +-253)

Born at Alexandria about 185, Origen was the outstanding original scholar and teacher of the early church. He was head of the catechetical school at Alexandria. His father Leonidas, the possessor of a library of rare manuscripts, was martyred in the persecution of Severus in (202 A.D.). “When his father was in prison, Origen wrote to him: “Take heed not to change your mind on our account”⁶² Origen and his pupils too faced similar risks, his patrimony was confiscated by the State, he maintained himself and the family by teaching.

Origen was a person of exemplary character, of encyclopaedic knowledge, and one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen. During the visit to Rome about 211, Origen met, and was influenced by Hippolytus the most renowned theologian of the Roman church. He loved Christianity most ardently, led a life of strict asceticism and interpreted literally the text of *Matthew 19:12*, of giving up marriage for the kingdom of God. At the age of 18 (202 Or 203) Origen was appointed by Demetrius, the new Bishop of Alexandria as head of the catechetical school to succeed Clement who had been obliged to flee during the persecution of the African Septimius Severus (193-211).

He taught and directed the catechetical school during 28 years. His was a successful but somewhat chequered career. He was charged of having received holy orders irregularly and possibly also accused of heterodox teaching. About 230, two friends of his, bishops Theoctistus of Caesarea and Alexander of Jerusalem, ordained him to the priesthood without consulting bishop Demetrius, which was a violation of the canons. At any rate, two synods in 231 and 232 condemned him and Bishop Demetrius of Alexandria deposed him from the priesthood and from his position in the school and banished him from the city.

⁶² Cadiou. Rene: *Origen, His life at Alexandria*; Herder, London; 1944, p. 14.

He went to Caesarea in Palestine, where his deposition was not recognized, and he founded a new theological school. About 232 the Empress Julia Mamaea, who was well disposed towards Christians, summoned him to Antioch to deliver lectures on religion. In Arabia he opposed the Patripassians as erroneous. He was severely tortured during the persecution of Decius about the year 244 (250) and died at Tyre in 253 A.D. at the age of 69, his health broken by these sufferings.^{63; 64}

“Origen was a man of brilliant gifts, of prodigious learning and was by far the most prolific writer of the pre-Nicene period... He is the most influential theologian of the Greek Church and the most important theologian of the entire church before Augustine. His influence on the history of Christian thought and learning in the East cannot be over-estimated. His contemporaries considered him a teacher without equal and posterity for some time concurred in the judgment. On the other hand while he still lived he was charged with many errors and these charges grew in number and vehemence after his death. Finally in 543 the Emperor Justinian condemned him as a heretic as did the Council of Constantinople in 553 and the Church approved the sentence. Later generations judged him less rigorously.”⁶⁵

Origen was an enthusiastic and pious Christian, an ascetic and a mystic, who took his religious obligations seriously and was ready to lay down his life for the faith. He was above all else, a man devoted to the things of the spirit, who used his intelligence to guide himself along the various stages of mysticism. Christian piety, mysticism and monasticism owe much to him.

He developed a teaching of mystical union with Jesus unto martyrdom. In his *Refutation of Celsus*, who criticized the Christians and invited them to obey the emperor, Origen proposes the Christian view of relation to the State: obedience to God is prior to loyalty to the rulers.

“Moreover we are to despise ingratiating ourselves with kings or any other men, not only if their favour is to be won by murders, licentiousness or deeds of cruelty, but even if it involve impiety toward God or any servile expressions of flattery or obsequiousness, which things are unworthy of brave and high principled men who aim at joining with their other virtues, that highest of virtues, patience and fortitude.”⁶⁶

Origen’s literary activity extended over all the fields of ecclesiastical learning.

“Origen was the Church’s most voluminous writer. St. Epiphanius counted six thousand of his works, though Eusebius catalogued only two thousand, and St. Jerome only eight hundred.”⁶⁷

⁶³ cf. Bihlmeyer-Tuchle: *Church History: Vol. I*, Newman Press, Westminster, 1968, p. 186.

⁶⁴ *Quasten*: Vol. II, pp. 37-40.

⁶⁵ Bihlmeyer-Tuchle: *op.cit.*, p. 186.

⁶⁶ *Quasten*: Vol. II. p. 56.

⁶⁷ Ed. Anne Fremantle: *A Treasury of Early Christianity*, A Mentor Book, NY., 1960, p. 67.

Pre-existence of souls

According to Origen there are very many passages in Scripture which can be interpreted only morally (*psychic*) or mystically (*pneumatic*) but not literally or historically (*somatic*). To meet the objection that God is unjust in not creating all creatures equal, Origen drew on Plato and taught *the pre-existence of souls* and their fall before the beginning of time. The present visible world was preceded by a world of equally perfect spirits who abused their free will by turning away from God and were therefore exiled in matter just for this purpose. The purpose of the visible creation is to restrain and purify spirits. The purification will be universal and all fallen spirits, even Satan, will eventually return to God. The material world will then come to an end and the body of man will rise as a pure spirit so that its end will be as its beginning.⁶⁸

Origen applied the principle of the pre-existence of souls as the key to the incarnation.

“One of these souls, the one destined to be the soul of the man Jesus, in every respect a human soul like the rest, was from the beginning attached to the Logos with mystical devotion; it burned with love and desire for justice. All the other souls, by the misguided exercise of their free-will fell away from the Logos, to whom they ought to have adhered; but this unique soul, as a result of its adoring contemplation, became inseparably united with him ... So when it was born from the Blessed Virgin with pure flesh created by the action of the Spirit, Godhead and manhood were inextricably united.”⁶⁹

The life here on earth is less a place of imprisonment than a time of testing and trial.

“Origen also admits, in accordance with the principles he held in common with the Notes of Ammonius, that there is a *transmigration of souls* or a succession of bodies for one and the same soul, but he distinguished it clearly from the metempsychosis of his day. [*cf. de oratione, XXVII, 8*] ... The soul within us was indeed no longer what it had been, but it had the power to become again all that it had been in the beginning. ‘As it is itself when it reflects, so it is in its intelligence when it thinks’ [*P.G., CIV, 80*] The directive part of the soul became, in his hands, the power of contemplating the Good. ... Origen’s researches into Aristotle gave him a vast number of useful definitions and also a new viewpoint which tempered his Platonism, diluted the concentrated dualism of his philosophical environment, and enabled him to reconcile nature and free will. On this title alone he is a worthy disciple of Ammonius, the philosopher who was able to reconcile Plato and Aristotle.”⁷⁰

A Number of Worlds

Influenced by Plato, Origen speaks of a number of worlds before and after this one. Worlds will follow worlds in endless succession.

⁶⁸ Bihlmeyer-Tuchle: op.cit., p. 188.

⁶⁹ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*; A & C Black. London, 1977/1989, p. 153. According to Kelly Origen was the first to use the term ‘*God-man*’ for describing the Incarnate.

⁷⁰ Cadiou, Rene. op.cit, p. 164-165.

“There were ages before our own and there will be others after it. It is not, however, to be supposed that several worlds existed at once, but that, after the end of this present world, others will take their beginning.”⁷¹

Subordinationism

For Origen, God is incomprehensible, one, ingenerate, and known only indirectly at best, by inference from the universe and created order.

“In writing on the Trinity, Origen sees the three persons in a relationship of subordination. The Logos is less than the Father and the Holy Spirit is of lesser rank than the Son. (*De Prin. 1,3,5*) He held however to the divinity of the Logos or the God-Man. Many of his contemporaries too thought likewise.”

Origen thinks that God the Father eternally generates the Word, that is the wisdom of the Father; it is in and through the Word that all others are created.

“If the father comprehends [i.e. holds in his grasp] all, and the Son is included in that ‘all’, then the father comprehends the Son. But someone will raise the question whether the only-begotten Son’s knowledge of the Father is identical with the Father’s self-knowledge, and will demonstrate that the saying ‘The Father who sent me is greater than I’ [*John 10, 29, and 14, 28*] is true in all respects. So that in respect of knowledge the Father is known by himself more fully and clearly and completely than he is known by the Son.”⁷²

“We say that the Son and the Holy Spirit excel all created beings to a degree which admits of no comparison, and are themselves excelled by the Father to the same or even greater degree.”⁷³

A God, not ‘the God’

“... we must sometimes say that ‘God’ means ‘God-in-himself’, thus it is that the Saviour, in his prayer to the Father, says, ‘That they may know thee, the only true God’ [*Jo. 17. 3*]. Everything which, without being ‘God-in-himself’ it deified by participation in his godhead should strictly be called ‘God’, not ‘the God’. The ‘firstborn of all creation’ since he by being ‘with God’ first gathered Godhead to himself, is therefore in every way more honoured than the others besides himself, who are ‘gods’ of whom God is the God, as it is said, ‘God the Lord of gods spoke and called the world’. [*Ps. xlix (50)*], i. For it is through his ministry that they became gods, since he drew divinity from God for them to be deified, and from his kindness generously shared it with them. God, then, is the true God and those who through him are fashioned into gods are copies of the prototype. And, again, the copy which is the archetype of the many copies is the Word which was ‘with God’ who was ‘in the beginning.’⁷⁴

⁷¹ De Principiis ii,i.3; ed. Bettenson: *The Early Christian Fathers*, Oxford paperbacks, 1969, p. 189; Quasten: op.cit., vol. 11, p. 90.

⁷² De Principiis, iv, 35, cf Henry Bettenson: *The Early Christian Fathers*, Oxford Paperbacks, 1969. p. 233.

⁷³ Comm. in Joannem, xii. 25; cf. Bettenson. op.cit. p. 233.

⁷⁴ Comm. in Joannem, ii. 2, cf. Bettenson, p. 234-235.

He presents *Jesus as God, but as a second God*, to stress the distinction between the Father and the Son. William G. Rusch thus presents the teaching of Origen:

“The Son is the first of Gods; he is the archetype and model. His deity is derived from the fountainhead, the Father. The Word is the archetype because he is always with the Father (*Comm. on John 2. 2. 10*). Thus Origen understands that the Word is God by derivation. In spite of the fact that the Word is one with the Father, he stands on a lower level in the hierarchy... Such statements show how Origen thinks of God as being eternally broadened downward by a number of relationships from the fountainhead, the Father, to rational creatures.”⁷⁵

Origen reflects very profoundly on the mystery of God. He posits an hierarchical order in the Trinity and regards the Son and Holy Spirit as inferior to the Father and intermediaries between the Father and creatures. In his commentary on John, Origen writes,

“As for us, who believe the Saviour when He said: ‘the Father, who sent me, is greater than I,’ and who for that reason did not allow that the word ‘good’ should be applied to Himself in its full, true and perfect sense, but attributed it to the Father and gave Him thanks, condemning him who would glorify the Son to excess – we say that the Saviour and the Holy Spirit are without comparison and are very much superior to all things that are made, but also that the Father is even more above them than they are themselves above creatures even the highest.” (*In Joh. 13, 25*)⁷⁶

Such texts indicate that Origen proposed a hierarchical Trinity to safeguard monotheism and the absoluteness transcendence of the one God. Origen often refers to Paul’s words concerning Christ: “the firstborn of all creation” (*Col. 1, 15*)⁷⁷

Origen held that prayer should be only to God ... as Jesus said only God is good ... Jesus himself prayed to the Father and we should not pray to someone who prays to another ... Christ termed himself our brother clearly he wishes that prayers be to the Father and not to him.⁷⁸ Origen remained alone in this theory, which most probably stems from a subordinationist concept of the Logos and an exaggerated monotheism.

Universal Salvation

Origen’s doctrine of *apokatastasis* has an interesting theological speculation on the ultimate salvation of all beings when “God will be all in all”. His is a positive approach to life and God’s goodness. “We think, indeed, that the goodness of God, through his Christ, may recall all his creatures to one end, even his enemies being conquered and subdued (*ps. 109, 1*) ... Stronger than all evils in the soul is the Word, and the healing power that dwells in Him; and this healing He applies, according to

⁷⁵ cf. *The Trinitarian Controversy, Sources of Early Christian Thought series* edited by William G. Rusch, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1980. pp. 14-15.

⁷⁶ *Quasten*: Vol. 11, p. 79.

⁷⁷ Origen: *Contra Celsum*, VI. 47-48 quoted in G.H. Ettliger: *Jesus, Christ and Saviour, Message of the Fathers of the Church*, Michael Glazier. Delaware. 1987, Vol. 2, p. 89.

⁷⁸ *Quasten*: Vol. II, P. 67: Origen 16.1 commenting on 1 Tim, 2.1

the will of God, to every man.” He argues clearly for human freedom as well as for God’s foreknowledge and providence towards all.

Origenism

Such meagre evidence as survives of Greek Trinitarianism in the latter half of the third century testifies to the extent of Origen’s influence. Some theologians gave prominence to his emphasis on the Son’s essential kinship to the Father, others to his subordinationism ... The best known of Origen’s subordinationist strain is his pupil Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria. Pope Dionysius issued a brief which in effect criticized Dionysius of Alexandria without mentioning his name.⁷⁹

The students and disciples of Origen sometimes took his teachings further than he may have wanted too. During the Trinitarian controversy, the Arians frequently appealed to the works of Origen in support of their doctrines.

“Some of the keenest minds, later the three great Cappadocians, continued to esteem Origen and to use the wealth of thought he offered without being blind to the temerity of his speculation.”⁸⁰

Towards the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth Bishops Epiphanius (+ 403) and Theophilus of Alexandria and others fathered the future ‘theological deviations’ on Origen and wanted a prohibition of the reading of his works.

It is doubted whether Origen taught subordinationism. Jerome accuses him of it, while Gregory the Thaumaturgos and Athanasius clear him of all suspicion. (*p.* 77)

An Opening to Other Religions?

Origen’s views are interestingly close to some Hindu and Buddhist teachings. The idea of many successive worlds can relate to the concept of many yuga in the history of the universe that is found in some Indian philosophical schools. We are of course here in a field in which there may be no verifiable evidence. But so are we in the hypothesis of creation and the beginning of the human race with Adam and Eve as foreparents of all. The consideration of these concepts can help relativise our presuppositions and hypotheses on such matters as the origin and destiny of the universe and of the human race.

The theory of the pre-existence of souls, linked to Platonic philosophy, can find a point of contact in the Hindu-Buddhist concept of the transmigration or re-incarnation of living beings. Origen would seem not to hold the view that human souls would be re-embodied in irrational animals; though he mentions this for the sake of discussion as held by others. These latter beliefs are linked to the concept of dependent causality of cause and effect. One’s present position in life is said to be due to one’s previous existences and the karmic effect of the good and evil accumulated through them. The present life and future lives are said to be processes of purification till ultimately all are liberated in the state of Nirvana or Moksha.

⁷⁹ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*; A & C Black. London, 1977/1989, p.133-136.

⁸⁰ Bhilmeyer-Tuchle: *op.cit.* p. 263.

Thus there is a positive concept of universal salvation (*apokatastasis*) which is more in keeping with the idea of a good and loving God who does not want anyone to be condemned to eternal punishment.

“The Son in his kindness generously imparted deification to others ... who are transformed through him into Gods, as images of the prototype ... the Word is the acetype of the many images.”⁸¹

Origen proposes an alternative approach to the basic problems of understanding life and its mysteries which was long regarded as not unorthodox within the churches. This would have given an overall orientation different from that which followed the Augustinian synthesis of original sin, and the 13th century Thomistic views following on the Augustinian and Aristotelian impact on Christian theology.

Origen’s originality could be reflected on as allowing us more axes of freedom in the use of our theological imagination and for finding common meeting grounds in inter-religious dialogue. Are not these as worthy of attention as are the other hypotheses (considered orthodox) that have led to irremediable divisions and centennial conflicts? If Origen’s views had been kept alive as an alternative hypothesis, the relationship between Christianity and Islam would have been quite different. This would have influenced the church’s concept of mission and attitude towards other peoples and cultures. The history of the Americas would have been different in so far as the Europeans would not have had an intolerance of others at the heart of their missionary enterprise.

The way Origen and his teachings were treated by the Church over several centuries is also revealing. It shows how the powerful in subsequent generations can condemn and obliterate the memory of such eminent personalities that have been among the highest beacons of light during centuries for vast sections of the church.

Paul of Samosata - (*3rd Century*) was attributed the view that the ‘Logos’ was indwelling in a man (with a body and soul). Christ had not ‘come down from heaven’ but was “from below”, a “mere man”. He was therefore in no way different from human nature in general. Paul of Samosata was a fore-runner of Arianism.⁸²

Sabellius held a quite contrary view that God the Father himself was in Christ in the flesh ... Hence God himself suffered in Christ – patripassianism. He was the head of the *Monarchian* Party in Rome in 217, and was excluded from the church by Pope Callixtus.

This was the problem of the Logos/sarx relationship. – that of the Word of God and of the human body, the flesh. Some would deny a human soul in Christ – the Logos or divine will performing the function of the soul. Some others would affirm a human will to the extent of questioning the presence of a divine will animating the human body of Christ.

⁸¹ Commentarium in Joannem, ii.2, in *The early Christian Fathers*, ed. Bettenson, p. 199.

⁸² A. Grillmeier: *op.cit.* p. 163; 183

The dogma of the Church evolved between these two extremes – as in the Nicene Council – to two natures in one person.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, Historian. (c. 260-339),

Born in the early 260s lived up to about 340. He saw the great transformation that took place in Christianity and the Empire during the reign of Constantine. He reflects Origen in his most subordinationist mood, and his overriding interest is cosmological rather than soteriological. Eusebius, while freely recognizing that the Son exists before all ages, consistently refuses to concede that he is co-eternal with the Father. For him the father pre-exists the Son.

“The unity of the Son with the Father, on his exegesis of *John 10, 30*, consists simply in his sharing an identical glory; and he is not afraid to add that the saints also can enjoy precisely the same kind of fellowship with the Father”⁸³

In the foreground of the thought of the historian and theologian Eusebius we seem to find a reference to the origenist tradition, which he understands to be the tradition of the church ... The problem which the confession of the divinity of Christ (and of the Holy Spirit) poses for Christian monotheism is therefore resolved by Eusebius in terms of ante-Nicene, Origenist subordinationism. But in contrast to Origen, this subordinationism is made more acute as a result of certain important nuances ... Thus this essential subordination is expressed in the order of sovereignty, which makes the Son the servant and living organ and minister of the father in the service of man. It can be seen essentially in the designation of the Son as ‘servant of God’.⁸⁴

The Christological position of Eusebius was different from that of Arius and of his opponents.

“He thought in terms of one transcendent Supreme God, who mediated himself to the world through the Logos. Perhaps somewhat naively, he thought of this being as Divine, but not in the same ultimate sense as the God from whom he derives his being, besides the ultimate source of all things was not divided or reduced by the generation of the Logos, who was the ‘perfect creation of a Perfect Creator’.”

“There is a fundamental contradiction between his monotheism and his Christology. ‘Even the only begotten of God and the first born of the whole world, the beginning of all commands us to believe his Father alone true God, and to worship only him.’ Yet the Logos is also to receive worship, for he is God’s vice gerent, his image and his instrument, a second Lord.”⁸⁵

“Like Origen, Eusebius cast the Logos in this mediatorial role: God is the one who utterly transcends the Many, the Logos is both One and Many, being the image of God and at the same time pervading all things. He is the Neo-Platonic World-Soul, the instrument through which God created and sustains the world,

⁸³ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 226.

⁸⁴ Aloys Grillmeier: *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. I, pp. 167 ff; p. 182.

⁸⁵ Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, SCM Press, London, 1983, p. 17.

and the mediator who reveals and displays providential love in his direction of the world and its history. Thus the Logos could in no sense be identified with God, to admit that he was ‘of one substance with the Father’ was to undermine both God’s uniqueness and the mediatory position of the Logos ... The work of Christ was that of teacher and revealer pointing the way to the true religion and overcoming ignorance and idolatry. It is true that Eusebius uses and interprets the imagery of sacrifice to explain Christ’s death, which he sees as a triumph over the opposing powers of evil.” ...

“Eusebius’ position was far from unreasonable within the terms of his own understanding of Christian salvation, just as it was acceptable within the terms of contemporary thought. It simply belonged to third-century Neoplatonism, to the world which produced Origen and Porphyry, to a “Eusebius dislikes ‘substance’ theology, because of the danger of it being understood in a materialist sense. His analogies concentrate on the fragrance emanating from a object, or a ray of light issuing from its source; and even these he described as earthly images, illustrations far transcended by theology which is not connected with anything physical. The Son was begotten unspeakably and unthinkably. He certainly accepted that the Logos was derived from the Father in a unique sense, though insisting that the manner of it surpasses human understanding. So, in spite of his distrust of the terminology produced, Eusebius was prepared to be accommodating, if only others would make concessions too.”⁸⁶

At the Council of Nicaea, Bishop Eusebius after long delay subscribed to the formula ‘begotten of the substance of the Father.’

“Before and after Nicaea he completely avoids homoousion, *although he too had subscribed to it. According to him the Son does not have the same substance as the Father, although he is ‘begotten’.*”⁸⁷

In his Christology, Eusebius explains the incarnation as the supreme instance among the theophanies of the Logos.

“In visible form Christ could become the teacher of knowledge of God and the victor over death and the devil in a special way. In the incarnate Christ there is a new beginning of this Lordship, and the direct guidance of men by the Logos is resumed.”⁸⁸

Eusebius predominantly interprets the coming of Christ in terms of the function of the Logos as revealer, though other themes of soteriology are not lacking. “The essential basis of Eusebius’ doctrine of the incarnation is thus that the Logos-Son, understood in subordinationist terms, dwells in the flesh, taken form the Virgin, in the place of a human soul.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Frances Young: op.cit., p. 20.

⁸⁷ Aloys Grillmeier op.cit., p. 174.

⁸⁸ Grillmeier: op.cit., p. 178.

⁸⁹ Grillmeier: op.cit., p. 182.

Arius (born c. 256-260 – died 336).

A native of Libya (like Sabellius) was a priest of Alexandria. He was commissioned to expound the scriptures. He was a disciple of Lucian of Antioch.⁹⁰ He wished to safeguard the uniqueness of God. He produced both strong supporters and vigorous opponents among his audience. They both produced dossiers of scripture quotations in support of their point of view, which were influenced by their theological and philosophical premises, especially Platonism.

He took strong objection to the preaching of his bishop Alexander. Arius held that

“only God the Father is eternal and unoriginated. The Logos, the pre-existent Christ is a creature, created out of nothing and had a beginning ... There was a time when the Logos, the Word, was not. *For Arius Jesus is a demigod, neither fully God nor fully man.*⁹¹

He is a Son through whom God created the universe and appointed heir of all things. (*Heb. 1,1-2*). Coupled with Luke’s “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man”, the scriptures seem to indicate that Jesus was a man who gradually perfected his wisdom and godliness and achieved adoption as God’s son. He could therefore change; and hence was not the absolute God. He was made perfect through suffering and spiritual development. He was an example to be followed. Hence, his saving work.

Thus the Arian position had significance both for the identity of Jesus and his salvific role as a model of holiness.⁹² Arius *claimed that he was setting out the faith of his forefathers*. He was in the line of the subordinationist tendency shown by bishop Dionysius of Alexandria around 260 in his polemic against the Sabellians of Cyrenicia.

“To many of his own contemporaries he certainly did not appear in the same light as he did in retrospect; for it is quite clear that at first, many found his position more in line with traditional Christianity than that of his opponents”. “Arius’ doctrine of God had affinities with Athenogoras and Clement, his subordinationism belongs to the Origenist tradition, his theological method is anticipated in Dionysius of Alexandria, and his biblical literalism may be connected with bishop Peter ... Arius was guilty not so much of demoting the Son as exalting the Father ... Arius’ main concern was probably to avoid attributing physical processes’ like emanation or generation to God, a traditional point developed earlier against the Gnostics. Arius therefore expressed coherently what many Christians had long since assumed.” (p. 64)

The views of Arius were based on scriptural texts such as those which attributed human weakness and progress to the Son of God (*John 14:28*) ‘My Father is greater than I’. The issues were not trinitarian or philosophical but soteriological, ethical and

⁹⁰ I. Johannes: *Patrology, Vol. II; Christian Classics*, Westminster; 1950/1990, p. 143.

⁹¹ William G. Rusch: *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁹² Linwood Urban: *A Short History of Christian Thought*, O.U.P., Oxford, 1986, pp. 62 ff.

Christological. Christ, as presented by Arius, was more inspiring for human effort than the one in which the Son of God was not subject to human weaknesses.

Christology; Subordinationism

The Trinitarian doctrine of Arius was, naturally, related to his Christology. He was faced with the problem of how the Logos, if divine in the same way as the Father, could relate to a human body. For a divine Logos the entry of the Word into a substantial conjunction with the flesh was inconceivable. “And so the Arians say to their Nicene opponents, how dare you say that the Logos shares in the Father’s existence, if he had a body so as to experience all these?”⁹³ A connected problem, in the perspective of the Trinity, was monotheism and the uniqueness of God. These had also soteriological implications. His resolution of the issues was through subordinationism in which the Father alone is eternal, uncreated and unbegotten.

“Indeed the popularity of his biblical solution to the tension between monotheism and faith in Christ is beyond dispute; and there is no reason to doubt Arius’ sincerity or genuine Christian intention ... It is not impossible that he was simply a die-hard conservative who was not afraid to challenge what he considered the innovations of his bishop, and who attracted a following merely on the grounds that he voiced what so many other felt about dangerous theological developments. Those who opposed Arianism found it difficult to find a formula which would effectively exclude his line of interpretation, simply because he had a serious *claim to be voicing tradition*; he genuinely believed he was setting forth ‘our faith from our forefathers’. Like Eusebius he was concerned about monotheism and morality. If this estimate is correct, the Arius was not himself the arch-heretic of tradition, not even much of an enquirer, rather he was a reactionary, a rather literal-minded conservative who appealed to scripture and tradition as the basis of his faith.”⁹⁴

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria

The views of Arius were opposed strongly by Athanasius (295-373), bishop of Alexandria for 45 years. He succeeded Alexander as Bishop of Alexandria in 328, when he was in his thirties. He devoted his life to combatting a teaching that he saw as a deadly heresy, and experienced a series of victories and defeats, depending on whether the goodwill of the political powers favoured Arius or himself.

He was deposed in 335 at the scarcely impartial Synod of Tyre on charges of murder and black magic. During his forty five years as Bishop, he had only two extended periods of relatively peaceful residence in his seat, from 346 to 356 and the last seven years of his life. He spent seventeen and a half years of his episcopate in exile, undergoing five successive periods of exile under four emperors. His fortunes depended somewhat on the favour of the successive emperors, whose theologies ranged from anti-Arianism to pro-Arianism.⁹⁵

⁹³ Aloys Grillmeier: op.cit., p. 246.

⁹⁴ Frances Young: *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, SCM Press, London, 1983. pp. 58-64.

⁹⁵ Ettliger: op.cit., p. 92.

The troubled career of Athanasius is typical of a whole era:

Athanasius: Born in 295

at the Council of Nicaea as Alexander's deacon in 325

Consecrated bishop of Alexandria, 8 June 328

1st exile: under Constantine, 11 July 335 – 22 November 337,
lived at Treves

2nd exile: under Constantius, 16 April 339 – 21 October 346,
lived in Rome

3rd exile: under the same, 9 February 356 – 21 February 362;
in the Egyptian desert

4th exile: under Julian, 24th October 362 – 5 Sept 363;
in the Egyptian desert

5th exile: under Valens, 5 October 365 – 31 Jan 366;
in the Egyptian desert
died 2 May 373.⁹⁶

For Athanasius, with his strongly soteriological interest, Jesus Christ can be saviour only if he is truly God and truly man; for salvation of the fallen human race can be only from God, and *nothing can be saved that is not assumed by God*. Athanasius holds that humans had fallen from the exalted position in which God had placed them, due to their freewill, irrationality and selfishness. The result of sin was a corruption of nature and a loss of grace, which only the re-creating power of the Logos could restore. The Logos taking human form, paid the debt to God's honour, by his death. God resurrected the Logos and reconciled humanity with God. Thus the 'divine dilemma' of human perdition was resolved.

Creation and re-creation were both performed by the same Logos of God. Re-creation is Athanasius' main understanding of salvation in Christ. *He became man that we might become God*. Only God could save us; hence the Logos had to be God – of the same substance as the Father. True revelation of God is not possible if the Logos was not God. Salvation in Christ thus understood in terms of revelation and re-creation was the faith that Athanasius was prepared to defend to the uttermost.

“The Stoics had conceived of the Logos as the soul of the universe, and Athanasius borrows this idea, with the difference that for him the Logos is of course personal. On his view the Logos is the animating, governing principle of the cosmos, and the rational soul of man, which fulfills an identical role in relation to its body, is a close copy of Him, in fact a Logos in miniature. Christ's human nature was, as it were, a part of the vast body of the cosmos, and there was no incongruity in the Logos. Who animates the whole, animating this special portion of it. The paradox was rather that, while present in the body of the Incarnate, animating and moving it. He was simultaneously present everywhere else in the universe, vivifying and directing it with His life-giving power.”

⁹⁶ Danielou and Marrou: op.cit., pp. 262-263.

Athanasius too returns constantly to scripture texts to prove his thesis: ‘no one knows the father except the Son’. ‘I and the Father are one’; also *Heb 1.3* where Christ is described as the radiance of God’s glory. Concerning the doubts, agony and ignorance of Jesus, Athanasius suggests

“that there was a parallel and progressive development of His body and disclosure of His deity. When he is reported to have feigned ignorance, it was a case of feigned, not genuine, ignorance. Being Word He knew all things; but since he had become flesh, and flesh is naturally ignorant, it was fitting that he should make a show of ignorance.”

The anthropology of Athanasius, was thoroughly Platonic, and treated the soul as having no necessary connection with the body; hence it was perfectly consistent with the hypothesis that the Logos took the place of the human rational soul. He “at least tends not just to conceal the soul of Christ, but also exclude it altogether ... He never made an explicit denial of the soul of Christ and wrote no sentence suggesting the sense which Apollinarius has given it.”⁹⁷ All the same he was “the chairman of the Synod of Alexandria (362) which agreed that ‘the saviour did not have a body lacking soul, sensibility or intelligence’.”⁹⁸

Athanasius’s Christology, therefore, just as much as that of the Arians, conformed to the Word-flesh scheme; he differed from them only in his estimate of the status of the Word. For Arius the Logos is a creature. The debate was also concerning the way in which we are sons of God. For Athanasius Christ is the Son of God as of the same nature; humans are sons of God by grace and appointment through the Logos.

“John 1.14 became the fundamental Christological statement for Athanasius ... Thus a remark which Athanasius makes in his main work against the Arians is to be regarded as his central Christological formula: ‘(The Word) became man and did not come into a man’. It should be regarded as the classic formulation of the theology of the ‘Logos-flesh’ type as opposed to the Christology of the ‘Logos-man’ type.”⁹⁹

Athanasius does not deny a human soul in Christ; he merely rejects the adoptionism of Paul of Samosata without clarifying his formula in the direction of the explicit Logos-Sarx christology of Apollinarius and the monophysistically inclined group as at Chalcedon. He emphasized,

“the ‘unity of subject’ in Christ. The Logos is the all dominating and sole principle of all existence and therefore subject of all statements about Christ ... The human element is governed by the Logos, and the Lord is ‘flesh-bearing Logos’, but not ‘God bearing-man’ ... This is an old Christian legacy, which we were able to establish as early as Ignatius of Antioch and his source, *John 1.14*.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Danielou and Marrou: op.cit., pp. 262-263.

⁹⁸ William M Thompson: *The Jesus Debate*. Paulist Press, NY., 1985, p. 325; and Kelly, op.cit., p. 288.

⁹⁹ Grillmeier: Vol. I, p. 326-327.

¹⁰⁰ Grillmeier: Vol. I, p. 328.

Athanasius was the champion of what became orthodoxy in the subsequent centuries. His arguments have been crucial for the development of Christian theology. Later he became known as the “Father of Orthodoxy”; the orthodox tradition owes an enormous debt to his theological writings.¹⁰¹

The Council of Nicaea, 325

By this time Christianity had been recognized as the religion of the Empire. These debates were causing division in the church and hence in the empire. **Constantine** therefore summoned a general Council which met at Nicaea with about 300 bishops to settle the dispute. More than hundred of the Bishops came from Asia Minor, less than twenty from Palestine and Egypt. The Latin West was hardly represented. Hosius of Cordova was present from the imperial court and had much influence on the council. Pope Sylvester sent two legates in his place.

The position attributed to Arius was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Jesus was proclaimed “... the one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God ... from the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, ... true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father”. The Divine in Jesus is thus said to be the truly Divine One, equal to the Father. It condemned anyone holding the Arian belief that there was a time when the Logos was not. This excluded the Arian position. Arians opposed the text “true God from true God” as it could indicate a corporeality of God.

According to William G. Rusch ‘ousia’ and ‘homoousios’

“both were un scriptural and employed with some reluctance. The latter phrase was placed in the creed by the emperor Constantine, probably with Hosius’s (his theological advisor) guidance”. One of the assets of the ‘*homoousios*’ – and this led to its acceptance – was that different groups were able to interpret it in ways compatible with their own theology. As far as Constantine was concerned, this was agreeable. Constantine was amenable to tolerating a variety of groups, as long as they accepted his creed and each other.”¹⁰² The emperor obliged the bishops to sign the formula agreed on by the Council.

“By thus inserting into the profession of faith a new term which originated no longer in scripture but in man’s reason, the Council of Nicaea recognized as fruitful the purely theological attempt at elucidating revelation, and used its authority to sanction the progress made in rendering explicit the contents of faith.” The emperor supported the decision with the whole weight of his authority, he exiled the bishops and Arius who did not subscribe to the ‘*consubstantial*’.¹⁰³

Emperor and Doctrines

According to Eusebius of Caesarea; the church historian, in his “*Vita Constantini*” (*VC*), the emperor had a decisive say at the council. “According to the VC, Constantine guides the debate, reconciles opponents, conciliates some, wins over others urges all towards unanimity ... The VC makes Constantine the head of the

¹⁰¹ Frances Young: op.cit., pp. 65-83.

¹⁰² Rusch: op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁰³ cf. Danielou and Marrou: op.cit., pp. 252-253.

Council... The emperor plays the chief role at the council .. The bishops remain in the background, although Constantine looks on them as ‘Fathers and prophets’.

“*VC* 1,44 also mentions in connection with the Synod of Arles how Constantine deals with bishops: he praised those who agreed with the better view ... but the mischief-makers he put behind him with repulsion”¹⁰⁴

The imperial power, unifying under its authority the whole Roman world, looked like an earthly image of the divine monarchy. The emperor felt responsible before heaven for the salvation of his subjects, no longer only for their temporal welfare. The emperor was not content with merely facilitating the holding of councils and lending his authority for carrying out their decisions. He took the initiative in summoning councils proposed issues for decisions, and helped to decide them by establishing a majority or unanimity.

“He had to make up his own mind about the strictly ecclesiastical problems at stake, and this led him to play a part in their elaboration – often a disastrous part.”¹⁰⁵

“We are dealing with what we have called the bi-polar structure of Christian society. On the one hand the bishops discussed and the councils tried to define, but on the other hand there was the Emperor, who intervened to support one group, to exile or depose others. When there was a new Emperor, or when the Emperor changed his mind the life of the Church was immediately affected.”¹⁰⁶

The impact of Constantine and his personal interpretation of the Nicene creed is seen in his receiving of Arians into fellowship of the church at the *Synod of Jerusalem in 335 A.D.* The Synod wrote a letter to the Bishops of Egypt who, led by Athanasius, refused to recognize this restoration. “In their letter they pointed out that the emperor Constantine had admonished them in a personal letter to accept the friends of Arius again, ‘who for a long time had been kept outside the church by an immoral envy’. Now the emperor himself is testifying to the orthodoxy of these men in his letter, as he has received their confession of faith Consequently the bishops of Egypt must also now act, as the faith made known by Arius and his friends clearly preserves the apostolic tradition accepted by all.”¹⁰⁷

Constantine’s son, Constantius, who ruled as sole emperor from 350-361, leaned towards Arianism. There was a short lived pagan reaction under Julian (361-363). Valentinian (364-375) was pro-Nicaean, but tolerant.

In the East the brother of Constantius, Valens (364-378), was in favour of a modified Arianism as defined at Constantinople in 360. He was against the partisans of Nicaea also. Hence there was once again a campaign of intimidation, deposition and exile of bishops, including Athanasius. Valens died in May 378 in the disaster of Adrianople vainly trying to stem the Gothic invasion.

¹⁰⁴ A. Grillmeier: *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Vol. 1, pp. 253 - 253-264.

¹⁰⁵ Jean Danielou and Henri Marrou: *The Christian Centuries. Vol I – the First Six Hundred Years*, McGraw-Hill, NY, 1964, p. 242.

¹⁰⁶ *op.cit.*, p. 256.

¹⁰⁷ A. Grillmeier, Vol. 1. p. 253.

The successor of Valens in the East, Spanish-born Theodosius, was a convinced Nicæan. He changed the direction of religious policy. He enforced on his subjects Catholic orthodoxy with the full weight of his authority. Theodosius summoned the second ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381 to re-establish orthodoxy.

Thus the power of the emperors was very much part of the process of determining doctrines and the fortune or fate of bishops according to whether they agreed or disagreed with the dominant imperial view.

For at least another 125 years after the Council of Nicæa there were controversies concerning the understanding of the extent of the divinity in Jesus and the nature of the presence of the divine and the human in him. These issues had to be settled from scriptural evidence; but no clear answers could be deduced from them. The different views proposed all claimed scriptural support.

A Reflection

The different formulations concerning the Trinity and the nature of the relationship of the human and divine in Jesus show how complex the issues were. Jesus, as reported in the scriptures, was not at all clear on these intricate philosophical and theological issues. The New testament is capable of different interpretations, as these centuries of debate indicate.

The debates were concerning issues such as the nature of the divinity, the Trinity, [*the origin and inter-relations within the Trinity: persons, their generation, eternal, creation, begetting?*]; the christological issues: how is Jesus God-man; Word-flesh; Word-man; the body-soul relationship in Jesus; his intellect and will; soteriology, what is redemption: from what to what? by whom?

To all these and many more subtle and indeed truly mysterious questions the church evolved responses based on the scriptures, the prevailing philosophies, anthropology, theological reflection, authority patterns, popular religiosity and theological imagination. They became part and parcel of the accepted faith of Christians. They were enshrined in the liturgy and recited by the faithful regularly every Sunday throughout the Christian world, and that, till recently, in the Catholic Church in mysterious Latin.

As William Thompson comments “under the pressure of the disputes emerging in the Hellenistic world, the Nicene theologians attempted to remain true to the biblical heritage. They essentially transposed into Hellenistic terms the Christian belief in the dialogical Divine One of Jesus. We might summarize Nicæa’s intuition in this way: precisely because the Divine is outgoing and dialogical, and not immune from humanity, this holy mystery could be fully present in the man Jesus. This was not a wholesale rejection of Hellenism. Both Christianity and Hellenism shared a common belief in a Holy Mystery. It was a creative adaptation of Hellenism, a ‘Christifying’ of it, so to speak.

There was also a profound soteriological dimension to the Nicene settlement. For it was the divine outpouring into the Jesus event which undergirded the belief that the Divine had truly embraced humanity in Jesus and liberated it from evil and sin.

This was also a “Christifying” of Hellenistic forms of soteriology: salvation becomes, not flight from the world into a spiritual sphere of immutability, but a healing of the world, a world renewal.¹⁰⁸

We could also say that this was a hellenizing of the way in which Jesus and the mystery of the Divine was interpreted. Acting together with the Roman legality and power it was a europeanising of christian theology. The european mode of logic with its tendency to think in terms of the exclusivistic principle of contradiction became normative for doing christian theology. Thus we see the trend to condemn, anathematize, exclude, exile and even kill or exterminate those who did not accept these particular formulations of dogma, which were regarded as absolutes of faith.

Ultimately what is done is to give an explanation of the unknowable, ineffable divine in human terms taken from a particular language, philosophy and culture, in a given historical situation, under the pressure of conflicting parties, political interests and personal rivalries, including those of princes, princesses and ecclesiastics. An understandable human phenomenon, such decisions may even be deemed necessary for a political empire in which faith is important for legitimation of power and the unity of the realm.

They were issues that were openly debated in earlier times when the church was not the dominant religion and ideology of the empire. Interestingly there was more freedom in the theology of the church in the first few centuries when the church was under persecution and sided with the oppressed rather than with the rulers. With the so called conversion of the Roman empire to Christianity there was a corresponding conversion of the church to the values of the empire; these latter included a compromise with Caesar, Mammon, and Mars the God of power and war. Theology became one of domination, and has remained so except in so far as recent church renewal and theologies of liberation have motivated Christians to opt for the poor, the oppressed and for justice.

With the ecumenical councils such as those of Nicene, Ephesus and Chalcedon, authority became the determinant and criterion of Christian orthodoxy. It was this attitude which impeded the church rulers from appreciating human freedom and the right of legitimate dissent in the church, especially in things over which we do not have absolute certainty. Over the centuries the church authorities were instrumental or involved in the suppression of the efforts as of Galileo regarding science, or of numerous reformers of the church such as Savonarola and Joan of Arc who were burnt at the stake.

The infamous Inquisition was thus set up by Pope Sixtus IV in 1478 at the request of Ferdinand and Isabella in order to preserve religious unity and doctrinal orthodoxy within their realm. “It initially considered as its special subjects Jews and Muslims who had submitted to Baptism in order to remain in Spain, but later broadened its aim to include anyone suspected of heresy.” The “Supreme Court of the Inquisition” became an agency of both Church and kingdom to protect Spain from

¹⁰⁸ William M Thompson: *The Jesus Debate*, Paulist Press, NY., 1985, pp. 307-308.

outside threats. ...” It was indeed guilty of brutality and injustices, especially against Jews, ... It was also functional in Spain’s New World colonies”.¹⁰⁹

When such decisions become the ruling orthodoxy and when they legitimise political power, social inequality, male domination, cultural imperialism and religious exclusivity, there could be a serious distortion of the message of Jesus himself. It could be worse if they are enforced by the political and ecclesiastical authorities with moral and physical sanctions, as if these dogmas were directly revealed by God to the popes, patriarchs, bishops and emperors and empresses and their respective theologians. In fact these dogmatic elaborations have led to divisions among the churches for centuries; divisions which are yet unresolved as between the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

These doctrines led to even worse consequences in inter-religious relations. With such interpretations of the Trinity and of the Incarnation there could be no understanding between Christianity and Judaism, between Christianity and Islam, and between Christianity and other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism as well as the cosmic religions of the peoples of the future colonial empires of Europeans in Asia, Africa, Americas and Oceania.

The centuries of Christian - Islamic wars were buttressed, if not motivated, by such theological claims that gave each side the conviction that they were engaged in a holy war for the cause of God. The inter-religious history of the human race during the past 1500 years has been written in blood, in some measure due, to the intolerant exclusivity of these dogmas which were deeply (and proudly) held and vigorously propagated by the dominant political, commercial, economic and military powers from Europe.

Humanity has paid a very high price in terms of prejudice, hatred, war, and the extermination of peoples and civilizations due to the religious and military power of those who claimed to be the only legitimate disciples and interpreters Jesus, the prophet of justice and the prince of peace whose message is of God’s love. The millennial consequences of this theology indicate to us the nature and extent of the de-routeing of Christian theology.

It was only as a consequence of the interminable wars of religion accompanying the Protestant Reformation that the principle of religious liberty began to be affirmed in Europe. Then different rulers of states supported conflicting Christian denominations. As one historian remarks religious liberty is the residuary legatee of ecclesiastical animosities. The damage done by the distortion of the message of Jesus due to the Constantinian alliance of church and state began to be gradually overcome only when there was more than one Christian church in Western Europe and several political rulers instead of one dominant Caesar or emperor.

Even up to the present time Christians have not yet analysed adequately the very serious deviations that have thus entered into the content of theology that passes for faith. A much deeper purification is required for God, revealed as love by Jesus, to be

¹⁰⁹ Catholic Encyclopedia, *Our Sunday Visitor*, Inc., Indians, 1991, p. 512.

liberated from the militant traditional Christian theology, especially of Western churches.

If Christian theology had been elaborated in terms of the philosophies of other people, as of Arabia, India or China the belief of the followers of Jesus would have been expressed differently, perhaps in a more tolerant and open manner. There would have been other ways of understanding the manifestations of the divine as theophanies or 'avatars', other searches of the relationship between God and the universe, different expressions of the relationships within the divinity as the 'trimurthi' of Hinduism, other soteriologies that would be closer to the perceptions of Origen with an optimistic view of universal salvation through processes of purification, different understandings of the problem of evil and of suffering as in Buddhism.

The issues on, which other perceptions have been excluded and/or on which religious wars have been waged by Christians are ones that are of later origin than from Jesus Christ or even from the early Church. In that sense we can claim that the genuine early Christian tradition was much more open, inclusive, tolerant than what became orthodoxy from the 4th century after Councils of Nicaea, 325 and later Chalcedon. We advocate a recognition of that tradition and a re-rooting of Christian theology in it. The pre-Nicene or pre-dogmatic theology (if we may call it so) was much more concerned with human issues including social justice than has been the theology in which the principle concern was the divinity of Jesus as defined at the Nicene Council.

Chapter 4

DE-ROUTEING OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The Human Predicament and Salvation

Another issue which Christian theology had to try to explain is the human condition of aspiration for good and attraction towards evil that is seen as a personal and collective reality among all peoples of all ages. Related to these is human physical and psychic suffering. Death is a universal phenomenon that colours all these reflections. Before the certain prospect of death, humans experience the limitedness of our being. We cannot fully fathom ourselves, nor do we know how the human race began and what its condition was at the commencement. Nor do we know the nature of God's relationship to the human effort for self-realization.

The religious reflection of the Buddha also was deeply influenced by the experience of suffering, misery, old age and death. He sought therein the causes of suffering and evil, the meaning of life and the path of release from suffering, 'dukka' and the cycle of birth and rebirth 'samsara' in the Indian religio-cultural context.

On these questions also, as concerning the Trinity and Christology we are, at least partially, in the realm of mystery. No one knows for certain when, how and where the human race began. What happens to us after death is also a mystery, despite our deep desire for immortality.

In this sphere, however, human experience is greater and more personal. Each one experiences the desire to be good, to be one's true self; and at the same time sees within oneself the pull towards what is not good and not fulfilling in the long term for oneself or for society. As Augustine says I am against myself. Human weakness and proneness to evil is known universally.

Is the proneness to good and evil something imbedded in human nature? How strong is the human will to resist its inordinate desires? Has there been a universal fall of the human race that has so weakened the will that all humans will naturally be sinful unless sustained by the grace of God? What is the nature of the cooperation between free will and the grace of God? In the Augustinian era these were discussed especially concerning human sexuality? How strong was the will to ordain sexual relations in a right manner? Was sexuality good in itself or a disorderly and almost uncontrollable factor within human persons? Was nature also flawed along with the punishment for a fallen humanity? There were intense and acrimonious debates on these issues that were settled as much by argument as by the use of power.

1. Two Theological Perspectives and Approaches

Different interpretations are given for this reality involving the understanding of human nature, of society, of human history, of God, and of any outside forces of evil such as devils. The religious teaching on these leave much room for conjecture, myth, imagination, and legitimation of power, privilege and prejudice.

The explanation of these problems is also central to all religions and to their understanding of human fulfillment, liberation, salvation and redemption. The moral teachings, practices, rituals, and prescriptions of religion depend on the interpretation given to this central issue. The authority pattern within the religions is also fashioned according to the perspectives held concerning the moral life here on earth and the reward or punishment promised and expected in the future.

On the other hand it can also be seen that the religious communities themselves may introduce teachings on these all important, but rather mysterious issues, in such a way as to foster the interests of one group or the other. The sacred books of the religions may be written or interpreted consciously or unconsciously with that objective. The religious authority may develop the religious teachings in such a manner as to enhance its necessity and importance for human salvation, according to the explanation given of the human predicament.

We can distinguish in a religion between a central *primordial intuition* concerning human life and destiny and its interpretation and application by different communities by their thinkers, teachers and schools. Thus Christianity, drawing its inspirations from Jesus of Nazareth, has had many understandings and theologies concerning the moral life and of human fulfillment.

These interpretations impact the notion of Christian mission, and the relationship of Christians to others and to nature. If Christians claim to have a special and privileged path to eternal salvation their sense of self-importance is enhanced. This influences their attitude towards other peoples, religions and cultures. If within a religion a particular group, such as the clergy or a caste, are considered necessary and important for salvation then they are invested with more moral and religious power and authority.

There is thus a connection between our understanding of the fundamental human predicament of birth, life, death and ultimate fulfillment and our conceptions concerning God, human nature, moral and social life, and the role of religions in the search for meaning in life. What fulfillment, self-realisation, salvation and/or redemption is depends on the beliefs concerning these realities that are not fully knowable by us. Since we are in the realm of at least partial mystery we can expect here too many hypotheses, and propositions based on religious faith.

Christian theology on human life has a close connection with the position concerning the human and divine in Jesus Christ. If the human condition is said to be one in which a totally divine redeemer is essential, then it could be argued that Jesus is such a fully divine redeemer. If on the other hand the human condition is understood as one in which a normal help of God, available to all from creation; is adequate for reaching our ultimate destiny, then there is no need of a fully divine redeemer.

Thus those who thought of Jesus as fully divine, equal to the Father, held that humanity is so fallen from an original justice that there could be no human salvation without a very special intervention of God in human history. Those who emphasized the gravity of the alleged universal fall and the consequent incapability of humans to

be reconciled with God by their own efforts (with some divine help available to all from creation) accentuated the divinity of Jesus as the universal and unique redeemer of humankind from that helpless position.

The two perceptions held together. They strengthened the claim of the church and its ministers as representatives of Jesus Christ. This correspondingly de-emphasized human effort, as human beings are considered of themselves incapable of good actions that can lead to their fulfillment here below and eternal salvation hereafter. The other religions are then downgraded as these are said to be incapable of ensuring human salvation. The situation is worsened if the other religions are held to be perverse, positively harmful for human fulfillment and hence to be actively contested by Christians who had true knowledge of and privileged access to the means of salvation.

A theology based on such presuppositions concerning a fallen humanity universally alienated from God, tends to think of Jesus Christ as first God and thereafter human, or rather to stress the divinity of Jesus and neglect his humanity. The significance given to Jesus life and death would be in relation to redemption to be effected by reconciling humanity with God (the Father), or by appeasing God for human sin. The accent then is on the divine contribution in the redemptive mission of Jesus.

Theology concerning the sacraments is also influenced by this perspective. The sacraments could then be thought of as operative in themselves, and due to the ministration of the clergy, "*ex opere operato*". The dispositions of the 'recipients' of the sacraments would then receive less attention. This affects deeply the attitude towards sacraments such as baptism, the eucharist and penance. Thus infant baptism was said to entitle infants to enjoy the beatific vision in heaven, whereas infants not baptized were admitted to a lesser heaven or condemned to a lighter punishment, according to different theologians.

Correspondingly Christology would be derived from the assumption that Jesus is fully divine. Then Christology would tend to be more deductive, derived from the premise of his divinity. This is sometimes called a descending Christology, or a high Christology. It would be more exclusivistic, not leaving much room for other manifestations of the divine, and for other paths to salvation, or for other religions to be seen as from God.

Such a theology would therefore be less tolerant of other views and much less of other religions. Combined with political power it would be more tempted to impose itself on all Christians. It could more easily legitimise a situation of Christian dominance of others. It could be more readily reconciled with a Christian empire and imperialism. The divinity of the emperor would be enhanced, if it is linked to that of Jesus, and buttressed by a papacy also closely related to Christ. Male domination would find in the divine Christ a plausible support for patriarchy in church and society.

On the other hand theological views that held a more positive approach to the human condition, i.e. of being capable of themselves of doing good (with a universally available help of God) did not need to presume Jesus to be fully God,

equal in all things to the Father. Such theologies would stress the human life of Jesus, and each one's personal responsibility for one's moral spiritual life. They would tend to appreciate better the human condition in which Jesus lived, and his tragic death due to the hard moral options he made in the social context of his time. God's grace would then be understood as available to all humans at all times, before and after Christ, within and outside the church.

Such theologies would be more open, inclusive, and derived from the lived experience of Jesus and the church. Such an approach is sometimes called an ascending or low Christology, in which the humanity and human experience of Jesus is emphasized as giving us the message and the example of redemption. Such theologies would be more on the side of human liberation vis-a-vis different forms of oppression. They would re-read the scriptures as the account of the struggles of peoples for integral liberation and God's concern and support for them. They would then be opposed by the dominant.

These theologies would be more open to inter-religious dialogue and for sharing insights with other persuasions. They would more readily recognise the Spirit of God operative in all peoples from the beginnings of the human race. Several "Fathers" of the early Christian era, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who were "subordinationist" in theology, were more open to other religions.

A de-routeing of Christian theology would take place if the original liberative intuition of Jesus that God is love and we are called to love one another, is supplanted or replaced by a theology which neglects the right relationships implicit in that core intuition and the life and teaching of Jesus.

2. Some of the theological propositions are:

1) The teaching on original justice and original sin is not contained in the Old Testament in any direct way. The Genesis accounts attribute evil to human freedom, and not to God's intention. God is shown as having goodwill towards humanity.

The Old Testament does not make any explicit or formal statement regarding the transmission of hereditary guilt from Adam and Eve to the entire human race. It has passages that refer to the universal tendency towards sin, and how sin was present in human history as in Genesis chapters 3, 4, and 5. This is, of course, quite different from the subsequent theological definition as in the Council of Trent. The concept of a super-natural state and a fall that cannot in anyway be made good by human repentance cannot be apodictically concluded from the Old Testament.

The biblical text in Genesis 1-3 does not speak of a "sin". Anne Primavesi comments:

"None of the Hebrew words for sin and transgression are used in the story. When God pronounces judgment on the specific act which leads to the couple's eviction from the garden, only the act itself is given as the reason. Interpreters may label this act as disobedient. Exegetes may study it in the context of other passages about sin. But in the text no such label is attached nor is any such connection made or attributed to God. Nor does the Hebrew Bible ever associate any of the many sins later perpetrated by the children of Israel with the

behaviour in the garden. Even the prophets, continually haranguing the Israelites about their sinful behaviour, never mention the couple. In their evident concern about sin, judgment, punishment, the prophets threw the book at erring kings and idolatrous peoples with the notable exception of these first three chapters.

The word “sin” first appears in the Hebrew text in Chapter 4 of Genesis. There God warns Cain before he kills Abel that ‘sin is crouching at the door’.”¹¹⁰

For the Jewish people important elements of their faith are a developed monotheism, the exodus from slavery in Egypt, the prophetic social critique and an awareness of God’s presence in history. They did not understand the Genesis story of creation in the sense of a universal fall of humankind and an inadequacy due to which they could not reach their eternal destiny without a divine redeemer. They had hope in God and expected salvation from God. The Messiah they expected was a redeemer of their race. The practice of the Torah was sufficient for the Jews to attain their eternal beatitude.¹¹¹

“Apart from these early chapters of Genesis, there is in the Hebrew Bible no further mention of Eve, the figure made to bear the sins of the world in later Christian interpretations. She appears (though not by ‘name’) in extant literature written in Greek in the second century B.C.E. in the Book of Ecclesiasticus. This Book is part of the canon in Catholic Bibles but not in Hebrew or Protestant ones. There is an apparent allusion to her when the author, Ben Sira, says: ‘From a woman was the beginning of sin, and because of her we all died’ (Eccl 24:25)¹¹²

The Jewish interpretation of the story of the fall is that human beings had an inclination to evil and therefore transgressed the law given by God

“Jesus Ben Sira who was the author of the book later called Ecclesiasticus expresses the common Rabbinic belief that the evil inclination explains Adam’s fall. God created man from the beginning and gave him into the hand of his inclination *vetzer*. If thou choose thou mayest keep the commandment. This last passage is echoed by one of the most important Talmudic texts on the *vetzer hara* / created the evil *vetzer* / created for you the Law as a remedy. If you are occupied with the law you shall not be delivered into its hand. This text epitomizes the Jewish understanding of the interrelationship of the Law evil and human responsibility.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Anne Primavesi: *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, Burns and Oates, Kent, 1991, p. 223; also Elaine Pagels, *Adam Eve and the Serpent*, London, 1990.

¹¹¹ cf. Marc. H. Ellis: *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, N.Y., 1987. When asked in a personal discussion what he thought of the identity of Jesus, Marc Ellis replied that Jesus was first of all a Jew, and that he is in the line of Moses and the Jewish Prophets.

¹¹² Anne Primavesi, op. cit., p. 224. Many modern scholars, especially; feminist theologians, question the traditional interpretation of the Genesis texts, thus Phyllis Trible in the three conferences she gave us at the consultation of the World Council of Churches on “*Community of Women and Men in the Church*,” held at Sheffield, England, 1981.

¹¹³ Lindwood Urban: *A Short History of Christian Thought*, O.U.P. 1986, pp. 133-34. Much of this section on the opinions concerning original sin are from Linwood Urban’s book, pp. 125-55.

ii) *Jesus* does not speak of a fall of humanity or of himself as a redeemer. He emphasized personal and social responsibility for evil and castigated hypocrisy and social exploitation. He encouraged honesty authenticity and loving service. He did not teach that baptism saves anyone from an original sin. He is not recorded as having baptized anyone. Adam and Eve and the Genesis story are not seen as important for Jesus, even though Paul and theologians of later centuries interpreted his life with reference to them and an alleged universal fall.

iii) *The Apostolic Teaching* as portrayed in the Acts and the Epistles in the New Testament (the Early Kerygma) has clearly the message that all human beings are sinners and that salvation is through Jesus Christ. In his speech before the members of the Council in Jerusalem, Peter declared,

“Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us.” (*Acts 4.12*)

The Epistles of Paul likewise present such a teaching. *Rom. 5.8-9*:

“But God has shown us how much he loves us – it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. By his death we are now put right with God; how much more, then, will we be saved by him from God’s anger! We were God’s enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his son.”

While this is true, the apostles teaching has also the position that God is just and judges everyone according to one’s actions. God has no favourites (*Acts 10.34*), and divine grace is available to the Gentiles even before baptism or meeting with the Apostles and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Jewish patriarchs and prophets like Abraham, Moses, Samuel and David were with God though they had no knowledge of Jesus. On the contrary their sayings are invoked as testimony of the mission of the future Jesus: (*Acts 3.13; 3.22-26*).

Peter and the disciples had a spiritual experience in the meeting with Cornelius to whom the Spirit sent Peter. The Acts record that Cornelius a gentile captain in the Roman regiment was addressed by an Angel of God who said “God is pleased with your prayers and works of charity, and is ready to answer you”. (*Acts. 10.4*) Peter began his response to Cornelius thus:

“I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to.” (*Acts 10.34-35*)

Cornelius was therefore pleasing to God before he had heard of Jesus. He received the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Apostles had received, and hence Peter baptized him and his household. Here there is salvation prior to any contact with Jesus. At the meeting in Jerusalem (The Council of Jerusalem) in Acts Chapter 15 there was a long debate concerning the necessity of circumcision for the Gentiles to be saved.

“After a long debate, Peter stood up and said, “And God, who knows the thoughts of everyone showed his approval of the Gentiles by giving the Holy

Spirit to them just as had to us. He made no difference between us and them; he forgave their sins because they believed. So then, why do you now want to put God to the test by laying a load on the backs of the believers which neither our ancestors nor we ourselves were able to carry? No! We believe and are saved by the Grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are.” (*Acts 15, 6-11*)

Paul in his address to the City Council at Athens refers to their religiosity which he appreciates positively,

“I found an altar on which is written. ‘To An Unknown God’. That which you worship, then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it, is lord of heaven and earth and does not live in man-made temples ... Yet God is actually not far from anyone of us; as someone has said, ‘In him we live and move and exist!’ It is as some of your poets have said. ‘We too are his children.’” (*Acts 17.23-28*)

Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning human actions:

“For all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him. Each one will receive what he deserves, according to everything he has done, good or bad in his bodily life.” (*2. Cor. 5.10*)

The Acts of the Apostles also insist on the type of life that conversion to the discipleship of Jesus meant. It was not a faith of mere belief without a change in life. It was not enough to say “Lord, Lord” to be saved.

“All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute money among all, according to what each needed.” (*Acts 2.44-45*)

“There was no one in the group who was in need.” (*Acts 4,34*)

St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans exhorts the disciples,

“Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers.” (*Rom. 12.13*)

James is quite strong in his insistence on right action as the test of faith.

“You will be doing the right thing if you obey the law of the Kingdom, which is found in the Scripture.” Love your neighbour as you love yourself. (*James 2.8*)

“My brothers, what good is it for someone to say that he has faith if his actions do not prove it?” (*James 2.14*)

“You see, then, it is by his actions that a person is put right with God, and not by his faith alone.” (*James 2.24*)

In the New Testament writings there are thus some texts which stress that salvation is from God through Jesus Christ and others which make human good-will

and action the criterion of salvation and the judgment by God. We have to reconcile these two aspects which form part of the mystery of human action and divine inspiration or grace. Both have to be kept in a dynamic relationship in our theological perspective.

These two aspects however need not refer to an original sin as understood in later theology i.e. a sinfulness in human nature whereby humankind is unable to do good without a special divine redeemer. The concept of the divine grace understood as flowing from Christ need not be a problem for dialogue with persons of other theistic religions provided this grace is seen as graciously available to all human beings.

The apostolic preaching and writings contain the idea of freeing, redeeming, reconciling, renewing in Jesus Christ by his death. They do not however have clearly the later teachings that were developed concerning an original sin. It might even be argued that since St. Paul says that: The results of the gift also outweigh the results of one man's sin (*Rom. 5.16*) why should there not have been a removal of human mortality also which is said to be a result of Adam's sin?

On the contrary, St. Paul in the same epistle to the Romans speaks of the just judgment of God:

“For God judges everyone by the same standard”. (*Rom. 2.11*)

“For God will reward every person according to what he has done”. (*Rom. 2.6*)

“For it is not by hearing the law that people are put right with God, but by doing what the commands”. (*Rom. 2.13*)

“The Gentiles do not have the law; but whenever they do by instinct what the law commands, they are their own law, even though they do not have the law. Their conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their conscience also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them, and sometimes defend them. God through Jesus Christ will judge the secret judgments of all” (*Rom. 2.15-16*)

Thus St. Paul has a doctrine that explains how all persons – Jews and Gentiles – can be justified according to their fidelity to their conscience.

iv) There is really no explicit discussion of Original Sin among the very *early Fathers*. Like the Rabbis, *Justin Martyr* does not think of Adam and Eve as perfect human beings; the *yetzer hara* was with them from the beginning. Among the sources of evil, Justin places the cultural inheritance or the bad habits and wicked training in which children are brought up. He has in this some sense of the sociologically transmitted inherited tendencies to sin. Likewise *Irenaeus* pictures Adam and Eve as children, childlike and immature, and hence easily tempted. The purpose of creation and of the redeemer is to bring these imperfect beings to their fullness.

v) *Origen's* view is that human souls pre-exist their embodiment. God's creation was good. The story of the fall in Genesis is an allegory of a pre-cosmic fall of the angels, which is the source of human imperfection

vi) *Athanasius* regards the Genesis story of the fall as historical and not pre-historical. Because of the fall of Adam and Eve their descendants "live no longer in paradise, but, dying outside it, continue in death and corruption." Due to the fault of the first parents, the disintegrating forces latent in our nature were released. The human will however remains free. Yet "Athanasius never hints that we participate in Adam's actual guilt, i.e. his moral culpability, nor does he exclude the possibility of men living entirely without sin, for example he claims that Jeremiah and John the Baptist actually did so".¹¹⁴

vii) *The Greek Fathers*, the three Cappadocians: Basil (300-379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), Basil's younger brother, were influenced by the views of Athanasius on the blessedness of the primeval state of Adam and Eve. They hold that sin is transmitted by Adam and Eve; but with their insistence that human free will remains intact and is the root of actual sinning, we are responsible for our sins. They have a much more optimistic outlook than the West.

"It is easy to collect passages from their works which, at any rate in the light of later orthodoxy, appear to rule out any doctrine of original sin. Both the Gregories, for example, as well as Chrysostom, teach that newly born children are exempt from sin. The latter, further interprets St. Paul's statement (*Rom: 5.19*) that the many were made sinners by one man's disobedience as meaning only that they were made liable to punishment and death ... Admittedly there is hardly a hint in the Greek fathers that mankind as a whole shares in Adam's guilt, i.e. his culpability. This partly explains their reluctance to speak of his legacy to us as sin, and of course makes their indulgent attitude to children dying unbaptized understandable".

"But they have the greatest possible feeling for the mystical unity of mankind with its first ancestor. This is the ancient doctrine of recapitulation, and in virtue of it they assume without question that our fall was involved in Adam's. Again their tendency is to view original sin as a wound inflicted on our nature; ... Their treatment of our involvement in the sin of Adam is almost always incidental".

The orbit within which they worked is quite different from that of Augustine. They emphasize humanity's participation in the divine nature, rebirth through the power of the Spirit, adoption as children of God, new creation through Christ – all leading to the concept of deification. Their accent is on this positive state to be reached with the grace of God "dwelling in us", as stated by Cyril of Alexandria.¹¹⁵

viii) *Manichaeism* originated by the prophet Mani born in Babylonia circa 216 and martyred under Bahram I c 277. Mani began an independent religious movement with elements from Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Mani acknowledges his dependence on the "Fathers of Justice": Jesus, Zoroaster and Buddha and wants to

¹¹⁴ J.N.D. Kelly, op.cit., pp. 346-48.

¹¹⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, op.cit., pp. 348-52.

preach their teachings to the whole world. Mani was crucified in 277 under King Bahram due to the hatred of the Zoroastrian priests.

Manichaeism was a form of Gnosticism that offered humans salvation through knowledge. It is a philosophy of dualism. Reality consists of two great forces opposed to each other Good (that is God, Truth, Light) and Evil or Darkness. the latter being identified with matter. Man is a fallen particle of Light tragically involved in the material order and exiled from the transcendent world. His salvation consists in grasping this truth by an interior illumination received spontaneously or through initiation into the Manichaen fellowship. Redemption is in withdrawing oneself from the contamination of the flesh. God is at once redeemer and redeemed. It was a highly organized, ascetical, hierarchical church that swept over Europe, Africa and Asia including China from the end of the 3rd century.¹¹⁶

3. Augustine and the Pelagians

The turn of the 4th century and the early decades of the 5th were a period of intense and deep theological discussion and debate around issues connected with the nature of the human predicament and the role of God's grace in salvation. Augustine, Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum were three of the main contenders in this controversy. This debate is of paramount importance for the future of Christian theology, especially in the West. Their argumentation was based on the Bible accepted as revealed by God, on contemporary philosophies, views on human psychology and biology, as well as the social life in the Roman Empire that was then facing severe attack externally due to the 'Barbarian' invasions and internally due to moral decadence.

The church decision on the "*Pelagian*:" controversy profoundly influenced Christian spirituality during the succeeding centuries up to the present times.

a) Aurelius Augustine (354-430)

Augustine was born of a pagan father, Patricius, and a Christian mother, Monica. His birthplace was Thagaste, in Numidia (present Algeria) North Africa. Augustine's family was of a romanized sort, poor but respectable, beholden to the patronage of a neighbouring grandee, Romanianus, who helped pay for Augustine's education. In 371, at 17 he joined the University of Carthage, the metropolis of Roman Africa and was there till 383.

From his seventeenth year he lived with a woman for thirteen years without being legally married to her. They had one son, Adeodatus, who died a teenager. As a young man he was a Manichaen during nine years.

"Augustine doubtless listened to their exalted hymns in praise of virginity; but he felt sure that such stirring sentiments did not yet apply to himself: "and I, an unfortunate young man ... would pray: 'Lord give me chastity and continence, sed soli modo, but not now'. (*Confessions* 8.7.17:757)" When his mother, Monica, arranged a marriage for him with a young girl of an affluent Milanese family, she left him and returned to Africa. "Bruised by her departure Augustine

¹¹⁶ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*, Harper & Row, N.Y., pp. 8-9; and Bihlmeyer-Tuchle, *Church History*, Newman Press, Westminster, 1968, p. 156.

fell back on a stopgap mistress. As a result, his own sexual needs were bleakly demystified. It seemed to him that any further relationship with a woman, lawful marriage included, could be based on nothing other than his own compulsive need for sex ... A deep sense of sadness lingered with Augustine for the rest of his life. Sexual love remained, for him, a leaden echo of true delight. He dearly wished that he had grown up chaste from his youth, his heart kept open by the discipline of continence to receive the embrace of Christ: *o tardum gaudium meum, 'o my late joy!'*”¹¹⁷

The mystic in him contemplated his own life, his yearning for God and how his physical pleasures caused sorrow which in turn was a cause of joy.

“Late have I loved thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved thee. And behold thou wert within me and I was without ... When I shall cleave to Thee with all my being, sorrow and toil will no longer exist for me, and my life will be alive, being wholly filled with thee ... My joys, which are to be lamented, struggle against my sorrows, which are cause for joy, and I know now on which side victory may stand.”¹¹⁸

In 386 he was converted to Christianity in Milan under the influence of his mother and of Ambrose. He and some like minded friends, who were interested in contemplation and intellectual pursuits, decided to live together in chaste continence. Five years later, on his being made a priest in Hippo, he set up a monastery there with his friends. As bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 396 he lived a strenuous life of intense intellectual and pastoral activity.

“Compared with Jerome, and even Ambrose, Augustine [in Hippo] moved in a monochrome, all male world. He imposed strict codes of sexual avoidance on himself and his own clergy. He would never visit a woman unchaperoned, and did not allow even his female relatives to enter the bishop’s palace.”¹¹⁹

Augustine considered the Pelagian views to be a deep threat to Christianity, and opposed them implacably. His positions may, subject to correction, be presented as follows.

a) Adam and Eve in paradise were endowed with the highest excellence of wisdom, possessed no imperfection whatever and were immune from physical illness. They were in a state of justification, illumination and beatitude. Immortality was within their grasp if only they continued to feed upon the tree of life. At that stage the human body was thus subject to the soul, carnal desires to the will, and the will to God. Already they were wrapped around with divine grace (*indumentum gratiae*)¹²⁰ Unlike Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Jerome, Augustine held that Adam and Eve were set in Paradise to found a people, and this included physical intercourse,

¹¹⁷ Peter Brown: *The Body and Society*, Faber and Faber, London, 1988, pp. 392-94.

¹¹⁸ Augustine: *Confessions X*, 27.38 – 28.39, cf. “The essential Augustine,” ed. Vernon J. Bourke, Hackett Indianapolis, 1985, p.148.

¹¹⁹ Peter Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 396.

¹²⁰ J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*, Harper and Row, N.Y., 1960, pp. 362 ff.

childbirth and the rearing of children. Compared with the notions of many of his vocal contemporaries, it was a singularly sociable and full blooded vision.¹²¹

b) Nevertheless, as the Bible records, Adam fell, due to his own fault, his pride. This made his sin more heinous and disastrous for all. Humanity is a kind of universal mass of perdition, a *massa damnata*, itself sinful and propagating sinners. (*Ench. 27.8*)

c) *The human will* is divided and enslaved to the passions, as St. Paul, too, testifies. Only an inherited disposition to sin could explain the deep-seated and universal torments felt by human beings. Consequently human nature has been terribly scarred and vitiated. Hence its enslavement to ignorance, concupiscence, and death, though the spark of the divine still remains in it. Henceforth we cannot avoid sin and do good without God's grace. Our choice remaining free, we spontaneously, as a matter of psychological fact, opt for perverse courses.

“The twisted will, not marriage, not even the sexual drive, was what was new in the human condition after Adam's fall. The fallen will subjected the original, God-given bonds of human society – friendship, marriage, and paternal command – to sickening shocks of willfulness, that caused these to sway, to fissure, and to change their nature.”¹²²

For Augustine, in ‘concupiscence of the flesh’, “the flesh was, not simply the body: it was all that led the self to prefer its own will to that of God ... It originated in a lasting distortion of the soul itself. With Adam's Fall, the soul lost the ability to sum up all of itself, in an undivided act of will, to love and praise God in all created things. Concupiscence was a dark drive to control, to appropriate, and to turn to one's own private ends, all the good things that had been created by God to be accepted with gratitude and shared with others. It lay at the root of the inescapable misery that afflicted mankind.”¹²³ Hence the social disorders such as slavery, arrogance, egotism, malice, violence and self-destructiveness of a fallen humanity. In the Pauline-Augustinian theological tradition the basic sin is pride and self-deification. Lust is a consequence of and punishment for it. All he writes in *De Civitate Dei*:

“We should wrong our Creator in imputing our vices to our flesh: the flesh is good, but to leave the Creator and to live according to this created thing is mischief. The corruptible flesh made not the soul to sin, but the sinning soul made the flesh corruptible ... otherwise we shall make the devil, who has no flesh, sinless.”¹²⁴

Augustine considered these the more significant issues, though the uncontrollable elements in sexuality demonstrated more existentially the interpersonal dilemmas of the human will in its decision-making. In the incongruities associated with sexual feelings men and women could glimpse their tragic state of

¹²¹ Peter Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 400-01.

¹²² Peter Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 404.

¹²³ Peter Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 418. He refers to Augustine's: *de Trinitate* 12.10.25, and *de Civitate Dei* 14.28:436.

¹²⁴ quoted in Reinhold Niebhur: *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Charles Scribner, NY, 1941/1964, pp. 230-31.

being estranged from their own wills and from God, as Adam and Eve saw in Paradise after the Fall.

d) This original sin was communicated by the physical act of generation, or rather as a result of the carnal excitement which accompanied it, even in baptized persons. Sexual desire is the most violent, persistent and widespread form of concupiscence.¹²⁵

Though “Augustine both defended marriage and found a place for virginity within the church ... sexual desire still disquieted him. In mankind’s present state, the sexual drive was a disruptive force. Augustine never found a way, any more than did any of his Christian contemporaries, of articulating the possibility that sexual pleasure might, in itself, enrich the relations between husband and wife.”¹²⁶

“Augustine, although he was more sensitive than others to the social dimension of the couple, was unable to conceive of the possibility that sexuality could hold tenderness, friendship, spirituality, and this lack of insight was very influential on the later tradition.” “The compulsive force of sexual habit was a cruel chain which only God could unloose ... an abiding principle of discord [discordiosum malum] lodged in the human person since the fall.” Adam and Eve were conscious of their nudity after their act of disobedience. “In marked contrast to most Greek and Syrian writers Augustine identified this moment with an instant of dearly felt sexual shame... As soon as they had made their own wills independent of the will of God, parts of Adam and Eve became resistant to their own conscious will”

“What concerned him was that after the fall of Adam and Eve, this pleasure had gained a momentum of its own, and that it clashed with the intentions of the will. The sharp *summa voluptas* of orgasm notoriously escaped conscious control. This meant that a revelation of the limits of the conscious self that had first stunned Adam and Eve lingered on, as a sad reminder of the precise moment of the Fall, in the hot act by which each new human being was conceived.” ...“In Augustine’s mind, sexuality served only one, strictly delimited purpose: it spoke, with terrible precision, on one single, decisive event within the soul. It echoed in the body the unalterable consequence of mankind’s first sin ... It was a drastically limited vision of a complex phenomenon.”¹²⁷

e) Future generations shared Adam’s guilt. Augustine writes in ‘*de Trinitate*’ XIII.15:

“It was by a divine justice that the human race was delivered into the devil’s power; the sin of the first man was passed on from the very beginning to

¹²⁵ According to Augustine, the Saviour chose to be a pure virgin to avoid the taint of concupiscence ... cf. J.N.D. Kelly op.cit., p. 365, quoting *de Nuptiis et Concupiscentia* 1,27.

¹²⁶ Peter Brown, op.cit., p. 402.

¹²⁷ from Eric Fuchs: *Sexual Desire and Love*, p. 117; quoted in Peter Brown, op.cit., pp. 402, 406, 408, 417, 422.

everyone born as a result of intercourse between the sexes and the debt of the first parents became binding on all their posterity.”^{128; 129}

“In the misdirected choice of that one man all sinned in him, since all were that one man, from whom on that account they all severally derive original sin”.¹³⁰

According to Augustine the whole of humanity sinned ‘in Adam’ as all were in Adam, in his ‘loins’ i.e. genitals, [*as thought of in the biology of time?*]¹³¹ Augustine invokes the tradition of the church in favour of his version of original sin.

f) As sin is a human rebellion against God, the atonement for it had to be by a human being in obedience to God. At the same time only someone divine could reconcile humans with God, by atoning for the offence that sin gave to God. Hence a divine-human person was needed to atone for the sin of our first parents and of subsequent humanity.

g) This was realized through Jesus Christ the universal saviour. All humanity is destined to everlasting damnation if not for the grace of Christ. Even helpless children dying without the benefit of baptism must pass to eternal fire with the devil, although their sufferings will be most mild compared, with those adults who have added their own sins to those of inherited guilt.

h) The stain of guilt of original sin is removed in Baptism.

“The rebirth to be attained by baptism, according to the saying of Jesus applied by Augustine to life after death: ‘unless one is reborn of water and spirit, one is not able to enter the kingdom of God [*Jn. 3:5*]’”¹³²

Augustine writes in the *City of God* [*XXI, 15 -16*] ,

“whoever therefore desires to escape eternal punishment, let him not only be baptized, but also justified in Christ, and so let him in truth pass from the devil to Christ.”¹³³

i) Interpreting Jesus’ reported description of the last judgment [*Mt.25: 31-46*], Augustine’s eschatology had hell as the only alternative to the kingdom of God.

¹²⁸ *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, Cambridge UP, 1989, p. 115.

¹²⁹ “Propter hand (concupiscentiam) ergo fit ut etiam de justis et legitimis nuptiis filiorum Dei, non filii Dei sed filii saeculi generentur: quia et ii qui genuerant, si iam regenerati sunt, non ex hoc generant ex quo filii Dei sunt sed ex quo adhuc filii saeculi Ex hac igitur concupiscentian carnis quod nascitur, utique mundo non Deo nascitur. Deo autem nascitur cum ex aqua et spiritu Julian,” V. 52; *Contra duas epist. pelag.*, i, 27. Quoted in J. Tixeront: *History of Dogmas*, Vol. II, 2nd ed., Herder, St. Louis MO, 1923, p. 470.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, bk. 2, chap. 15, quoted in Linwood Urba, op.cit., p. 141.

¹³¹ Christopher Kirwan op.cit. p. 139. The author discusses the questionable interpretation given by Augustine to Paul’s ‘in quo omnes peccaverunt.’ The Pelagians disagreed with him on this.

¹³² Christopher Kirwan: op.cit. p. 142.

¹³³ quoted by Vernon J. Bourke in “*The Essential Augustine*” p. 181.

But whereas Jesus' curse was on those who had neglected their positive duties in relation to neighbour, Augustine extended the curse to all who had not received God's grace, including all who die unbaptized. "Through the inclusion of the threat of hell Augustine's preaching on original sin becomes as Williams says, a 'terrific dogma'."¹³⁴

j) The practice of baptizing infants with exorcisms and a renunciation of the devil was proof that even they were infected with sin. This in turn was an argument for the divine-human natures in Jesus.

k) Augustine's teaching on *predestination* flows from his view of the flawed nature of the human soul, and all humanity being a '*massa damnata*' a condemned lump or mass. The human will is incapable of consistently opting for the good without God's grace. This has to be not merely 'prevenient' or 'enabling grace' granted sufficiently to all, but also 'actual', 'efficient' or 'cooperative' grace that God grants for a particular act. Augustine then faces the question of predestination by God of some to be saved and others to be damned. Since all humans are in any case a *massa damnata* God's Justice demands their condemnation, it is the divine mercy that decides to save some. The scripture text about God's universal salvific will is explained by Augustine as referring to all the elect. There is an element of 'a secret and, to human calculation inscrutable justice.

"Augustine is therefore prepared to speak of certain people as being predestined to eternal death and damnation, they may include, apparently, decent Christians who have been called and baptized, but to whom the grace of perseverance has not been given". The elect "alone have the grace of perseverance, and even before they are born they are sons of God and cannot perish".¹³⁵

Augustine writes on the gift of perseverance

"This and nothing but this, is the predestination of saints; namely, the foreknowledge and planning of God's kindnesses, by which they are most surely delivered, whoever are delivered. As for the rest, where are they left by God's righteous judgment save in the mass of perdition where they of Tyre and Sidon were left?

And they, moreover, would have believed, had they seen the wondrous miracle of Christ. But it was not granted to them to believe, and therefore the means of believing was denied to them The Jews were left in the same mass of ruin because they could not believe ... the mighty works which were done before their eyes."¹³⁶

Augustine was so concerned with the unity of the church that,

"by 405, he accepted that the Roman state could bring to bear the force of its own laws to 'reunite' Donatist congregations to the Catholic church under threat

¹³⁴ Christopher Kirwan: op.cit. p. 143.

¹³⁵ J.N.D. Kelly: op.cit. pp. 368-369.

¹³⁶ Augustine: de dono perseverantiae (428), 35; quoted in "*Documents of the Christian Church*," selected and edited by Henry Bettenson, OUP, London, 1944, p. 80.

of punishment. In doing so, he upheld the view that the structures of authority that gave cohesion to profane society might be caned upon to support the Catholic church: Emperors should command their subjects, landowners their peasants (flogging them when necessary), heads of households, their wives and children, in order to bring them back into the unity of the Catholic church.” Correspondingly “if the Catholic church was to remain united it could do so only by validating Roman society. The bonds that held subjects to emperors, slaves to masters, wives to husbands, children to parents should not be ignored. They must, rather, be made to serve the Catholic cause.”¹³⁷

After the church had become coterminous with the Roman Empire with the Constantinian revolution. Augustine looked forward to the global universality of the Catholic church. The church was to be a total society. He accepted and even urged that the State would use its power to spread the faith and restrain heresy. He “not only accepted, **he became the theorist of persecution**; and his defences were later to be those on which all defences of the Inquisition rested.. Augustine was not necessarily a cruel man ... But he insisted that the use of force in the pursuit of Christian unity, and indeed total religious conformity, was necessary, efficacious, and wholly justified ... Was not this the meaning of the text *Like 14:23* ‘compel them to come in’? It was Augustine who first drew attention to this and a number of other convenient texts, to be paraded through the centuries by the Christian apologists of force.

“... For the first time, too, he used the analogy with the State, indeed appealed to the orthodoxy of the State, in necessary and perpetual alliance with the Church in the extirpation of dissidents. The Church unearthed, the State castigated. The key word was disciplina – very frequent in his writings. If discipline were removed, there would be chaos.

... Here, first articulated, is the appeal of the persecuting Church to all the totalitarian elements in society, indeed in human nature ... the justification of constructive persecution: the idea that a heretic should not be expelled but, on the contrary, be compelled to recant and conform, or be destroyed. ‘Compel them to come in’ ... To Augustine, the duty of man was to obey God’s will, as expressed through his Church.”¹³⁸

Augustine’s rather pessimistic view of human nature went hand in hand with his near total dependence on divine grace and an authoritarian view of church and civil society. They influenced the future church and the society of medieval, fuedal Europe. Such a benevolent but harsh authoritarianism would be related to the Christian missionary methods of later centuries.

b) Position of Pelagians

Pelagius a monk from Britain born (in Ireland?) about 354 was in Rome from 384 until the city was sacked in 410. Thereafter he settled in Carthage. He “died not long after 418 somewhere in the countries adjoining the Eastern Mediterranean, just possibly in Egypt”.¹³⁹ Pelagius was an ascetic lay person concerned about the spiritual

¹³⁷ Peter Brown: op.cit; p. 398-399.

¹³⁸ Paul Johnson: *A History of Christianity*, Penguin Books. England, 1980 pp. 115-119.

¹³⁹ B.R. Rees *Pelagius, A Reluctant Heretic*, the Bodell Press, Suffolk, 1988, p. xii.

laxity in the church and among the Roman aristocracy. This was a period of massive conversions to Christianity the official religion of the empire. Pelagius was doubtful about the authenticity of such adhesions. He therefore proposed, especially to the aristocracy, a christian life as conformable as possible to the radical demands of the gospel.

He held a very optimistic view of human nature, believing that the human will was by nature good and could choose rightly. He stressed the autonomy and responsibility of the human person and the primacy of personal effort in human salvation.

Pelagius is historically a much maligned person, represented as Godless. According to the scholarship of B.R. Rees, he was fundamentally a Christian moralist and wanted, above all else, to be an orthodox theologian of the Christian church and to be known as such. Jerome, in a controversy with him called Pelagius “that fathead bloated with Scottish porridge” – one of the more innocent descriptions according to the contemporary conventions of debate!

The teaching of Pelagius is succinctly stated by Augustine :

“Everything good and everything evil, in respect of which we are worthy of praise or of blame, is done by us, not born with us. We are not born in our full development, but with a capacity for good or evil; we are begotten as well without virtue as without vice, and before the activity of our personal will there is nothing in man but what God has stored in him.”¹⁴⁰

The general position of Pelagians was:¹⁴¹

a) Adam’s sin was purely personal and not transmitted. “For Pelagius, Adam’s sin had brought about no irrevocable weakening of the will. No insuperable inherited frailty stood between modern Christians and the capacity first bestowed on Adam and Eve to follow God’s commands to the full Pelagius and his followers refused to believe that religious men and women were at the mercy of forces beyond the will’s control. Such a view struck Pelagius and his supporters as tantamount to condoning moral torpor.”¹⁴²

b) It would be unjust for God to punish the whole human race for his transgression.

c) Death is a necessity of human nature, not a punishment for sin.

d) The Mosaic law has a salvific value. There could have been holy people in ancient times, before the advent of Christ. The Bible mentions many such persons, men from Abel to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and women from Debora to Mary the mother of Jesus.

¹⁴⁰ *Documents of the Christian Church*: ed. Bettenson; p. 75; from Pro. lib., ap. Aug. de peccato originali, 14.

¹⁴¹ cf. Aime Solignac in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, vol. XII, Part II, col. 2925-2936.

¹⁴² Peter Brown: *The Body and Society*; Faber, London, 1988 p. 411.

e) Divine grace is offered equally to all as God is no “acceptor of persons”. It merely facilitates what the will can do by itself, and is always given in proportion to one’s merits. Otherwise a human being cannot be held responsible for one’s action. There would then be no justice in the rewards and punishments to be meted out at the last judgment as foretold by Jesus in *Matt. 25*.

f) There is no universality of spiritual death due to Adam’s sin. Thus if both parents are free of original sin by baptism, how can they communicate to their offspring the sin they do not have? If the soul is from God, it cannot be bad. Then only the body would be in sin, and only the body could be punished for sin.

g) Redemption does not give new life to the human race. Christ merely helps by his good example. Humans could acquire a relative degree of justice by their own efforts. The grace of God does not replace human liberty but helps it. The nature of the cooperation of grace and freewill is a crucial point in this debate. He saw a threat to divine justice in the Pauline doctrine of the fall, and a threat to freedom in the Pauline doctrine of grace.

h) Since all are born without sin, infant baptism is not necessary; its effect on infants was purely benedictory. Infants, who die without the sacrament, go immediately to heaven,

i) Prayer for the conversion of others is futile since it cannot help them in saving their souls.

j) Sin is a responsible act against God’s law. Sin is in an action, not in the nature of the human person. One’s conscience enlightens a person about good and evil: approving or reprimanding one’s actions. Hence reconciliation with God has to be at the level of action and not of human nature. Human nature is naturally good and reconciled to God. It would be against the goodness of God to bring into being persons naturally in sin and against God.

k) God’s creation is good; hence a creation-centred theology and spirituality.

l) According to Pelagius these were in agreement with the views of many fathers of the church such as Lactance, Hilary, Ambrose, Jean Chrysostom, Jerome ...

The relationship between divine grace and human freewill is one that Augustine himself admitted is “obscure”, and its answer “very difficult, and intelligible to few”.¹⁴³ A distinction was involved between two graces: “enabling grace” (or power to do something given by God, the fountain of all power), and “cooperative grace” (aid in the execution of an act). Pelagius holds the need of enabling grace, but not necessarily the cooperative grace. That is humans have a general power from God to do what is right; and their freewill can decide and act on it. Pelagius view is thus expressed:

“We distinguish three things and arrange them in a definite order ... first *‘posse’* [ability], second *‘velle’* [volition], and third *‘esse’* [actuality]. The *‘posse’* we assign

¹⁴³ Christopher Kirwan: *Augustine*, Routledge, London, 1991 p. 126.

to nature, the 'velle to will, the 'esse' to actual realization. The first of these 'posse', is properly ascribed to God, who conferred it on his creatures; while the other two, 'velle' and 'esse' are to be referred to the human agent, since they have their source in his will."¹⁴⁴

Pelagius in his letter to the young Roman virgin Demetrias, (to whom Jerome and Augustine too wrote letters of advice), scorned the suggestion that God

“forgetful of human frailty, whose author he himself is, should impose commands [*mandata*] that cannot be borne He, who is just, did not will to demand [*imperare*] anything impossible; he, who is caring [*pious*], did not propose to convict [*non damnaturus*] a man for what the man could not avoid.” (*letter to Demetrias, section 16*)¹⁴⁵

On this issue too scripture texts were quoted throughout the centuries in support of differing views. These included *Jn 15.5* “without me you can do nothing”, in favour of Augustine’s view and *Ecclus 15:14-17*, and “the command I lay on you this day is not too difficult for you” *Deut. 30: 11,14* in favour of Pelagius’ view. These issues and texts were involved in the debates at the time of the Reformation by Erasmus Luther, Calvin.

It could be argued that Pelagius denied the supernatural order, explained away the mystery of predestination, and made God only a spectator in the drama of human salvation.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand his work radiates an intense awareness of God’s majesty, of the high destiny of human beings and of the claims of the moral law and of Christ’s example.

Towards the end of the fourth century several theologians expressed views similar to those of Pelagius: thus Rufinus the Syrian, Celestius, Julian of Eclanum, the monk John Cassian, Anianus, and Fastidius. “To Vincent of Lerins the Augustinian doctrine was a most disturbing innovation, quite out of line with ‘orthodoxy’ which Vincent defined as that body of belief which is held undeviatingly by the universal church – *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*.”¹⁴⁷ Some of them were less prudent and conciliatory than Pelagius.

c) Julian Bishop of Eclanum, (ca. 386-454)

Bishop Julian, the son of a bishop happily married to the daughter of a bishop, was another important writer who opposed Augustine’s views. The record of his position is contained in their refutations by Augustine in: “*Contra Julianum haeresis Pelagiana defensorum*” “Against Julian, defender of the heresy of Pelagius” 421, and his *Opus Imperfectum contra Julianum*” unfinished work 429-430.

The Pelagians gained in Julian a clever and pertinacious disputant, but not the astute politician they needed. Julian and Augustine debated for more than twelve years the nature of human nature, of sexual desire and death. Julian replied to

¹⁴⁴ Pelagius, *Pro libero Arbitrio*, ap. Augustine, *De Gratia Christi* (418), quoted in Bettenson: Documents p. 74.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine Kirwan: op.cit. pp. 106-107.

¹⁴⁶ cf. i, 1967, p. 58.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Chadwick: *The Early Church*; Penguin, London, 1967/1990 p. 233.

Augustine that mortality is not the result of sin but of nature, a return to earth. Julian argues that God created and blessed human fertility even before Eve's taking the fruit (*Gen. 1:28*). In the normal course of events, human beings were to replenish the earth depleted by mortality. The command to increase and fill the earth supposes that there will be room for that increase, and if everyone were to survive then the earth would not be filled but choked.

“This fourth century criticism of Augustine is pertinent to our modern attitudes to death, which evade the problems of increasing life-expectancy, overpopulation and over taxing the earth's resources ... the refusal to accept death as part of our nature betrays the (same) unwarranted assumption that we ought to be able to prolong life indefinitely”¹⁴⁸.

Julian, the happily married Bishop, disagreed fundamentally with Augustine regarding the morality of human sexuality. Julian thought that,

“it was not enough to insist as other Pelagians had done, that sexual needs could be renounced without insuperable difficulty, Julian had to go on to demonstrate that in strict theory, sexual desire did not have to be renounced at all. It was in no way corrupted. It was both irrational and impious to suggest that the sexual urge, as now used in married intercourse was in any way different from that which God had first placed in Adam and Eve. When the Christian couple stood before their priest, (as Julian and his bride had done, some twenty years before) they bore in their bodies a capacity for sexual desire and for sexual delight identical to that which God had blessed in Adam and Eve. Sexual desire might, at times, have to be controlled, but it could never be said to be ‘fallen’. By such an argument Julian brought about a dramatic shift of venue for the controversy. A storm whose first rumbles had taken the fashionable, ascetic treatises on virginity [*e.g. in the letters to Demetrias by Pelagius, Augustine and Jerome*] now came to rage above the marriage-beds of Christian laity.”

“... Far from being the symptom of a sinister dislocation of the human person, sexual pleasure was the ‘chosen instrument’ of any self-respecting marriage ... Those who accepted marriage must accept the libido for what it was, an innocent and necessary instinctual drive ... to deny this was tantamount to deny that Christian marriage was a state blessed by God ... The Christian couple were free to ‘trigger’ the sexual mechanism, and to set it aside without great difficulty, despite its solemn onset and admittedly uncontrollable conclusion. Sex was therefore what free choices made it. Good choices made for marriage and children. The social function of Christian marriage explained and entirely justified the physical facts of sex.”¹⁴⁹

Disapproving Augustine's view on the nature of the limits of human free will, Julian asserted, that with Augustine's position

“all vices would be shrugged off as no more than the inevitable foibles of a human nature that had fallen beyond recall. It was not by such dangerous

¹⁴⁸ Anne Primavesi: *op.cit.* p. 227.

¹⁴⁹ Peter Brown: *op.cit.* p. 412-413.

ruminations on human frailty that the glory of God and of his saving commands would be made manifest in the under-Christianized provinces of the West”.¹⁵⁰

Deprived of his see in his mid-30s in 418, he spent the remainder of his life in exile from Italy, at first in the East and later in Sicily.

4. The Decision on the Controversy

Pelagius was opposed in Palestine by Jerome but his teaching was approved by a Synod of Palestinian bishops at Diospolis (lydda) in December 415. Due to the pressure of the Africans Pope Innocent I replied that on the evidence sent by the Africans the Pelagians should be held excommunicate unless they repudiated such views. Three months later Innocent I died and was succeeded by Pope Zosimus (417-419). On representation by Celestius and Pelagius, the Pope Zosimus “told the Africans rather curtly that they had been listening to rather prejudiced accounts of Pelagius who on fundamentals must be accounted orthodox

Suddenly [six months later] the Pope found that his hand was forced, not by the anger of the African bishops but by the Emperor. Augustine and his friends had been taking advantage of Zosimus’ hesitations and had sent urgent representations direct to the court at Ravenna. On 30 April 418 an imperial edict [*Emperor Honorius*] banished the Pelagians from Rome as a threat to peace. The lobbying that led up to this edict is shrouded in mystery. [Riots in Rome, which were blamed on the Pelagians].¹⁵¹ Perhaps Augustine’s enlistment of government intervention was made easier by his use of the socialistic tract by the Pelagian Briton in Sicily where the strongest language is used to pillory the irresponsibility of the rich towards the poor and the maintaining of power by torture and cruelty. Here at least was plausible evidence that Pelagianism could mean social revolution ... The effect of the edict on Zosimus was crushing. He bowed to the inevitable, issued a formal condemnation of Pelagius.”¹⁵²

The views of Pelagius were condemned at the *African Council of Carthage*. The Emperor condemned the Pelagians on 30th April 418; the Council of Carthage followed suit on 1st May, 418, and the Pope Zosimus put forward his statement “*Epistula Tractoria*” which the bishops had to subscribe to. Julian d’Eclane was one of 18 Italian Bishops who refused to sign the letter issued by Pope Zosimus. They were condemned, excommunicated by the Pope and exiled by the Emperor.¹⁵³ Thus the alliance of the Roman church and the imperial power became a factor in the determination of these crucial and very sophisticated theological issues.

The Council of Carthage condemned [*anathematized*] the view that:

i) Adam was created mortal, hence death is natural for humans and is not a penalty imposed on human nature as the wages of sin.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Brown: op.cit. p. 411.

¹⁵¹ Paul Johnson writes: “Finally they [the Africans] resorted to bribery: eighty fine Numidian stallions, bred on episcopal estates in Africa, were shipped to Italy and distributed among the various imperial cavalry commanders, whose squadrons, in the last resort, imposed Augustine’s theory of grace.” *History of Christianity*; Penguin, England, 1980; p. 120.

¹⁵² Henry Chadwick: op.cit. pp. 230-231.

¹⁵³ Flavio G. Nuvolone in the *Dictionnaire do Spiritualite*, col 2902.

ii) Original sin is not present in every human, and newly born children need not be baptized to be cleansed from it.

iii) “That there is in the kingdom of heaven, or in any other place, any middle place, where children who depart from this life unbaptized live in bliss ...”

iv) that divine grace is not indispensable for good actions which we can in any case do by our own free will.¹⁵⁴

The Pelagian doctrine was finally anathematized at the Council of Ephesus in 431. A century later, the *Council of Orange [Arausiacum]*, 529, reaffirmed the condemnation of the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian positions. It also anathematized the view of predestination to evil, which seemed implicit in Augustine’s writings. Thereafter, despite many protests, the Augustinian position prevailed, by and large, as the theology of the Western church. The Eastern church continued to hold the earlier traditional positions unaffected by -what happened in the West. They had a less pessimistic attitude towards human nature after the Fall. We do not participate in the guilt of the first parents’ sin, though we inherit its consequences. They spoke of the vitiation of human nature as a powerful bias or proneness towards sin, implying that actually our sins are not inevitable and therefore we deserve blame. Thus the Antiochene, Theodore of Cyrus:

“if infants are baptized, the reason is not that they have actually ‘tasted of sin’ but that they may secure the future blessings of which baptism is the pledge.”¹⁵⁵

Original sin, as interpreted by Augustine, was taken (or granted in the church including the Council of Trent. It is basic to the great 13th century synthesis of Thomas Aquinas.

With these decisions, by about the mid-5th. century, i.e. about 400 years after the death of Jesus, the main lineaments of Christian theology had taken shape with the Augustinian synthesis and the decisions of the councils up to Chalcedon, 451. It was basically that humankind is fallen irremediably and Jesus Christ, God-man, is the redeemer for all through the church and her ministers and sacraments. What we have thereafter for many centuries up to the mid-20th century are further refinements of these themes or debates around them. The main core of doctrine was taken for granted as revealed doctrine, confirmed by the tradition of the church. In course of time the practice of the church, based on these assumptions became an argument for the truth of the assumptions themselves.

The Augustinian teachings, including the idea of the human “mass of perdition” God’s favour for the elect, the need of the church for salvation, the right of the state to intervene in safeguarding doctrine, suited the Christian powers. Church and state combined to evolve the new framework of theology. It became the ideological basis of European Christian domination and of the intolerance of others by Western Christian powers during many centuries till our times.

¹⁵⁴ ed. Henry Bettenson: *Documents*, pp. 83-84; J.N.D. Dely op.cit. pp. 360-370.

¹⁵⁵ J.N.D. Kelly: op.cit. pp. 372-374.

5. Subsequent Impact (in brief)

During the entire Middle Ages, Europe was influenced by these rather pessimistic views; of course, with redemption readily available through baptism and the ministry of the church.

Anselm of Canterbury (born about 1033) was the most influential theologian of the eleventh century. His book, “*Cur Deus Homo*”, “Why the God-Man” long influenced the explanation of soteriology in the West. He discounted the ransom theory, that humanity was in the captivity of the devil and had to be ransomed by a superior power. Anselm held that human sin being against God, divine justice demands that either satisfaction or punishment follow sin. Since God’s mercy will not damn the whole of humanity, satisfaction is necessary. Only a divine person can offer a reparation as great or greater than the evil of sin. Hence Jesus, God-man, born without original sin, voluntarily sacrificing his life for our sins, is of infinite value and makes just reparation. Thus Jesus re-established the order of relationships. This is known as the satisfaction or at-one-ment theory of redemption. This view somewhat resembles the satisfaction due to a medieval feudal lord by serfs who offend him.¹⁵⁶

“What greater mercy can be conceived than that God the Father should say to the sinner – condemned to eternal torment, and unable to redeem himself – ‘Receive my only Son, and offer Him for thyself’ while the Son Himself said – ‘Take me, and redeem thyself’ [*Cur Deus Homo: Book II, xx*]”.¹⁵⁷

Anselm’s presupposition concerning the human condition of being condemned to eternal torment indicates the continuing impact of the decisions taken in the controversies six centuries earlier.

Peter Abelard of Brittany (1097-1142), a student of Anselm, questioned this view. In his “Exposition of Romans” he strongly critiqued the traditional view of ransom: “should not Satan be regarded as more guilty than those seduced by him? Is it not unjust that the seducer should have rights over the seduced? ... The final obstacle to redemption does not lie either in Satan’s dominion or in God’s justice. It lies in the lack of love in us.”¹⁵⁸

Lovelessness is our plight. God’s rectification of that plight comes through Jesus’ act of love. Jesus came for the express purpose of spreading this true liberty of love among humans. “Wherefore, our redemption through Christ’s suffering is that deeper affection in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear love to him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found, as he himself asserts saying, greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Abelard quotes *John 15:13* to show the supreme nature of Christ’s love, *Luke 12: 4-9* to show that he came expressly to spread this true liberty of love among men and *Romans 5:5 f* to show that this liberating love is imparted by the love of God.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ William M. Thompson: *The Jesus Debate*; Paulist Press, N.Y., 1985, p. 348-352.

¹⁵⁷ *Documents of the Christian Church*: ed. Bettenson; OUP, London, 1944, pp. 194-195.

¹⁵⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromily: *Historical Theology*; T & T Clark; Edinburgh, 1978, p. 186.

¹⁵⁹ Abelard, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 280 f, quoted in Linwood Urban, op.cit. p. 121-122.

Abelard insisted on the need of human participation in salvation. His nonconformity in thought and conduct (love relationship with Heloise) brought down on him the condemnation of Bernard of Clairvaux and the church. Anselm's teaching prevailed; it was closely linked to the theory of satisfaction through the eucharistic sacrifice.

Thomas Aquinas, (1225-1274) utilized Aristotelian categories to evolve his great synthesis, accepting the Augustinian tradition on the human condition and the identity and redemptive role of Jesus Christ. He takes for granted the Fall of the human race, and redemption by an incarnated God-man. He quotes extensively Augustinian statements to develop his thought. e.g in *Summa Theologica: III*, q.i. art. i-iii, on the Incarnation, and in III, q.xlviii.i-iv on atonement.

Thomas Aquinas thus replies to the question he himself poses in scholastic fashion:

“Whether Christ's passion wrought our Salvation by way of redemption, I reply that man was bound, through sin, in two respects; first, in servitude to sin, ... because the devil, by inducing man to sin, had overcome him and therefore man was assigned to the devil as a slave [*homo servituti diaboli addictus erat*]. Secondly in respect of incurring a penalty ... according to the justice of God ... Therefore, since the passion of Christ was sufficient and superabundant for the sin of the human race and the penalty incurred, his passion was a kind of ransom, [quoddam pretium] by which we were freed from both these obligations.”¹⁶⁰ He too holds that the whole human race was corrupted by sin. [*S. T. III. q.1,art. ii ad 2am.*].

The distinction between *nature and supernature* was utilized to interpret the need of a divine saviour. It was assumed that human beings were in a state of supernatural grace in the garden of Eden and humanity fell to a natural position when they lost grace. Since then the human race could not rise up to the supernatural state without a divine intervention as by Christ.

The Protestant Reformation

Such overall thinking and religious practices of Western Christianity continued substantially unchallenged throughout the Middle Ages. The Protestant Reformation from the early 16th century challenged the hegemony of the Catholic Church. It questioned certain dogmas, the authority pattern in the church and the abuses especially among the clergy. The Protestant thinking was, however, within the overall pattern of traditional theology. They accepted the theses of the fall of humanity, Jesus as universal and necessary redeemer and the church as the unique mediator of salvation.

Their criticism of Catholic theory and of practice was about the understanding of the position of humanity after the fall, the relation between divine grace and human action in salvation, the nature of the impact of prayer and the sacraments, specially the

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, III q.xlviii art. iv.

Mass, the role of clergy and of the laity in the church, especially the authority of the Pope.

They too depended on the secular powers, which were contesting Rome and the emperor. They were concerned about the spread of Christianity through the mission of the church. Their views on economic affairs were more individualistic than the Catholic position.

They had both certain valid points of view e.g. Luther insisted on salvation not being a matter of church sacraments but of the grace of God. He gave more importance to the laity's role in the church. The Reformers stressed the importance of scripture. They did not approve of the role given to Mary and the saints in Catholic worship. Catholics on the other hand insisted on points such as the unity of the church, the role of tradition in theology, the need of a central authority, the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the value of the Mass for the living and the dead.

Much of the conflict among the churches is now seen as due to lack of understanding among the proponents of theological views, as well as the concern of the church authorities for the belief and practice of the faithful. Differences in accents regarding doctrine, personal factors, rivalries of princes and cultural differences of peoples account for this division of the churches. The conflict added to the divergences.¹⁶¹

6. Comment on the Dominant Fall/Redemption Theology

The fall/redemption theology concerning original sin and the human predicament, thus decided in the early 5th century, was not necessarily the generally accepted thinking in the church prior to Augustine. It is not clearly from the Bible, and still less from Jesus. There is no historical or scientific evidence for a human condition of immortality before the "Fall". Some of the issues decided by the church in this controversy were ones about which humans cannot have apodictic certainty: for instance, no one can know what happens after death to unbaptized babies. The many theological hypotheses on life in Paradise show how much room there was for human imagination about it.

These conclusions on the human predicament were based on some *presuppositions* assumed by church powers and theologians, e.g.:

- 1) a "state of original justice"
- 2) the nature of the alleged Fall of Adam and Eve.
- 3) consequent natural human inability to avoid evil and do good with the ordinary enabling grace of God available to all.
- 4) a harsh attitude of God towards this "fallen" humanity
- 5) how Jesus Christ is accordingly redeemer of fallen humanity

¹⁶¹ cf. David N. Power: *The Sacrifice We Offer*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1987: "There is no guarantee of any sort that the Bishops of the Council of Trent, as advised by the theologians, understood what the Reformation sought or what this system was. It is all too clear that they did not sympathize with it, as it is clear that the reformers often attacked what was base in the medieval system, without taking account of its positive values." p. 141.

- 6) communication of Christ's merits through the church
- 7) hence necessity of church for eternal salvation
- 8) male superiority buttressed by the interpretation of scripture
- 9) the dominance of man (sic) over nature
- 10) the right of secular power to enforce theological uniformity

This classical post-Augustinian moral teaching had significant consequences on church and society. The church had a great civilizing influence on Europe throughout the millennium of the Middle Ages, after the decline of the Roman empire. It was the principal spiritual mainstay of civil society. It helped consolidate family life, build the christian community around the pariah, the monastery and the diocese. It encouraged a spirituality of dependence on the grace of God and a piety around the sacraments. It fostered a sense of Christian mission strongly motivated by the conviction of saving souls by bringing persons to the church. Our critique of the negative impact of this theology is not meant to detract from its positive achievements.

7. Some of its questionable aspects

a) It interpreted the human condition and the nature and process of redemption as almost totally dependent on Jesus Christ and the church. Church membership was seen as essential for salvation. Later on the church was thought of as a "perfect society" having within itself all the means for salvation.

b) The redemption-oriented theology led to pastoral action and parish life being concerned primarily with an individualistic "care of souls".

Hence the accentuation of the sacramental ministry of the clergy. Baptism was regarded as essential for the forgiveness of original sin;¹⁶² The sacrament of penance was overly related to sexual morality to the neglect of other sins and virtues; the Eucharist was later interpreted as saving souls from purgatory; this led to a routinization and externalization of the liturgy and even to its commercialization with disastrous effects on the clergy as in the late Middle Ages. The emphasis on the sacraments as effective by their very performance (*ex opere operato*) diluted the importance of human participation and increased the significance of the (male) clergy.¹⁶³

c) The Western churches have long had a negative attitude towards human sexuality and marriage, stressing human sexuality as an occasion of sin. This contributed towards developing a hyper sex-conscious Christian spirituality. This perspective may influence christian morality even today on such issues as the use of contraceptives.

d) The interpretation of the Genesis story of the Fall presented woman as temptress and cause of the fall of man; this has greatly supported misogynist views and fostered male dominance.

¹⁶² The difficulty raised by the issue of the unbaptized person of good will was resolved by the presupposition of a baptism of desire. 13th century Thomas Aquinas conjectured that, if necessary, God would even send an Angel to enable such a person to have the essentials for salvation.

¹⁶³ cf. Tissa Balasuriya: *Eucharist and Human Liberation*; CSR, Colombo; Orbis NY and SCM London; 1977/1979.

e) Spirituality of the laity, religious, and priests has been much influenced by the negative attitude towards the human body, and the world viewed as infected by sin and hence as occasions of sin. Consequent impact on christian education in parish and school. With less accent on the freedom of the human will, Christian spirituality was understood more as a participation in the sacramental rites of the church and less in terms of an effective loving relationship with God and the neighbour. Suffering was given a value as sharing in the redemptive work of Jesus. This induced the victims of exploitation to accept their lot rather passively as willed by God, or as salvific suffering.

f) Mission of the church was understood as a duty and right to try to convert others to Christianity for their own salvation, even ‘compelling them to enter’ disregarding their rights as peoples and cultures

g) An intolerant attitude towards other religions, considered incapable of saving humans from the alleged tragic consequences of the Fall.

h) The civil authority too could use its power for converting others to the faith and for maintaining theological orthodoxy. An alliance of the church with the secular rulers for the furtherance of its mission was seen as God’s plan for human salvation.

i) Dilution of personal responsibility and neglect of the dimension of social justice and right relations in spirituality; cooperation with capitalistic powers and companies irrespective of their social and colonial exploitation, provided they helped in the mission of the church.

j) Questions of the state of humanity after the Fall, and the nature of justification by the grace of Christ were central issues debated between Catholic and the Protestants at the Reformation. In general the Reformers were more Augustinian than Pelagian. Jansenism was a more narrow or strict Augustinian trend within the Catholic church in post-Reformation times.

k) The church option in favour of the Augustinian position was somewhat of an innovation in the tradition of the church. The decision to outlaw the Pelagians and exclude their thinking from Catholic orthodoxy was, at least, a change from the earlier freedom of debate on these issues. This led to a downgrading of the human will, a neglect of nature, and of the positive value of all creation.

As Reinhold Niebuhr explains:

“The essential characteristic of Pelagianism is its insistence that actual sins cannot be regarded as sinful or as involving guilt if they do not proceed from a will which is essentially free. The bias toward evil, that is, that aspect of sin which is designated as original in the classic doctrine is found not in man’s will but in the inertia of nature. It is in other words not sin at all. Actual sin is, on the other hand, regarded as more unqualifiedly a conscious defiance of God’s will and an explicit preference for evil, despite the knowledge of the good, than in classical doctrine. While traditional Pelagianism is not sharply defined until it

takes form in the classic debates between Augustine and his critics, *it is not unfair to regard all Christian thinkers before Augustine as more or less Pelagian*. They may not define actual sin so explicitly as a perverse choice of the will as does Pelagius but they do define original sin as essentially some form of inertia in nature and history.”¹⁶⁴

Niebuhr continues,

“... There is according to J.B. Mozeley no suggestion of an enslaved will in any Christian theology before Augustine”.¹⁶⁵

Hence is it not Augustinianism that is the innovation, rather than the accent on the freedom and responsibility of the human will as in the Pelagian approach? Christianity would have been quite different if the Pelagian position was not condemned, but continued as at least a tolerated line of orthodoxy. If humans were not in sin by birth through generation, redemption would have been thought of differently: in less quasi-automatic terms in relation to Christ. Then eternal salvation would not have been thought of as necessarily linked to church membership. The church would have been more open, and the christian mission more tolerant, humane and socially conscious. Christian spirituality would have emphasized personal responsibility and authenticity, as Jesus did. The meditation on Jesus would have been much more concerning his gospel teachings of love of neighbour and love of God.

The attitude of Christians towards *other religions* would have been different, based more on a sense of equality than on one of spiritual superiority. Inter-religious dialogue would have been more Jesus-like and understanding of others. There would have been much greater common ground in the dialogue with other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Spirituality would or could have been about right relationships among persons, with all beings and with nature.

Relations with Islam would have been altogether different from what has been historically. As Aloysius Pieris comments the church considered herself supreme,

“outside of which no power could exist, let alone another religion or truth. For the only new religion that confronted Christianity in the Middle Ages was Islam and the impact of that encounter was indeed shattering. How could the fulfillment theory of the fathers, as well as the corresponding principle of *preparatio evangelica* be applied to Islam, a post-Christian religion that made open claims to be the ‘fulfillment’ of all that God had ‘prepared’ from Moses to Christ. Dialogue was not possible. Open conflict and war with Islam reinforced the church’s *renunciation of dialogue*.”¹⁶⁶

If even the approaches of Justin and the early Apologists were insufficient for this dialogue of religions, how much less open was the post Augustinian thinking for mutually respectful inter-religious dialogue?

¹⁶⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr: *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, N.Y. 1964, p. 245.

¹⁶⁵ op.cit. p. 244, from J.B. Mozeley: *The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination*. p. 125.

¹⁶⁶ Aloysius Pieris: *Love Meets Wisdom, A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Orbis, N.Y., 1988, p. 22.

The approach to secular humanity too would have been more connatural. Christians would not consider secular humanists as persons (necessarily) away from the path of virtue and grace. Christians would have found it easier to make common cause with all persons of good will striving for the full humanization of all. The issues raised by today's 'unchurched' would be thought of more understandingly.

Presently, the churches are returning, somewhat implicitly, to the position prior to the condemnation of Pelagius in accepting that other religions can be salvific. The concept of original sin as communicated by generation and affecting the eternal destiny of infants is no longer held by most Christians, especially in their practical lives. A quasi-Pelagian position would seem to be held by most persons of other religions who do not have a magical or automatic approach to salvation.

For Christianity to be able to dialogue with other faiths and secular thinking we have to go to the root causes of its intransigence, intolerance and sense of spiritual superiority. These are in the major orientation of theology, in the fourth and fifth centuries after the alliance with the empire. What eventually became orthodox teaching was a rather arbitrarily decided synthesis, enforced harshly with the support of the secular rulers. In it the dogmas on Christ, on the human condition and on the role of the church mutually supported each other, and favoured the dominant rulers, landowners, slave-owners, males, the higher clergy, and Christians vis-a vis other faiths. That theology, in so far as it still has an impact, needs to be re-evaluated and Christianity correspondingly purified of what is not from Jesus himself, or is not compatible with his core teaching.

8. How and Why Christian Theology was De-routed

That theology has been de-routed and that Christians have misrepresented Jesus is, surely, a most serious charge against a long tradition of faith and of theology. This theology has after all been at the base of so much that is good in the church and in the whole of Western civilization. We give, in summary, some of our reasons for considering that Christian theology was de-routed during the period: of the great debates of the 4th and 5th centuries.

1) Redemption in Jesus was misrepresented, by positing a form of original sin in which humans are helpless, and a theology of grace in which the keys to salvation are with the church, and that mainly under the control of the clergy.¹⁶⁷

2) It neglected the human life and social option of Jesus and made him a God-man according to a philosophical definition. The accent henceforth in Christian theology was on the divine activity of Jesus in his salvific role. His personal option to contest the social injustices of his day, even at the risk of death at the hands of Roman rulers and their Jewish collaborators was, in effect, regarded as non-essential to the redemptive process. This evacuates the passion and death of Jesus of their human meaning, and neglects the gospel narration of the problems of the time. These dilute the challenge of Jesus to his disciples.

¹⁶⁷ cf. Tissa Balasuriya: *Mary and Human Liberation*, Logos, CSR, Colombo, 1990 for a study on "Original Sin and the Christian Mission".

3) The Christians misunderstood and misrepresented the mission of Jesus and of the church. Instead of joining others in realising the values of the kingdom of God or the reign of righteousness on earth they purported to save souls for eternity; hence they were overly concerned about bringing others to the church to the neglect of witness to Jesus and his gospel.

4) This fall/redemption theology is unfair by and unfaithful to the God of the Bible and of Jesus Christ by making Christians consider themselves the favoured children of God, the males as more akin to God in Jesus, and the clergy as God's representatives on earth with power to bind others on earth and in heaven.

5) The pastoral ministry of the church concentrated on the sacramental ministrations (by the clergy) without serious regard for their spiritual meaning in personal or social life.

6) It has given the church a theology in which spirituality was made more or less automatic, individualistic, privatized, formalistic and as it were within the control of the male clergy. The life of virtue was interpreted in a more conformist manner, generally as consisting in humble obedience to God speaking through the authorities in the church and in civil society. Holiness was considered as otherworldly, the world being "secular".

7) It made Christians think themselves spiritually superior to others as God's favorites with a surer path to salvation. This has made them less humble or more arrogant and intolerant in their attitudes towards others.

8) Correspondingly, this theology has favoured the power of the male clerical hierarchy in the church. This in turn so insulates the authorities that it cannot easily see its deficiencies. This is a principal obstacle to the reform of theology itself. The hierarchy tended to substitute itself for Jesus Christ.

9) It has neglected the worth of the human being, of human freedom, the body, sexuality and responsibility.

10) It has been partly responsible for the alienation of the laity, women, working class, slaves, the poor, and colonized peoples.

11) It often impeded the church from understanding the progressive movements for intellectual freedom, scientific investigation, democracy, social justice, women's emancipation,

12) It legitimized the wrong attitudes (and sometimes persecution) of Christians against the Jews, whose Bible it arrogated to itself and interpreted against the Jews themselves.

13) While it has claimed to be the guarantee of orthodoxy and unity, this theology has led to divisions within the church throughout history from the earliest times, the most important of them being the division into the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches.

14) It was long unwilling to appreciate the spiritual riches in popular religiosity and in other religions; it has thus motivated and helped legitimize the intolerance and persecution of other religions. Thus it has justified the European Christian antagonism towards (and wars against) Islam during nearly a 1000 years.

15) Inspired by this theology, the Christian mission made somewhat common cause with the ruling powers including the colonial exploiters and colluded in the domination and exploitation of innumerable peoples from several continents during many centuries. It became the theological ideology of the conquering European peoples.

16) This theology helped, especially after 1492, in setting up the present unjust world system. It does not yet contest it adequately even intellectually.

17) Christianity was politicized in favour of the powerful, and the political establishment was legitimized as from God in Christ.

9. Politicization of Christianity and Legitimization of Empire

Constantine invited the Christian movement to play a role similar to that which the old State religion of Rome had played. The church being part of the imperial power structure, Christians did not contest its false values as in the previous periods. Popes and bishops had a respected place in the authority pattern of the empire; they were no longer in danger of martyrdom. They too were involved in the secular power struggles of the empire e.g. as between Rome and Constantinople. Popes, patriarchs, bishops and theologians were imbroigled in these political struggles with theological underpinnings or theological debates with political implications. Political patronage and power were not without their influence in the determination of the abstruse dogmatic definitions concerning the mystery of the divine – human natures in the person of Jesus Christ. The emperors had a major say in the convoking of the Councils. The favour of the emperor was often determinant in the appointment or dismissal and exiling of bishops. Later with feudalism the prince and bishop were often from the same ruling family.

This development fostered the tendency to *politicize the christian view of Jesus* after the manner of the Roman emperors. Imperial functions and powers were increasingly attributed to Jesus. Christ became a King. As Hans Schmidt put it, “no longer is the ‘political Christ’ seen as the consoler of the oppressed and downtrodden church. He is the Commander, Lawgiver and Judge of a triumphant conquering Church.” In attestation of this, Schmidt refers to Eusebius in Praise of Constantine. *This work pictures God from above as extending his power down to the emperor and assuring the latter of victory over opponents and enemies.*¹⁶⁸

The emperor is now supported by the blessing of Christ. “The result is that Christology no longer fosters the end of exploitation, but legitimates a new and imperial war machine. ... The implications for soteriology are perverse too. Rather a spelling the end of human exploitation, Christian soteriology becomes a cult of

¹⁶⁸ William M. Thompson: *The Jesus Debate*, Paulist Press, N.Y., p.310.

conquering the masses, piling up conversions, and demonstrating the imperial hegemony of an imperial Christ.”¹⁶⁹

This trend was somewhat countered by the martyrs who did not accept the emperor as divine, and later on by the monks who opted for a life style away from the cities of the empire. The mystics of later periods express a different personal relationship to Jesus, in love, peace and justice.

Thus the core message and the meaning of his life was neglected. The connection between Jesus being saviour and the socially liberative aspect of his life and death was overlooked.

As William M. Thompson comments on the Nicene interpretation, “But what happens to the ministry, the death and the resurrection of Jesus? This could quickly lead to an unhistorical view of the Divine who can get along quite well without the Jesus of real history. The biblical view is, after all, the belief that the entire life of Jesus is revelatory of the Divine. If one detaches that entire life from the belief in the Divine – contracting the entire Jesus event into the birth of the Logos – then the door is open to a view of the Holy Mystery no longer governed by the Jesus event. This was clearly not Nicaea’s intention. but the very ‘sense’ of Nicaea’s doctrine genre as well as the later history of Christology bears witness to this tendency... This has important consequences for soteriology too: an eclipsing of Jesus’ humanity can lead to an eclipsing of the very human world which he entered to save us.”¹⁷⁰

Some tend to regard this as alright for that time, as human understanding grows with time. This was not a growth of doctrine but a regression in the understanding of the Jesus’ message from the apostolic days to Christianity becoming the Establishment’s religion. Jesus instead of being a radical transformer of social relations became a captive in the religious and political structures of those who claimed to be his disciples and authentic, exclusive interpreters of his message. They attributed to him claims he himself perhaps never made concerning his identity and function in human salvation history. Jesus being no longer visible on earth, the church authorities constituted themselves the residuary legatees of the salvific role and privileges attributed to him.

When those, who determine theological questions and priorities in mission are the power holders in a society it is to be expected that the issues discussed and emphasized would not be ones which would challenge their position and privileges. When education and theological literacy are limited and controlled by privileged males, theology is likely to be elitist and beneficial to them.

Historically it is a fact that as long as theology was the reflection of the privileged in society, it did not bring out the socially radical meaning of the life and death of Jesus. Even today those who are in socially comfortable settings tend to be complacent about the social implications of the gospel. It is only with the widespread reflection among the underprivileged that theology becomes the agent of social

¹⁶⁹ *op.cit.*, p. 310.

¹⁷⁰ William M. Thompson, “The Jesus Debate, A Survey and Synthesis” Paulist, N.Y., 1985, p. 309.

emancipation. Persons who experienced suffering and reflected on it contributed to this sensitivity even from within affluent positions.

10. Conclusion

Since these ill effects are from, or associated with, a theology that is not from Jesus, or the Bible and is not necessarily from the early church tradition, we can conclude that there has been a grievous de-routeing of theology from the teaching and life example of Jesus. In this sense Christians have misinterpreted Jesus. The radical demands of the gospel were blunted. Christians, have in effect, tended to worship a god of their own creation that favoured them and their domination over others. The idols Molloch, Mammon and Mars have not been far from the temples of Christianity inspired by this theology. Pragmatic hedonism could co-exist with much church-going and prayer; these did not relate to genuine love and sharing and efforts to ensure justice in exploitative societies. This theology of original sin is perhaps the original sin of subsequent Christianity, handed down from generation to generation as unquestionable, sacred tradition legitimizing the selfishness of Christians.

The core values of Jesus have been disregarded by the churches. Have not the churches merited the reproach of Jesus to the religious leaders of his day: they failed to see the beam in their eyes while they convert other peoples to the church?

The rethinking of this theology from its basic presuppositions should therefore be a fundamental task of Christian renewal in our time. The church has been doing this in many ways in its modern renewal; it needs to be undertaken more radically going to the root causes of our misdirection.

It is more important to recall that all these affirmations about the condition of humanity in the garden of Eden, the fall and the conferring of grace by Christ through the mediation of the church are based *on theological presuppositions and assumptions* that cannot be proved, cannot be known by the human intelligence, and have, as such, not been revealed by God in Jesus.

These assumptions and conclusions discriminate against vast sections of humanity. They cannot therefore be from God in Jesus, for God is love and cares for all. God has no favourites. [Acts 10:34]. Such assumptions have had the unfortunate effect of diverting the attention of the church from the real problems of realizing on earth the values of the kingdom as preached by Jesus. They are a misrepresentation of the objective of the mission and preaching of Jesus. The traditional theology presented a Jesus Christ of the mythical interpretations, theological assumptions and imagination that fitted the needs of the powerful of the times. They do not explain or respond to the position of many who are unchurched or secularists all over the world.

If for 300 years Christianity understood the teaching of Jesus and even the writings of St. John and St. Paul without a definite idea of a fallen human nature, or of the absolute necessity of Jesus being God equal to the Father, then they were an adequate interpretation of the old or new testaments. Many of the church leaders and teachers of the day were martyrs for their faith. Are we not entitled to regard such views as faithful to Jesus?

If on the other hand, the definitions of Nicene and Chalcedon opened the way for a subordination of the church and theology to the emperors and a neglect of the principal love command of Jesus, would it be wrong to regard this subsequent period as one of the captivity of the church to the imperial power in which Christians misread the teaching of Jesus in its core message, and de-routed Christian theology?

RE-ROOTING OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Chapter 5

RETHINKING NEEDED

By re-rooting we mean a return to the roots and source of Christianity. This is primarily to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. It will, of course, be stated that such roots can hardly be discovered now, after nearly twenty centuries. Further faith must be accepted as it is now in its historical evolution, under the guidance of the Spirit.

While it is true that there can be much debate on intricate questions of theology concerning the teachings of Jesus, we can come to fairly clear conclusions as to what the core teachings of Jesus are. During the past decade I have put this question to Christian groups in far apart places as Hong Kong, Sydney, London, Uppsala, Rome, Budapest, San Paolo, Mexico City, New York, Washington, Nairobi. Cairo, New Delhi, Karachi, and Colombo, as well as to international sessions of priests, religious and laity. Everywhere the group generally replied that the core teaching of Jesus is that God is love and we must love our neighbour as ourselves. To this were added variations to include the message of forgiveness, freedom, service, giving one's life for others, healing, justice, peace, compassion etc. All these, they would generally agree, are containable in the core message of love of God and neighbour. Hardly anyone would mention the later interpretations given in Christian dogma about the need of redemption by baptism, and sanctification through the sacraments.

When asked about the identity of Jesus they would speak of him as God, as man, as saviour and friend. But few would give exact reference to the theological explanations as to how Jesus is God, and how the divine persons "proceed" in the Trinity. In other words, though the formula of the Nicene creed is recited every Sunday at Mass, few remember it as the main inspiration of their practical faith in Jesus.

These persons and groups generally agree that the teaching of Jesus, as reported especially in the gospels, is rather simple and straightforward. When the story of the historical evolution of the dogmas, through acute debate is presented to them, they are happy to hear of the life of the early Christians and of the freedom in theological debate that was characteristic of the first four centuries of the church, especially before the Constantinian compromise.

All these indicate to us, from a long and wide experience of theological and spiritual ministry in many parts of the world, that both Christians and others have a fairly clear idea of what Jesus regarded as important in his message to humanity through his life work. In that sense the re-rooting could be an effort of the churches to return to the better inspirations of Christians today, when they reflect deeper on the

meaning of Jesus for the world, inspite of the later elaborations of his teaching by his followers from different schools of thought. In fact the same simplicity and radicality can be seen with reference to the core teachings other great religious leaders, such as the Buddha.

1. A lesson of history: rethinking on past controversies

It is now generally admitted in inter-Christian ecumenical dialogues that in the past there was much misunderstanding of the intentions and language of each other. The churches now admit that they did not then listen to each other adequately attentively and with empathy. The language used had also been misunderstood by both sides. They now see that each had something to learn from the others. They have expressed regret for the conflictual and competitive approaches that long marred inter-Christian relations.

Catholics now see that the Reformers had certain valid criticism of the Catholic Church. Likewise the Protestants now realise that the Catholics too had much that is valuable for all. Some differences in dogma continue. The Protestants object to the last two definitions of the pope viz: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary. Similarly the Greek Orthodox Church does not accept the Immaculate Conception because they do not believe in original sin in the same way as the Catholics; and they too object to the last two papal definitions. But the relations between the churches are much better. Vatican II, with its more conciliatory approach, tried to undo some of the damage of the former struggles. The World Council of Churches is itself an embodiment of this open, ecumenical spirit.

Reviewing, in like manner, the debates of the 4th and 5th centuries, we may see misunderstandings among those involved, for instance concerning language. Further the doctrinal issues are not so clear from divine revelation. There is room for genuine difference of opinion among disciples of Jesus, on many matters decided by those Councils. Views condemned by the Councils as at Nicene in 325 and at Ephesus in 431, were considered orthodox for decades or centuries prior to such decisions. Further the roles of the emperors in the convoking and perhaps controlling of Councils, is of doubtful theological value.

In the first few centuries the church was much more open to dialogue within the church and with other beliefs and practices like Judaism and paganism and philosophies like Platonism. If that openness had continued, the history of Christianity and of the world would have been different. This is seen better when we consider that Subordinationism was a general view among the Fathers towards the Trinitarian and Christological problem, and Pelagianism was an accepted approach among many concerning the human situation in relation to sin and salvation.

Thus *Justin* was in dialogue with Judaism and paganism, when the church was not in a position of dominance. He presents Christ in a way that could be understood in the background of Greek thought, the Jewish tradition and the prologue of St. John. His concept of the Logos as present in all from creation, though understood as fully only in Christ Jesus, left more room for respect for other faiths and cultures than subsequent theology did.

Origen's creative thinking shows how much the early theologians of Christianity had to think out their faith in intellectual responses to the challenges of the philosophical thinking of the day. Some of his speculative propositions are close to issues in Indian religions and philosophy e.g. the diverse manifestations of the spirit of God, (the *avatars* of God, sent to earth by God as and when there is need of purification in the world), the chain of reality linking all to the eternal reality (monism, pantheism, pan-en-theism), transmigration of spirits (re-incarnation), and the optimistic approach towards the ultimate salvation of all persons (samsara, or the cycle of births and deaths terminating in Nirvana or Moksha).

If these perceptions had been retained in Christian theology, subsequent Christian-Moslem and Christian-Hindu dialogue could have been much more felicitous. The doctrines on the Trinity and the Incarnation made dialogue with Islam almost impossible. Islam was a radical affirmation of monotheism, in the face of Christianity which seemed to dilute the Absoluteness of God. The dialogue with Buddhism too would have been easier, as Origen's thought relates better to Indian philosophy and religion. The religions of the Far East would have been better appreciated with their emphasis on right relations in human society. Thus Confucianism would, have been seen as more compatible with a Pelagian type approach to life. The meditation and search for self-purification in the Asian religions would have been appreciated, and their religious practices given credit, rather than been branded as superstition. The values of the primal religions of Africa would likewise have been respected, if a spirit of openness and humility had inspired the Christian mission.

The positions of Origen were a result of his own ingenious reflection on the Christian scriptures in his cultural context, especially of Platonism. Hence we need not give them the value of divine revelation. This may however also be said of the later elaborations of Christian theology as in the Nicene and Chalcedon Councils, when Christian theology was decided from a position of power and dominance. Though Origen was condemned by a church general council 300 years after his death and much of his prodigious works destroyed, he had a profound impact on Christian theology and spirituality during many centuries.

2. Some Modern Challenges to Theology

At the beginning of the modern era, the Christianity that came back to dialogue with the Asian and African religions had unfortunately already got ossified in its doctrines. It was almost irrevocably tied to their elaboration in terms of the greco-roman philosophies and religiosity, and over self-confident of its power, superiority and divine favour. Unfortunately, by the turn of the Middle Ages, much of the church was widely corrupt and had lost its gospel savor. Neither the theology nor the ministry of the church was of much avail to bring the Christians in Europe to a sense of greater humanity. Christians and churches benefitted from the development of the exploitative world system after 1492, and supported it rather than oppose it.

This theological misdirection had terrible consequences in our countries. It was a perversion of the life and teaching of Jesus, who was, in effect a captive of the Christian churches. His liberating message was clouded. This permitted the brutalizing of the Christians themselves, who, as disciples of the compassionate Jesus, should have been the champions of human life.

The chief concern of the mission of the Church during the period of European colonialism should have been the conversion of the Europeans to Jesus and his values. If the church had concentrated on this the church might have suffered martyrdom with the exterminated peoples. The history of Europe and of the peoples of the Americas, Africa and Asia would then have been different. Till recent times, the few who criticized or struggled against it have been usually marginalised, if not directly opposed by the church. Poor Christians were also oppressed by these forces, but they have not been powerful in the churches. It is only in our generation that a theology is again emerging for their liberation. For centuries the prevailing theologies have been allied to the dominant powers in society, even if they inspired care for its victims and suggested marginal social reforms.

At present also there is a similar invasion of the poor countries by the rich ones, which are still mainly European and call themselves Christian. Even today most rich Christians and their theologies do not stand up for right relations among persons and peoples. Might, still, claims to be right. Power is vaunted as if justice is a matter of might. The Gulf massacre of January-February 1991 was a clear instance of how Christian powers can justify war.

Today too Christians benefitting from such plunder may ignore the illgotten nature of their wealth, land and power. They may even feel justified and adopt rather complacent attitudes towards the worsening condition of the poor in most countries. The churches and Christians share in the justificatory myths of the dominant societies, such as that American society is one of healthy individualism in which each person can come up through honest hard work. The individualistic spirituality of the churches was a cause and effect of this theology. Many in the affluent capitalist countries do not think that the policies of their governments and multinational corporations are bad news for the poor peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The attitudes of the local elites of the third world also may encourage them to think well of these relationships. The challenge for the present generation is not to bemoan the past with a paralysing sense of guilt. We are not responsible for past centuries. We have to relate to the present consciousness inherited from the past.

The churches are trying to catch up with the exigencies of the modern world, in a somewhat wobbling manner due to the resistance to progressive changes within them. Christian theology has been changing considerably during the 20th century particularly since the 1960s. The research of scholars, the rapid changes in the world, and the rethinking within the churches contributed to these changes. The Second Vatican Council 1962-1965 and the deliberations of the World Council of Churches have given legitimacy and a thrust to these movements.

These changes, though long overdue and welcome, are too slow, too piecemeal and too inadequate to meet the needs of people, of Nature and the world as a whole. Changes that have been directed from the centers of power and controlled by the hierarchical leadership do not usually reflect the people's problems with any sense of grave urgency.

Power in the churches has been generally exercised by the affluent, male, white Christians of Western Europe and North America. They have usually been immune or

insensitive to the pressures felt by poorer people in the rest of the world. Due to this, till challenged by the victims of the oppressive structures, Christian theology did not respond in adequate depth to certain *urgent issues*, viz.:

- a) Nature and its care or destruction by humans
- b) gender relations in society and church, the liberation of women
- c) social class relations, affluence and poverty, exploitation
- d) race and ethnic relations; white domination, world apartheid world system and its structured injustice, especially since 1492
- e) culture relations; multi-culturalism in society and church religions: their core values, ambiguity, inter-religious relations; secularity, the areligious, the unchurched.

Dealing with these required a critical evaluation of the presuppositions of traditional Christian white, male, dominant theology. The issues involved include its interpretations of God, the mystery of the Transcendent, God as Spirit; the identity, role and mission of Jesus Christ: redemption and the mission of the church and its renewal; the efforts at integral human liberation, and Christian participation in them.

3. Second Vatican Council 1962-1965

i) Orientation and Limitations

Vatican II (1962-1965) was a Catholic Church Council of bishops, mainly from Europe or of European heritage. Hence their concerns were primarily intra-church ones, seen largely from a European or Euro-North American point of view. Some of the main directives by Vatican II for the reshaping of theology were :

- a) Greater freedom in the interpretation of the scriptures accepting the fruits of scientific scholarship in biblical studies;
- b) The church is a community of the “people of God”, in which authority is “collegial”... ultimately vested in the pope and the college of bishops;
- c) Other Christian churches belong to the body of Christ – though imperfectly; hence encouragement of the ecumenical movement and search for Christian reunification;
- d) Greater freedom in the liturgy ... for use of Bible, the vernacular languages, and different cultures by local churches;
- e) Centrality of God as love, and of love of God and neighbor, not accentuating fear and law;
- f) Mission of the church is witness to love of God and message of Jesus. A critique of earlier methods of evangelization; need of respect for others and for human freedom;
- g) Church open to the world, to secular research, trends and movements, listening responsively to the Spirit of God expressed through them;

h) Understanding of Jews and other religions, recognizing their spiritual values from God; inter-religious dialogue and social action;

i) Updating teaching on person, family, society and world ... accent on justice and peace;

j) Consequent restructuring of relationships within the church: pope and bishops, bishops and clergy, religious and laity; formation, pastoral life, administration.

ii) Limitations ... Inadequacies ... Shortcoming

Vatican II is undoubtedly the greatest influence for reform within the Catholic Church since the time of Constantine. It has been profoundly transforming the life of the Catholic church ever since good Pope John XXIII convoked it in January 1959. Nevertheless, like all human agencies, the Council was time and culture bound. Viewing it with the benefit of hindsight, some of its inadequacies or shortcomings are:-

a) Vatican II was not sensitive to the ecological hazards involved in the scientific and industrial civilization that seemed triumphant at the time. Ecology and the respect for nature received little attention from the Council.

b) The rights of women were hardly an issue for Vatican II, which like all the other church councils, was an assembly of males. Towards its end, 12 laywomen and 10 religious women were admitted as “auditores” listeners – a token presence. The consciousness of rights was already stirring the secular world: and a decade later 1975 was the United Nations’ year of women. The Council, however, still using sexist language of a male God, was blissfully ignorant of the grave issues that the feminist movement was to raise in the succeeding decades concerning biblical hermeneutics, patriarchy, the ordination of women to church ministry etc.

c) It lacked a critical analysis’ of the social structures of countries and particularly of the world as one system of economy, political power and natural resources. The economic inequalities within nations, and internationally, have grown during the 26 years since 1965, but the mainline Catholics in the rich countries have not been concerned about it in any serious manner. Vatican II was enacted in the 1960s when there was hope of world prosperity. A belief in the possibility of developing the poorer countries with the transfer of capital and technology created an international climate of optimism. Since then many factors such as excessive consumerism, the world economic recession, oil price hikes, the debt crisis, the running down of the earth resources, the ecological crisis have worsened the condition of the world’s poor.

d) Vatican II did not analyze critically the so called international order as a racist political organization under white domination, derived from the expansion of Europe to the rest of the world since 1492. It was not sensitive to the world system’s injustices, though it was conscious that the age of European colonialism was passing away.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ cf. my Planetary Theology: Orbis. NY., 1984, Chapter on World System.

e) In inter-cultural relations the Council were open to the need of replacing Latin with the local languages, and corresponding changes in the liturgy. The Council was conscious of the process of secularization that was impacting Western society. But it could not anticipate the extent to which it would affect the life of the churches such as on people's understanding of religion and the mission of the church, the practice of sexual morality, the rapid decline in the frequentation of the sacraments, the "unchurching" of perhaps the majority of Christians in many Western countries, the unprecedented fall in the number of vocations to the priesthood in the Western countries, even though these trends could already be perceived in some countries, such as France, Belgium and Holland.

The Council dealt with the problems that were in the consciousness of the European church leaders in the 1950s and early 60s. It did not focus its attention sufficiently to some future trends in the church. By that time the demographic trends in the world indicated that the Catholic church would, in the coming decades, become increasingly, a church of the southern hemisphere, particularly Latin America. The changes proposed in its power structure foreseen were hardly commensurate with this shift in its membership. Nor was there a perception of the major theological developments that were emerging from the Third World and were to surface as theologies of liberation in the 1970s.

f) Inter-religious relations were dealt with only marginally. They were not a major concern of the Council – the bishops from Asia and Africa were like novices at the Council. They themselves, thanks to their formation, were almost as European, or Roman, as the Western bishops. Therefore the issues relating to the dialogue with the other religions were not researched in depth. Questions such as the presence of the Spirit of God and divine revelation in other religious traditions, the corresponding role of Jesus Christ in human salvation were not dealt with in depth by the Council.

While the Council was open to inter-Christian ecumenical relations it reaffirmed the traditional Catholic position of the dual source of revelation in scripture and tradition and the authority of the Catholic Church to interpret the Bible authentically.

The achievements of the Vatican Council were due to the spirit of humility, openness and friendliness practiced and recommended by Pope John, the years of preparatory work of the theologians (not always understood or supported by the ecclesiastical authorities), and the pastoral approach of the Council Fathers. Its limitations were due, in part, to the nature of its composition and methodology for theological reflection. The Council fathers, being bishops, were elderly and of a middle or upper class life style. They had little experience of the sufferings of the poor or were not accustomed to reflecting theologically on social issues. The victims of the systems of injustice and discrimination such as the poor, women, youth, the oppressed races, the marginalized religions or even the Catholic laity were not active Council participants.

The strategies for the implementation of the Council decisions were left to the Pope, bishops conferences and the local bishops. This has not favored the participation of the disadvantaged groups in the ongoing reform of the church. The

Roman Curia has been able to reestablish a good measure of control over the church through the nomination of bishops and administrative procedures.

This section has referred to the Catholic Church. The Protestant and Orthodox Churches too face grave challenges. Their responses have been expressed around the activities of the World Council of Churches. I have not discussed them here.

4. Transformation of churches – too little and too slow

The churches have changed much since the 1960s but these are insufficient to induce Christians to respond as they can and should to the present main issues of world justice, women's rights, care of Nature, other religions, and even justice within nations. Throughout the Catholic world new church structures were set up as a follow up of the Council. Among these were the diocesan and national secretariats or commissions for liturgy, catechetics, the laity and lay apostolate, justice and peace, social action, inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, and sometimes a desk for women's concerns. These have to operate within the parameters determined for them by the local bishop or the country's bishops conference. Their finances are also often subject to episcopal approval.

Where the church leadership has been keen on renewal and relating to the people's problems great changes have taken place. The widespread growth of the movement of Basic Christian Communities, as in the Latin American churches, has meant a significant change in the decision making process among these groups and sometimes in the other church institutions also. They have helped in the growth of a conscious and active laity that is engaged in the social transformation of their countries. They have been in the forefront of the development of new theological insights in the church. Liberation theology has been the fruit of their reflections along with the theologians associated with them.

Despite these progressive trends, the majority of Christians in many countries are still individualistic in their understanding of religion and conservative in their social options. Most church organizations are still concerned with the inner church issues. The leadership of the churches at the local and sometimes even national levels are also at this level. They do not exert themselves strongly to try to resolve the critical personal, social, national and international issues even at the level they can be more effective in.

On the other hand powerful conservative movements are developing in many countries. In the United States the right wing groups assert themselves as more genuinely Christian than those who are committed to social justice, inter-religious dialogue and peace. They have the support of many theological seminaries, indicating that the fewer clergy of the future will not necessarily be of the progressive insights of the Second Vatican Council. Even where basic Christian communities or people's movements with persons of other persuasions are strong, there is often a clash within the church between progressives and conservatives.

The central church authorities often demand that progressives prove their Christian credentials. Conservatives are easily presumed to be good Christians. In recent years there is a noticeable trend favoring the appointment of socially and theologically conservative priests as bishops. Thus the hierarchy of a country like

Holland, that was in the forefront of many desirable changes, has over the years been virtually domesticated through the appointment of docile conservative bishops.

The 1985 Catholic Synod of Bishops, which surveyed the implementation of Vatican II, remarked that the documents of the Council were not sufficiently well diffused in the church. Many in the church, specially among the laity, were unaware of them and of their import. For the younger generation, below about 40 years of age, the Council is merely an event in history. They have little idea of how and what changes were effected. They take the present position as traditional and normal. Hence they are not much motivated to seek further changes.

The slackness and insufficiency of the response of the churches to the demands of the modern situations is due not only to their self interest, but also their misunderstanding of the message of Jesus and of the mission of the church.

5. Some Tools/Criteria for Evaluating Theological Doctrines

In *“Mary and Human Liberation”* [Logos. March/July 1990] I discussed a twofold criterion for critically evaluating theologies. I recall them briefly here, in addition to what is in pages 14-19 of this work.

A Twofold Criterion for Evaluating Christian Theologies

The sources of Catholic theology, the Bible and Tradition are both subject to a critical evaluation. The Bible has a core teaching of love and unselfish service which are truly meaningful, redeeming for all humanity. This is part of the primordial religious intuition, inspiration, experience and example of the Jewish people in the Old Testament and of Jesus and his disciples in the New.

However there are many elements in the Bible which are less praise worthy or are even undefendable specially as they impinge on the rights of human beings.

Likewise in tradition too there are different interpretations of texts which have led to conflicts among Christians, and teachings of the Church that have been intolerant and harmful to others – eg. concerning other religions or women.

We propose a twofold principle – one negative and one positive – for evaluating theology. It is derived from the love command of Jesus – the core of his message.

a) Negatively

Any theology authentically derived from God in Jesus must be loving, respectful and fulfilling of all sections of humanity of all places and times. This is the nature of the just and loving God revealed in the basic (and better) inspiration of the Bible specially by Jesus. Hence any element in a theology that insults, degrades, dehumanizes and discriminates against any section of humanity of any time or place cannot be from God in Jesus. Any such element in Christian theology is an unjustifiable intrusion by later theologizers and should be exorcised from the body of acceptable Christian theology. As Jesus says “from their fruits you will know them”. Fruits of hate, and insult cannot come from Jesus or God.

This gives a principle for the purification of a prevailing and predominant Christian theology. If there are such degrading elements in a theology their source must be searched. Perhaps they are an illegitimate inference from an acceptable source, or else the source itself may be a presupposition that is not justified or justifiable. In the latter case, that source itself must be very critically analyzed and evaluated. We must be careful not to attribute to God what is of mere human elaboration. This principle can lead to a review of much of the traditional construct of Western Christian theology.

b) Positively

Since all good comes from God everything truly humanizing and ennobling in any religion or ideology is also ultimately from the divine source, and must be respected as such. As God wills the happiness and fulfillment of all persons and peoples, the more a theology leads to genuine human self realization of all persons and peoples, the closer it is to the divine source.

This principle of critique is a rational and an ethical one. It can be applied to any religion or ideology. It is based also on the central teaching of Jesus Christ. It takes makes the core message of Jesus the touchstone of good theology. Should not Christian theology have this as its guiding principle? It affirms God in Jesus Christ as a God of love who cares for all irrespective of any divisions even of creed. It affirms the centrality of universal love which is made a measuring rod of the authenticity of any sacred text, church teaching or practice.

Naturally it will seem both simple and exacting. But so is the Gospel of Jesus. He himself purified the religion of the day. He struggled against the wrong interpretations of the Law and the Prophets that imposed unnecessary burdens on the people in the name of religion.

There would naturally be differences of opinion in the application of this principle. But the principle as such would seem to have a validity both in relation to the teaching of Jesus and human rationality. It gives us a way of applying the key value of the Jesus Gospel to the theologies that claim to be from him. It helps us liberate Christian theologies from presentations of God that are unfaithful to the Jesus teaching e. g. of God as intolerant, partial and cruel or fostering inhumanity, dehumanization and exploitation of human beings. It thus constrains us to seek deeper into the origins of certain theological teachings which cannot be from God in Jesus and are of purely human sectarian sources.

The critical evaluation of theologies may seem at first sight a weakening and dilution of the Christian faith. What is desired is not the diminishing of faith in Jesus the Christ but a purifying and deepening of it, in our context of a pluralist one world. Such a critical dialogue can help relativize what is not certain in theology, and give more attention to what is the core message of the faith in God communicated by Jesus.

While the particular presuppositions and some conclusions of religions and theologies may tend to divide the followers of the religions, the *core message* of the religions concerning human life and human fulfillment can help bring peoples together in mutual understanding and respect and in common action for the good of

all. This can be a better, deeper and more lasting basis for inter-religious cooperation at all levels, including social justice and human liberation. Such a dialogue can disengage the core message of Christianity from its encrustation in a particular culture or even theological school. The faith in and discipleship of Jesus can then be seen in clear perspective. It can perhaps be harmonized with the core message of the other world religions – if these too can be seen in their essence beyond their particular religio-cultural expressions.

These two principles – the exclusion due to negativity, and the approval due to positive contribution to human fulfillment – give us two valuable approaches for evaluation of religions including the present theology and the tradition of the Churches.

The Bible and tradition are both subject to the norm of excluding what is degrading to human beings. When we find that some teachings of Christian theologies have been harmful, injurious and degrading to human beings, or legitimizing – grave injustice, consciously or unconsciously we should institute a critical re-examination of such theology. This is required for the good of the Church itself. Jesus did so in his day. He was critical of what passed for religiosity but was harmful for people. The reform of the Church has come through such auto critique.

This principle can help evaluate the presuppositions and content of Western Christian Theology. What leads to killing of human beings because of religious beliefs cannot be from God and Jesus. Long internecine conflicts of religions is an indication that some of their presuppositions and even teachings have elements which are not from God but are expressions of human selfishness and perhaps communal aggrandizement.

The presuppositions drawn from one world view or culture may not be seen as mere presuppositions (proven or improvable) if the corresponding theology is limited to the peoples who draw their inspiration from the same culture. Europeans will not normally find difficulty in accepting Adam and Eve as the first parents of all humanity; and their fate in the garden of Eden is not such a tragedy for them as the teachings of the Church provide them a way out of the debacle through the Church itself. But other peoples may not necessarily accept this story and its consequences.

A doctrine, seemingly harmless in one context, may have bad effects in another. Thus Christian theology elaborated in relative isolation in Europe of the middle ages may be harmful in a plural context of different religions and social systems.

Such an approach can also help us understand why many in the West are no longer Christians. They reject it for different reasons such as rationalism, atheistic secularism, secular humanism or Marxism. Secularization is often a rejection by people of the teachings of a religion they do not find respectful for them, or necessary as an explanation of the meaning of life. This is not necessarily the rejection of the divine (as in an atheistic secularism) but the affirmation that a given interpretation concerning the divine is not acceptable to them. Secularization has helped in the purification of religion and religious teachings. The ‘secular’ world has thus taught the Churches to purify their theologies on many issues, such as about the concern for

nature, gender and family relations, social justice, race' relations, value of cultures and peoples religiosity, religious tolerance, human freedom, and democracy.

Other schools of thinking are also in crisis as the world is far from experiencing continuing progress; Western civilization is in a moral crisis and searching for values on which to rebuild itself. Marxist socialism too has failed to solve the problems concerning the ultimate meaning of life even when it has contributed towards a more just social order. The Churches are now together searching their identity as disciples of Jesus in more open dialogue with the world religions, they considered as pagans till recently.

This principle of critical evaluation in relation to the degrading and dehumanizing impact on any human persons or groups is applicable to other religions too. Thus if any teaching or practice of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Shintoism, Judaism or any religion looks down on other religions; considers itself as exclusively possessing the truth, is intolerant of others, or marginalizes a section of humanity such as the poor or women, to that extent it is subject to self purification. For this would be against its own better inspirations. It cannot be from God, the Absolute who cares for and loves all humankind, nor can it be a principle of genuine enlightenment that liberates persons to lasting happiness.

These criteria for critical evaluation are presented in a schema on page 1 of Chapter 6, accepting the limitations of such a formulation.

6. Third World and Feminist Theologies

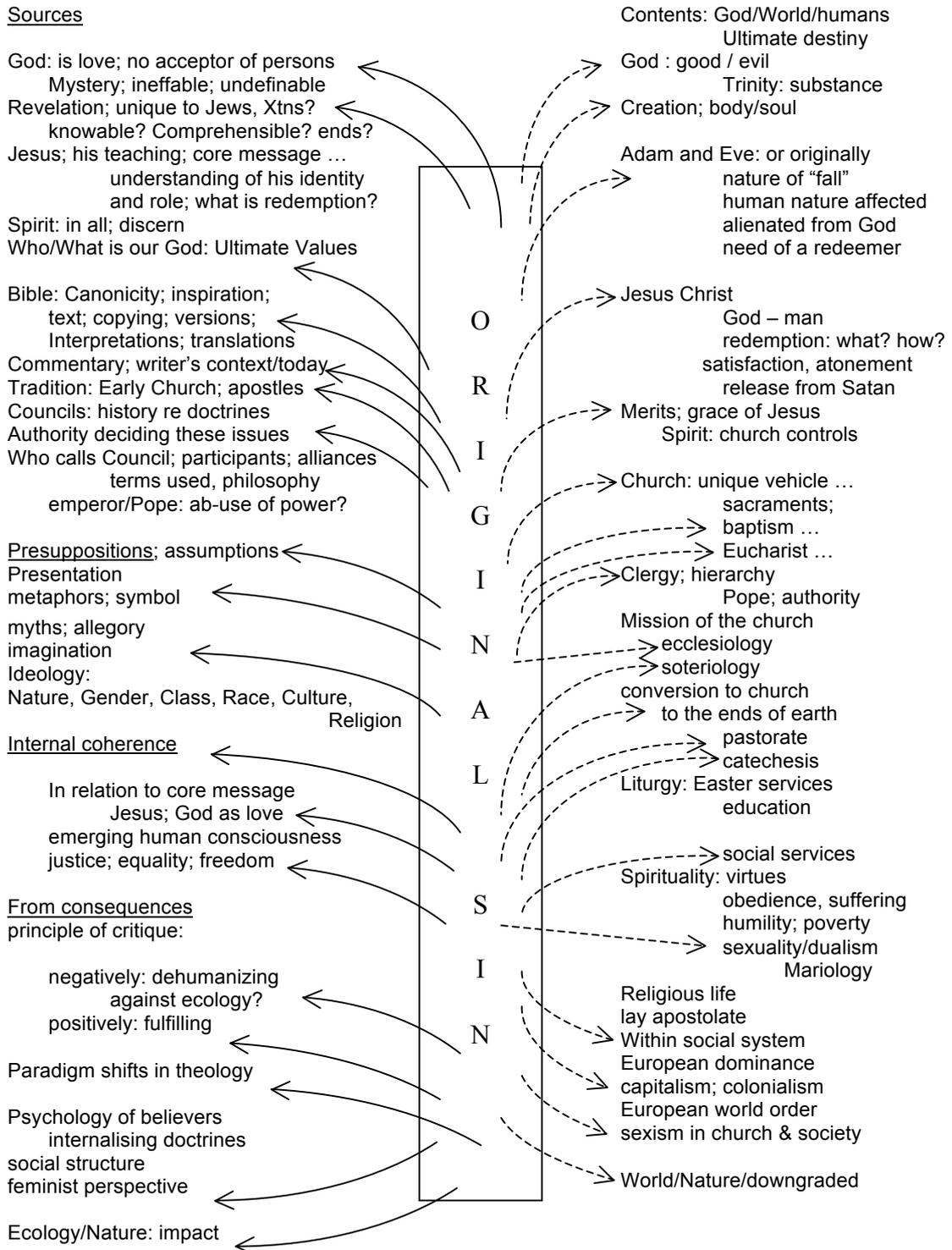
During the past 25 years Christian theology has developed much in the “Third World”, among the Afro-Asian diaspora in the Americas, and in the global women’s movement. In the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) we have searched for relevant theologies in our situations. The Afro-Americans make a strong critique and vibrant rethinking based on their experience of racial oppression. The Latin American Liberation theologies stress social analysis and a re-reading of the Bible from the point of view of the oppressed. African theologians highlight race exploitation and cultural oppression. The Asians are concerned with all these as well as the inter-religious relations and the global reality. Feminist theologians critique all theology from their consciousness of structured male domination in society and the religions.

The effort of this work is to push the discussion further with a critical evaluation of two main issues: the human predicament and the identity and role of Jesus Christ in human redemption/salvation/liberation looking into the history of Christian theology also. This can help further the theological revival that the post 1965 generation of Christian theologians have undertaken by strengthening the critical analysis and positive insights beyond the very important contributions so far made by these thinkers and movements for liberation. The motivation for personal liberation, commitment to social justice, gender liberation, inter-racial understanding and inter-religious dialogue as well as for the care of nature can be profounder when we see how these are intimately connected to the core teaching of Jesus. The formulations of dogma which have impeded just and fair relationships among these can be seen with their limitations in a more global perspective.

Chapter 6

EVALUATION OF CLASSICAL DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN

A. Tools/Criteria for Analyzing Theology



B. Presuppositions and Assumptions

Theological affirmations about the condition of humanity in the garden of Eden, the fall and the conferring of grace by Christ through the mediation of the church are based *on theological presuppositions and assumptions* that cannot be proved, cannot be known by the human intelligence, and have, as such, not been revealed by God in Jesus. Theological imagination seems to have been exercised on several issues such as:

- i) A state of original justice of humanity at the beginning.
- ii) A Fall of all humanity from this state due to original sin.
- iii) The transmission of original sin by human generation, implicitly considering sexuality as the process of the communication of original sin. This related also to the problem of when and how the individual soul is ‘implanted’ in the body by God?
- iv) Impact of original sin on human life on earth, on nature, work, child bearing, relationship between the sexes, death as the “wages of sin” ... all punishments by God?
- v) Inability of humans to save themselves from this Fall, without a special grace of God, in addition to universal enabling grace.
- vi) The need of a redeemer, who could reconcile humanity with God by an adequate satisfaction (or similar explanation). Identity of Jesus Christ as the divine – human redeemer.
- vii) Redemption of humanity by Jesus: transforming fallen human nature and reconciling humanity to God through his death. Nature of the process of redemption, relevant to the nature of the fall, which is an internal corruption in essence of human nature as such (ontological), or only a bad example?
- viii) Role of Baptism on persons: on adults, dying, infants removing punishment for original sin, remission of sins.
- ix) Exemption of Mary Immaculate from original sin consequences on Marian theology, Catholic spirituality.
- x) Role of Church:
 - a) – dispenser of graces –
 - z) – nature of conversion, Baptism
 - c) – mission of Church
 - d) – understanding of spirituality, relationship to world.

All these and more are affected by the understanding of the creation story and the interpretation given to original sin. Once elaborated the teachings had the strength of tradition, considered in turn, a source of revelation in the Catholic Church. (*cf. Chapter 4*)

We appreciate the Genesis presentation of the creation of the human race by God, of the human condition of sublime aspirations and inherent weaknesses, and the relationship to nature. We can accept the concept of original sin in the sense of a human proneness to evil, and/or as the collective sinfulness of a society and of a

corrupting environment. These are basic realities that all can experience and religions and philosophies seek to explain.

What we question is the hypothesis of original sin as propounded in traditional theology according to which human beings are born in a situation of helpless alienation from God due to the originating original sin of the first parents. The presupposition was that each person was like one fallen into a very deep well from which one could not come out except with the help of someone outside. The biblical symbol of this theology was Noah's ark in the waters of destruction and sheltering a few survivors. (2. *Peter 2.6*)¹⁷²

C. Critique of the Classical Teaching on Original Sin

Such a doctrine may go unquestioned within a community of only Christians, as Christendom was supposed to be. It will be questioned in a multi-religious environment if the other religions are not thought of as salvific. Persons who are of no religion and atheists would also question the presuppositions of this doctrine. In the Asian context a reevaluation of the doctrine is essential for us to understand the Christian mission in a manner that is respectful of others and of God. The traditional doctrine of original sin, as was generally prevalent in Christian theology can be critiqued on several counts.

i) In its Sources

a) *Old testament* The concept of a state of original justice and a fall from it that cannot in anyway be made good by human repentance cannot be apodictically concluded from the Old Testament. It would seem strange that the God of the Bible who speaks to the Jewish people through the prophets and sacred writers, did not reveal so important a datum concerning the human condition. It can be of course responded that God's ways are not our ways, and that revelation is gradual and progressive.

The Jewish people did not understand the story of Genesis to imply a human fall and inadequacy due to which they could not reach their eternal destiny without a divine redeemer. They had hope in God and expected salvation from God. The Messiah they expected was a redeemer of their race. The practice of the Torah was sufficient for the Jews to attain their eternal beatitude.¹⁷³

b) *Jesus* who taught clearly and categorically concerning what constituted holiness and goodness does not speak of original Sin. He does not speak of his mission and ministry as one of redemption i.e. of having to buy back "emere" humanity. This would imply paying a price to someone who kept humanity as it were captive. God could not be under obligation to anyone, much less to Satan, as such a theory of redemption would imply. If Jesus had a consciousness of his mission he

¹⁷² cf. J. Neuner: "*Mission after the Council*", Cyclostyled text, Pune, India, 1990, p. 6.

¹⁷³ cf. Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok: *On Earth as it is in Heaven; Jews, Christian and Liberation Theology*, Orbis, NY., 1987, ... "Jews have always maintained that one can by oneself conquer sin. Throughout the Talmud, in medieval sources and in modern Jewish theology, it is stressed that human beings can successfully control their passions. The human soul was created pure and without blemish; our hope should be that at death we may be as free from sin as we were at birth", p. 22. It is strange that Christians interpreted the Jewish Bible in such a way that the Jewish people them sieves would have been disadvantaged without the sacraments of the Church.

would have clearly stated so. Jesus calls for belief and trust in him and in his message as in John chapter 3, but this cannot be interpreted as a belief in the doctrine concerning original sin and redemption from it.

The teaching of Jesus concerning human salvation is that we must love God and love neighbor as ourselves. The conditions for salvation are stated clearly in the teaching on the last judgment (*Mt. 25*) “I was hungry and you fed me ... come and possess the kingdom which was prepared for you.” What makes a person good and holy is his honest behavior and not mere externals.

The teaching of Jesus is one that all human persons can practice – e.g. the Sermon on the Mount. He does not say that God’s grace is denied to anyone, or is based on the sacraments of the Church. The Gospels do not say that Jesus baptized anyone. If baptism was essential for salvation and the spiritual life, he should have given it his most serious attention. The conversion that Jesus wanted was a change of life – as in the case of Zaccheus who had to repay four fold for his illegal takings. The conversions in the lifetime of Jesus were in depth, and did not lead to the rite of baptism.

This doctrine of original sin as it was developed, neglected the actual story of Jesus as given in the gospels. It began with a few secondary quotations from the epistles of St. Paul and the Genesis story, and interpreted the role and identity of Jesus to suit that hypothesis that was taken for granted. Jesus was meditated on as more the suffering servant of Yahveh, the lamb of sacrifice; the one who atones for human sins and satisfies the justice of the Father who is offended by the sin of Adam. Thus the death of Jesus was evacuated of its significance in relation to the social options of Jesus, and the attacks by the rulers and powerful elite of the day.

This had the impact of developing a spirituality that was divorced from the struggle to transform society. The spirituality of the liturgy was so influenced that the Eucharist was explained in relation to the payment of the price of redemption by Jesus for the sin of Adam and Eve inherited by all other humans. The mission of the church was interpreted in a church-centered manner. Christian spirituality was accordingly thought of as primarily concerned with the salvation of one’s soul and of others by building the church, and progressing in holiness through obedience to the church authorities. Social action for justice was not seen as essential to mission of the church. Examples of this can be seen in the books of spirituality which have been current throughout many centuries including even the writings of 20th century spiritual guides like Dom Marmion (1858-1923).¹⁷⁴

If humanity was estranged from God, as was taught by the church a few centuries later, would Jesus not have considered it important enough to reveal it to his people, at least to his apostles?

One may also ask whether Jesus would have known about the future development of doctrine by his disciples in the course of centuries. If he had seen the disastrous consequences of this doctrine on the Christian mission, would he not have

¹⁷⁴ cf. Dom Marmion: *Christ the Ideal of the Monk; Christ in His Mysteries.*

warned his followers of it. This of course, takes us to another problem of the knowledge of Jesus.

c) *The Apostolic Teaching.* The apostles say salvation is through faith in Jesus. How is this salvific faith to be understood. Some Reformers thought of a trusting faith due to which God redeems irrespective of human actions. The general Catholic position is that faith to be salvific has to express itself in good works. In this sense it is the love of God and love of neighbor that manifests and nourishes faith and leads to holiness and salvation. Since the grace of God is not deficient for anyone, we may presume that anyone doing what one can would receive the necessary graces for salvation.

Peter when speaking of the costly sacrifice of Christ that set people free from sin also says: “You call him Father, when you pray to God, who judges all people by the same standard, according to what each one has done.” *1 Pet.* 1.17-19 (*Also cf. earlier chapter 4*)¹⁷⁵

d) *Fathers of the Church.* There was no universal agreement on the issues concerning the existence, nature and consequences of original sin prior to the time of St. Augustine. His teaching was the mainline Catholic doctrine right through the Middle Ages, with further developments by St. Anselm and the 13th century Scholastics.

We can see in the evolution of this doctrine how much the presuppositions and assumptions of a group influence the development of dogma – leaving room for imagination combined with justifications by authority.

ii) Lacks Internal Coherence

a) The doctrine is based **on unproved and unprovable assumptions** such as the conditions in the Garden of Eden. Pope John Paul II in his recent Encyclical on the Blessed Virgin Mary cites the Vatican Council II Constitution on the Church quoting Irenaeus:

“The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.”

Thus the present Pope and the Vatican Council II speak of Eve as having been a virgin in the Garden of Eden. This is obviously a presupposition – which is linked to the idea that the original sin was connected with sexuality.

Several questions can be raised concerning this teaching, as have been done during the past debates:

- If original justice was a condition in which their passions were under control of reason and virtue, how could Adam and Eve have “fallen” and sinned against God?
- How can such a punishment of all humankind for one act of the first parents be reconciled with the justice of God who is love.

¹⁷⁵ cf. Chapter on Original Sin, in my: “*Mary and Human Liberation*”, Logos, CSR, Colombo, 1990.

- If Jesus atoned for their sin superabundantly why were not the losses due to the sin made good – i.e. a return to original justice and immortality? Who decides these issues?
- In so far as it gives special privilege to the baptized, this doctrine would go against the teaching of Paul that “there is no respect of persons with God” (*Rom. 2.11*). If on the other hand God’s grace is available to all persons of good will, the emphasis on baptism to save persons from original sin would be incorrect.

Given our modern consciousness of the limits of growth and the exhaustion of natural resources, it is difficult to think that God did not intend humans to be mortal by nature, and not due to punishment for a sin of the first parents.

The whole doctrine is built on assumptions concerning a condition about which we have no knowledge. It is built on the ancient and medieval Western European anthropology and philosophies and their understanding of the human person, the body, sexuality, nature and the supernatural.

b) This doctrine is unjust by the rest of humanity – they have a judgment passed on them without their being responsible for any fault of Adam and Eve. Even a normal human Court of Law will not accept such a trial and judgment for the whole of humanity for ever.

iii) In Its Consequences

a) *Discrimination against Females*

The interpretation of the Genesis story given by the Fathers of the Church, specially after Augustine, was that woman was the cause of the fall. She was the temptress, the accomplice of Satan and destroyer of the human race. The identification of Eve with evil became so natural in Christian thought that the serpent acquired female features as in Michael Angelo’s painting of the Fall in the Vatican Sistine Chapel, Eve takes the fruit from a muscular seductress serpent.¹⁷⁶

Male theologians and clergy have contributed towards perpetuating this denigration of women through out the centuries. Is not this a result of presuppositions, ideology of male superiority and prejudice and theological imagination?

This doctrine of Original Sin was interpreted in a manner that was **anti-sexual**. Human sexual relations were said to bring into being a person who was a sinner, an enemy of God. St. Jean Eudes in the 17th century thus sympathized with women’s plight;

“It is a subject of humiliation to all the mothers of the children of Adam to know that they are with child; they carry with them an infant... who is the enemy of God, the object of his hatred and malediction, and the shrine of the demon.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Marina Warner: “*Alone of all Her Sex*”, pp. 58, figure 8.

¹⁷⁷ St. Jean Eudes, “*The Wondrous Childhood of the Most Holy Mother of God*”. Anon trans, NY .. 1915. p. 90, quoted in Marina Warner: op.cit., p. 57

In the mentality of Augustine, Ambrose and Jerome, the woman had a special responsibility for this situation, because child birth was through the womb, and womb was woman's. They praised celibacy and virginity as a higher and holier state than marriage, as did also the Council of Trent in Canon 10 of its 24th session.

“Virginity and celibacy are better and more blessed than the bond of matrimony!”¹⁷⁸

This doctrine tended to make Catholic moral theology hyper-conscious about sins of sexuality, and correspondingly neglect the other sins such as those of injustice and abuse of power. Original sin was de facto closely linked with concupiscence and sexuality. Since the female was considered more related to the body, and the male to the spirit and mind, this anti-sexuality was linked to an anti-female attitude. This was particularly so among the male clergy who dominated the Church in its thinking, ministry and administration.

b) *Is Negative Towards Nature*

The interpretation of the Genesis story of the fall had also an attitude that was **anti-nature** and **anti-world** which were considered cursed by God. This is quite contrary to the goodness of God and many passages of scripture which show the earth as fruitful and blessed by God. *Cf. Deut 8,7-10*

*“For Yahweh your God is bringing you a good land ...
in which you will not lack any thing ...
You shall eat and be satisfied ...
You shall bless Yahweh your God and in the good land
which he has given you.”*

It did not help Christians to see the joy and beauty of Creation. It could lead to a neglect of the care of nature and ecology.¹⁷⁹

c) *Discriminates against persons of other (or no) Religion*

Due to the doctrine of original sin, the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as saviour was long considered necessary for salvation. Even today, it is generally interpreted to imply that salvation is in some way or other, through Jesus Christ.

The doctrine concerning redemption was developed in relation to the presuppositions concerning original sin. Jesus the universal saviour was said to confer the graces merited by him through the Church founded by him. The Church did so through the sacraments of which baptism had to be the first. Baptism is said to remove the stain of original sin, not concupiscence but the other consequences of original sin whereby humans are alienated from God.

This theology tended to make the concept of salvation rather mechanical and extrinsic to human action. The sacrament of baptism was said to be effective ex opere

¹⁷⁸ In Rev. J. Waterworth trans. *The Canons and Decree of the Council of Trent* (London, 1848) – Marine Warner op.cit., p. 336.

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Fox: *Original Blessing*, Bears Santa fe, N.M., 1983.

operato as in the case of infants for their eternal salvation. It gave pre-eminence to the clergy who were considered the normal administrators of the sacraments.

The claim of the church, a religious establishment, to the power to mediate salvation beyond this life, is questioned by those who do not acknowledge a religion at all. Even if we maintain that salvation is through Jesus Christ, it does not follow that we can claim that Jesus Christ wanted a Church – say the Catholic Church – to be the mediator of that salvation. In fact both Jesus and Paul speak of a direct relationship between God and the human person. In the ultimate analysis holiness and salvation are in the relationship between a person and one's conscience and God. (*Rom. chap. 2, Jesus Last Judgment – Mt. 25*)

This explanation of the doctrine of original sin seemed to reduce the chance of eternal salvation of persons of no religion. Even when the human conscience was given the ultimate say in determining human actions, morality and spirituality, it was regarded as a less reliable path to salvation.

To us this is a form of religionism, in which one or several religions claim to be able to mediate eternal salvation even after death. This is an area which religion as an organized community cannot reach, and salvation after death is a mystery of a person's relationship to the Absolute Transcendent – God.

This doctrine discriminates against persons of other faiths. Though the Churches now affirm the possibility of salvation through other religions, Christian tradition has long held that the remedy for original sin was in and through the Church thanks to the merits of Christ. This did not cause much difficulty in Euro-American society where all were presumed to have the opportunity of baptism, and therefore of undoing the damage of original sin.

The traditional perspective of original sin is linked to a **concept of God** that is not acceptable to the other religions in our Asian countries. In our countries this idea of humanity being born alienated from the Creator would seem an abominable concept of the divine. To believe that whole generations of entire continents lived and died with a lesser chance of salvation is repugnant to the notion of a just and loving God.

The excesses of missionary zeal against other religions was partly due to the theology of “salvation only in the Church”. St. Francis Xavier said he was like mad going in search of souls to be saved, for they were going into hell. The traditional theology and spirituality had such a thrust. Missionaries would go to the ends of the earth to save souls. People had to be baptized and thus saved.

d) *Helped legitimise social exploitation*

It could more readily lead to a sense of fatalism and acceptance of the status quo as the result of original sin.

“That one man should possess property rights over another was recognised as an evil, and therefore held to be a consequence of the fallen state of humanity since Adam”¹⁸⁰.

Christians however helped in lightening the burden on slaves and in their being set free. Christian concept of accepting the status quo was often combined with the spirituality of accepting suffering in union with the crucified Jesus and St. Paul’s advice in *I Cor. 7, 17-24* to remain in the same condition as when one accepted God’s call.

This doctrine was used to argue the obligation and right of Christian peoples to colonise others, to give them the benefit of baptism and hence eternal salvation.

e) *Led to a wrong accent on Mission*

Jesus preached the reign of God and conversion to righteousness. The conversion he wanted was a personal, internal change of heart and a consequent transformation in human relationships and social structures. But during many centuries the main object of its mission has been the conversion of persons and countries to the Church.

The evolution of this dogma was closely related to the development of Christology, viz of regarding Jesus as a unique divine saviour of a fallen humanity. The doctrine concerning the Church or Ecclesiology was developed on the basis that Jesus Christ the redeemer had entrusted to the Church the continuation of his redemptive mission on earth till the end of time.

The Church therefore claimed the right and felt the obligation to bring all peoples to her faith community. At the same time it claimed supreme spiritual authority on earth. She considered herself the infallible guide in matters of belief and morality. The ministers of the Church could absolve sins or even by refusing to do so bind persons for eternity. This perspective made the Church quite authoritarian in matters spiritual. During many centuries the Church rulers exercised temporal power also.

The spirituality based on this dualistic theology tended to be other-worldly, individualistic, anti-feminist and hyper-conscious about sexuality. This promoted a Christianity that was not so concerned about human community building based on justice to all. Peace was also subordinated to the higher goal of promoting Christian mission. The link of the church and the powerful such as feudal lords, capitalists, despotic rulers and colonial empires was seen as legitimate due to the presumed higher good of the conversion of souls and the spiritual welfare of the subjects.

This theological perspective tended to bypass history and its significance for God’s plan for human salvation and fulfillment. Salvation was thought of in ahistorical terms, or rather salvation history became more or less co-terminous with European history. The history of the mission of Jesus was thought of in terms of church history, whereas the church is only one means for the mission of Jesus – and a fallible one at that.

¹⁸⁰ Henry Chadwick: *The Early Church*, Penguin, London, 1990, p.59.

The traditional doctrine of original sin was linked intimately to a “descending Christology” that in effect neglected the human life of Jesus as borne witness to in the gospels. Thereby immense damage was done to the understanding of Jesus who was presented more as a juridical saviour and judge rather than the warm understanding human person who he was in real life. It affected the spiritual formation in the parishes, in religious life, the priesthood and monasteries.

Thus the church doctrines on Christology, original sin, salvation (soteriology) and missiology were linked together conceptually. It is this view that made the Church historically intolerant of other religions, and even of non-European cultures.

When a church doctrine is not based on the Bible or on empirical evidence and when its conclusions are harmful to others, we are entitled to ask how is one sure that the teaching is of God? Could they be influenced by the presuppositions and assumptions of the theologians, by the self interest of the group theologizing and even by the “gift” of theological imagination which can be quite fertile and ingenious in evolving formulations to satisfy the needs of a group of believers specially when they exercise dominant political, cultural and spiritual power in a society?

Here our criteria for evaluating doctrines can be very helpful. If a doctrine is dehumanizing of a category of persons or affecting them unduly and unjustifiably, it cannot be from God who is love or from Jesus who is so humanly divine in all his teachings and life. We are then entitled to question the fruits of the imagination which may claim to pass for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - even if such doctrines have prevailed in the Church for centuries.

Considering the overall baneful effects of this doctrine of original sin as it was evolved including its missiological implications, we may go further and ask whether this doctrine itself is not the original sin of traditional Christian theology? Despite the changes in theological thinking, it is so deep rooted in its impact even today throughout the Catholic world (the Protestant is no better) that we must face it squarely.

A theology that wishes to meet the exigencies of a male-dominated, socially unjust and harmful to nature multi-religious world has to seriously rethink these presuppositions and their consequences in theory and practical spiritual life.

Chapter 7

An Inclusive Christology

Along with understanding on the human predicament, Christology is the key issue in Christian theology. These two link the theology concerning God, redemption, soteriology, ecclesiology, missiology and influence practical life of Christians immensely. Two basic issues are what is the identity of Jesus, the Christ and what is his role in human life and in the universe?

1. Tools of Analysis

In this study too we can apply the tools of analysis and the principle of critical evaluation of theology mentioned earlier. This is a way in which the *hermeneutics of suspicion*, generally accepted by many writers can be applied to these issues. Those who are victims of a particular theology would know more intuitively and more sensitively when a particular theological doctrine hurts, or dehumanizes them. In the past two decades the “third world” theologians and the feminist theologians from all the continents have given ample proof of this.

Since the question of divinity is involved we can remember that all human language about God is inadequate, and partial. We cannot speak of God except in human words, which we form from our human experience of our senses and our intellect. Even mystical experience, when described, has to use human language. Speaking of God therefore involves *metaphors*: i.e. a word or sentence is taken from one context and applied to another to which it may not fully relate. We have to speak analogically, our words do not apply in their full meaning to God, or what is said of God cannot be fully comprehended by our words.

The schema on tools/criteria for analysing theology (page 1 of Chapter 6) can be used here also, with the words “Jesus Christ” instead of “original sin”. Naturally such a schema has its limitations and needs explanation.

2. The Role of Jesus

In what sense is Jesus a Redeemer? This depends on the response to two related issues. First is Jesus the saviour of a fallen humanity in such a way that as God-man he had to redeem the whole of humanity by either paying a ransom to the devil or by making atonement to the offended God the Father on behalf of a helpless humanity? Has Jesus to accomplish redemption by conferring an additional actual (*efficacious*) grace to each individual person in order to enable the fallen human beings to use their wills for the good instead of giving way to evil, towards which they are drawn by the weight of their rebellious nature? Is Jesus a redeemer in an ontological sense, of effecting redemption for the whole of human nature in its situation of being incapable, in its very nature or essence, of reconciling itself to God from whom it is alienated by the original sin of the first parents?

Secondly has the church been constituted by Jesus as the dispenser of his merits and the unique and necessary path or vehicle for all humanity to eternal salvation? Traditionally after the great theological debates of the 4th and 5th centuries, the response to this was that baptism was the gateway to grace and salvation, even when baptism was interpreted liberally as including baptism of desire.

On the response to these two issues depends the understanding of the objective of the mission of the church, and the possibility of being in a frank, open relationship of equality with persons of other religions and the religions themselves. Pope John Paul II faces these issues in his recent encyclical on the mission of the Church *Redemptoris Missio*:

“Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind “. No one, therefore can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit ... although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* (italics in text) from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.” (no 5)

“The first beneficiary of salvation is the Church ... his co-worker in the salvation of the world ... He carries out his mission through her.” (no.9)

The response to the first question depends on the position with regard to the doctrine on original sin. If humanity is not universally fallen and flawed in its very nature, there is no need of a divine or exceptional efficacious redeemer to reconcile humanity to God. We have discussed this issue in the previous chapter and do not see any convincing reason to accept such a universal condemnation of all humanity. The view concerning the need of such a redeemer seems also to be subject to the hermeneutic of suspicion and the principle of critique which we have elaborated earlier. One would be inclined to think that humans are innocent of such a disqualifying sin till they are proved guilty. The history of theology would seem to leave the question open.

The response to the second issue is related to the question of religions and eternal salvation.

3. Religions and Eternal Salvation

Eternal salvation is a function which no human organisation can fulfill. This is something which neither churches nor any organized religion as such can do. As far as we can know, the activities and power of organized religion are limited to this life and do not extend beyond a person’s death. Religions cannot tell us with certainty about our situation before birth. The religious spirit of a community and of the family can influence us from conception in the mother’s womb and up to death. But the period prior to conception and after death are beyond the purview of organised religion.

Religions, giving a message of self-purification and care for others, can help in the self realization of individuals and harmonious development of societies. They can propose a model of life that if followed would lead to liberation from evil in this life and therefore foster eternal salvation. The founders and seers of religions can be shining examples of the way to holiness and building human community in solidarity.

The religious community can help in the construction and consolidation of the wider community according to its core values. The religious founders, saints and seers and the religious community itself can be the center of the solidarity of this inter-human communion.

Religions as organizations cannot, however, be a bridge between this life and a next. After death an organised religion can care for the body and the memory of the dead person. As a community it can treasure the memory of the life lived and continue the person's impact on earth through its ministrations and activities. In a sense the religions can ensure the presence and solidarity of the dead among the community of the living. The dead may have an influence on the living by their good as well as by any evil they may have done.

The issue of an individual's eternal salvation is a relationship of the person and God, the Transcendent. It is mystery of the inscrutable individual human conscience and of human-divine relationships. The eternal destiny of a human person cannot be determined or controlled by any human organisation; since these are, of their very nature, finite and transient.

The core message or primordial intuition of the religion or religions may be the path to our liberation on earth and the next. The primordial experience of the religious founders gives us the principle of salvation or liberation. Jesus' death on the cross is a message, an example and a principal enactment of liberation. All his followers are called to live in solidarity with that self-sacrificing love which is for them the source of redemption for all. The enlightenment of the Buddha under the Bo tree is an inspiration to all his disciples. It elucidates and exemplifies the principle and process of liberation from the human predicament of suffering due to selfish craving.

Living according to the Jesus message that "God is love" and that we must love the other as ourselves, endeavouring to give up selfish craving (*thanha*) and practising loving kindness (*maitriya*) towards all may be paths to liberation, to heaven, moksha, nirvana. In addition to our experience of fulfillment in this life our faith may inspire us to acknowledge this. But the Christian clergyman, Hindu priest, Muslim Moulavi or Buddhist monk or the faithful of any religion cannot, while alive on earth, accompany the dead person to a next life whatever and wherever it may be. The walls of the churches, temples, kovils and mosques do not reach to or encircle heaven, moksha, nirvana or even hell.

Jesus spoke of eternal life and linked it to a person's actions on earth as in *Matt. 25*, and in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. These are criteria applicable to all human beings, irrespective of any religious affiliation. He did not relate eternal life to the fulfillment of any conditions that would be laid down by a future church or community emanating from him. He certainly did not restrict salvation to membership of his new community. St. Paul speaks of salvation being through Jesus and in his name, but he does not indicate how this is to be.

In so far as salvation requires grace, we can assume that a good God would make such grace available in adequate measure to all persons throughout all time and in all places irrespective of any religious affiliation or of none at all. This, in any case, is also a position held in the traditional Catholic teaching on grace. Christians may

posit that this grace must come from Jesus Christ, but we cannot limit God's grace from being available to anyone; to try to do so would be to place ourselves above God or in the place of God.

Hence the question of whether religions are salvific would be a *non-issue* if it meant the capacity of organized religions to actually mediate the transition of a person from this life after death to another in which one is saved, or – for that matter – even damned. This is not within the competence of any human organization. In this sense is not the discussion on the salvific function of religions as organizations, if it means salvation after life, one that humans cannot decide? Yet is this not an issue on which there have been many claims and quarrels. These claims have been put forward particularly by the Christian churches. In fact it has been the basis of the missionary activity of the churches during many centuries and millennia.

When the Christian churches lay claim to be the universal and unique necessary means of salvation are they not going beyond the teachings of Jesus himself? They are linking the grace of God with membership of the church and participation in its life. This perception made Christians think they were privileged among humans to be the chosen people of God. It did not strike them as going against the goodness of God when their theology presented some peoples as merely the step-children of the same all loving God. This “chosen people of God” mentality has been responsible for much arrogance – both spiritual and otherwise – among those who considered themselves thus privileged.

They gave themselves a power and responsibility that were not their's and could not be their's. Hence they acted as if the privilege and burden of saving souls was on their shoulders. Worse still, they linked this salvific role to the European way of life and to collaboration in the unjust enterprise of colonialism.

4. In What Sense is Jesus a Redeemer?

Jesus is a redeemer, saviour and liberator in showing us the path to our own redemption from the proneness to sin and fulfillment as humans. He is the truth, the light and the way in his love for all unto the end, in his teaching, his example and in founding a community that is to be a continuing witness to his message of love throughout the centuries. Redemption is in following his command to “love God and one another as I have loved you”. Love is the redeeming force that brings about right relations among persons and with Nature. Jesus brings about right relationships between humans and God by his witness to God as love. He does not present God as a hard-hearted judge who asks for the death of the only Son as reparation for the alleged universal sin of humanity.

The love of Jesus is a powerful force that has an impact even to our times. He overcame death at the hands of his executioners; he lives beyond death, rising from the grave by the power of God. Jesus' love is a healing power, reconciling persons, bringing about right relationships of understanding, justice and peace. He lives among us by his influence and his memory as a motivating force in the Christian community and among all those who value his teaching and life.

The uniqueness of Jesus is in the depth of his personality; in his total self-giving love that helps fulfill others, and in his message that is uniquely salvific for all who

live it. We can think of him as a guru par excellence, who first trod the difficult path up to his death on the cross. He was a humble person who was not concerned about his own greatness but wanted to serve all in truth and in love. As the master he washed the feet of his disciples, and asked them to do likewise.

Right relationships based on love, especially if the whole of society lives by his values, would be liberation from the internal and external bondage to which humans are subjected. These values may, in substance, be the same as the core values of the other world religions also. This should make us happy, as whatever is good comes from the one God, whom Jesus called the Father. He is not in competition with others who want to lead humans truly on the right path. Is it not our own weakness that tends to present such persons as competitive saviours, and even quarrel over them? What right have we humans to limit the manifestations of God in human history, or even to place them in a competitive hierarchy?

Jesus is the manifestation of God's love in human form to transform humans to be divine. This was frequently repeated by the Fathers of the Church such as Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius. Jesus is the Logos (the Word) of God become human so that we might learn from a human being how a human being can become divine. *What is important is not to try to define (in our philosophical terms) the mystery of how Jesus comes from God, but to follow him in the path he shows us how we too can go to God.* That is precisely what Jesus taught and stressed. He pointed to the Father, prayed to the Father, obeyed the Father and revealed that God is love and we are called to love God and neighbour as ourselves. This is the fulfillment of the law and prophets; in this is salvation / redemption / liberation.

Faith in Jesus is not merely or necessarily the acceptance of the post Augustinian dogmas or a privileged insurance for personal salvation, but the sharing of his vision and a challenge to discipleship, to love justice and walk humbly with God, transforming ourselves and society by identifying with the other, especially the poor and the marginalised as he did, unto the death on the cross. It is thus that kingdom of God, of right relationships, "comes on earth as in heaven". That is why the early church had so many martyrs; and today too many martyrs bear witness to his redemptive-liberative love in our unjust, divided world.

5. Identity of Jesus

A. The Cosmic Christ, the uncreated Word

The Logos in John's term, the fullness, the beginning and the end of all things as in Paul, is beyond time and space, transcendent and universal. Christ in the sense of the eternal Logos can be seen as the light of the world as in John, the one who enlightens all who come into the world, the one in whom all things are recapitulated as in Paul (*Col. 1:15-20*), the Logos spermatikos of Justin, the ultimate judge of all at the end of time. In this sense, Logos is another term for God, often referred to in the Bible as infinite Wisdom.

"The revelation of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ gives us further insights concerning the evolution of the entire universe and of human history. The historical life of Jesus helps us specially in our understanding of the micro level of our personal lives; the consideration of the Cosmic Christ is a deeper

revelation of the wider macro significance of our own lives within the whole of reality ... Christ is related on the one hand to God (the Father) from eternity and to the whole universe in its return to the Creator in a fulfilled manner. Jesus the Christ, through the mysteries of his incarnation, death, resurrection and second coming links the divine and the human. In him God, nature, history, and all human beings of all time are mysteriously intertwined in a manner which we cannot fully fathom or unravel. We can only contemplate it and live it in diverse ways and times.”¹⁸¹

Christ thus understood is present to all, the Eternal Word, the Light of Lights. This divine Truth is the source of all religions, all motivations for good, of liberative movements, ideologies and processes for human betterment. The Cosmic Christ can also be spoken of as the Spirit of God universally active towards good from all time.¹⁸²

The Pauline and Johannine concepts can be understood of a pre-existent eternal Christ. Christ in this sense is neither Greek nor Jew, neither male nor female – and, we might add, neither Christian nor Zoroastrian; “Christ is all, Christ is in all” (*Col. 3:11*). The Cosmic Christ can be identified with the divine in such a way as to be understood as the divine principle that all theists acknowledge. Such a Christ is beyond all religions and can be the principle of the widest human communion or ecumenism. Identified with all humanity and the whole universe, while transcending it, the Cosmic Christ can be the inspiration for right relationships of gender, social standing, race, ethnicity, culture and creed, and the care of nature and of Mother Earth, the source and term of all physical life on our planet.

The Cosmic Christ is then identical with the supreme being in other religions, understood as life and light, and with the Atman-Brahman of Hinduism, Yahveh of the Jews, the Allah of Islam, the Tao and in a sense Nirvana and Moksha. As the Vedas remind us from time immemorial, these can be different names for the One, the transcendent goodness that cares for all. The Cosmic Christ is not a particularist deity, a monopoly of Christians and their churches. The human understandings of God need not be made competitive and set one against the other.

The difficulty comes in when the Logos is identified fully and exclusively with the human Jesus. Pope John Paul II may give an impression of doing so when he writes in the same encyclical :

“Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all. In Christ ‘the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’ (*Col 2:9*) ... It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history’s centre and goal” (*no.6*)

¹⁸¹ Tissa Balasuriya: *Jesus Christ and Human Liberation*, Centre for Society & Religion. Quest Series 48, 1976, p. 83.

¹⁸² Chung Hyun Kyung: Presentation to General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra. February, 1991, and my comment on the ensuing dialogue *Liberation of the Holy Spirit*, in *Ecumenical Review* April 1991. W.C.C., Geneva.

We do not claim to know how the historical Jesus of Nazareth is related to the Cosmic Christ. That is part of the mystery of the unfathomable divine. Jesus of Nazareth can be identified with the Cosmic Christ; but can we identify the Cosmic Christ fully and exclusively with the historical Jesus? The Cosmic Christ can be thought of as pre-existing all creation as God. Can this be said of Jesus of Nazareth too, except in the sense that all beings are always present to God, before and after their earthly existence? We should not make the historical Jesus so cosmic that he is taken away from the reality of his own earthly life. Nor should we make the Cosmic Christ so historical as to rigidly limit the mystery of the revelation of the divine to one historical human person.

The early Fathers of the Church, who were subordinationist, interpreted this in terms of an open or inclusive Christology. How the fullness of divinity can be in any human body, and how we can comprehend it, with our limited minds is, at least, open for discussion. The infinite God can be received by a finite human being only in a finite way. All creatures receive of God in different ways, according to each one's capacity. In fact, all good can only be from God, the source of all good, goodness itself. In that sense all beings are linked to each other. This can be contemplated mystically, better than understood rationally.

Christians believe in faith that Jesus of Nazareth is the most important, meaningful and ultimate presence of God on earth, without considering this view as necessarily binding on others.¹⁸³ This should motivate us to strive for the integral liberation of all beings as coming from God ...

Jesus is readily accepted as one manifestation of God that does not limit the divine omnipotence and concern for all. A theology, written from an Asian background, based on some of the texts of John and Paul could well interpret such sayings in a panentheist manner.

My 1976 views on the Cosmic Christ are relevant today too:

“Jesus himself tells us in the Gospels that he is not the last word in revelation. The Father will send the Spirit who will be given to all humankind. The Spirit will reveal many more wonderful things than what Jesus himself did ...

“It is important for us that we recognise the vision of the nature of all things that is thus revealed. This is the deepest level of Christian ontology, the explanation of the nature of being or reality. Christ the Lord implies a much wider dimension of being, than Jesus of Nazareth, though Jesus is the Christ ...

“A Fundamental Theological Inadequacy

“One of the reasons for this neglect of the ontological universality of the ‘*Christique*’, has been the keenness of Western theology to affirm the difference between the Creator and the created, the Infinite and the finite. The Western mind has had a tendency to see more clearly this difference partly due to its logic being based on the principle of contradiction: what is, is; and is not what it is not. On the contrary

¹⁸³ “A factor that has emerged out of India’s long history of multi-religious life is the rejection of an exclusive attitudes as far as the ultimate matters are concerned.” S. J. Samartha in *One Christ Many Religions Towards a Revised Christology*, Orbis, NY, 1991.

the oriental logic is more analogical and more synthetic. It sees more the unity of being than the divergences; or sees the unity as more basic than the discontinuity. The West has had the preoccupation of avoiding Pantheism, and thus drawn a categorical dividing line between God and nature. Oriental thought sees one as emanating from the other, one suffused by the other, even though dependent and transitory. These rather subtle divergences of approach have had profound implications in the interpretation of theology and spirituality ...

“Western science and rationality of analysis benefitted immensely from this approach. However the Western tradition and Christian theology forgot in the process to retain the consideration of the intimate link between matter and spirit, universe and God, the ephemeral and the numinous, between Jesus and the Cosmic universality of Christ.

“The Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation further saw to it that Christian theology concentrated on *intra ecclesiastical debates*, if not diatribes. For many centuries, while the modern world was being constituted largely by Western man, the Churches concentrated their attention on issues such as the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, relationship of scripture and tradition, infallibility of the Pope, auricular confession, apostolic succession, Latin and the vernacular in the liturgy, celibacy of the clergy, divorce, indulgences ... etc

“”The tragedy of this was not merely in the Churches being divided, but also in their being collectively blinded to the larger dimensions of Christian revelation itself. The cosmic ontology of the scriptures was bypassed, in favour of narrow, exclusive, ‘Christian’ theologies ...

“A return to the cosmic dimension of Christ can be an important contribution for rendering Christians more docile to the Spirit of God and more open to genuine dialogue with persons of other religious traditions and ideologies.

“Due to the neglect of the universal and Cosmic Christ, Christians claimed a monopoly of Christ. They did not differentiate between the founding of the Church by Jesus of Nazareth and the action of the Cosmic Christ. The Church was founded in time and in a particular place, but the work of Christ is universal – being the alpha and omega of all things ...

“Today there is a general malaise in Western theology ... The theology of Christendom has led to a dead end ... Western theology is still very far from satisfactorily dealing with the two basic issues facing humanity today viz: the personalist and social revolutions.

“A new Orientation of Theology Needed

“Meditation on the cosmic dimension of Christ can lead us to a reevaluation of the basic injustices of ‘Christian’ thought. *Creation* has to be rethought, not so much in its philosophical elucidation, as on the reflection on the ‘Christique’ presence in all created reality. The attitude to the universe will naturally be deeply influenced by such a consideration. The respect for nature and the prevention of its pollution, destruction and even unnecessary exhaustion would acquire a Christique dimension.

“The *Incarnation* and *Redemption* would have to be thought not only in terms of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth but also of their connected universal significance as engaging the cosmic aspect of Christ. Human history would then be revalued as the privileged area of the Christique evolution of conscious and intelligent humanity towards the Creator. *Revelation* would have to be understood, as mentioned by Jesus, as a continuing process, begun with creation itself. The message of God to humankind would have to be humbly discerned in nature, in history and within our own selves - in addition to the written scriptures and Christian tradition. The other religions, ideologies and movements of humanity will also have to be discerned as part of the Christique manifestation. A spirituality of a planetary age will then be a consequence of the meditation on the world, on the agony of human beings in it and the designs of a Providence for all creation ...

“The apocalyptic vision of the new Jerusalem is an inspiration for believers to hope in the final achievement of a universal happiness. It is also a promise and a teaching that salvation is communitarian ...

“Reflection on the cosmic dimension of Christ can be a source of theology and spirituality for a *New International Economic Order*. The consideration of the life of Jesus can be an indication of the struggle that the peoples of the world have to undergo for there to be an effective restructuring of the world order based on justice and fellowship ...

“The love and service of Christ is, in a sense, more than the love of the historical Jesus of Nazareth; for the idea of Christ implies a universality. The spirituality of the Christian must therefore include a love of the whole of humanity in its return to the Creator; it also requires a love and service of the universe, and specially of our planet the Earth. Being Christian has by its very nature to be open to the good in all others whatever be their religion or ideology - for Christ is all in all ...

“We believe that the rediscovery of Jesus of Nazareth as a human person totally committed to unselfish service of the other because God is love, and of the Cosmic Christ as the expression of the universal plan of God for the whole of humankind and the universe can be a help in such a reorientation of theology.”¹⁸⁴

Matthew Fox in his “The Coming of the Cosmic Christ”¹⁸⁵ surveys the history of a creation oriented theology that stressed the Cosmic Christ. He indicates that the concern for the historic Christ in Western European theology neglected the Cosmic dimension in Christ, especially due to the Enlightenment. He traces the interest in cosmicity in the Greek Fathers and in the creation mystics of the medieval West, from the twelfth century Hildegard of Bingen to Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Dante, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Nicolas of Cusa in the fifteenth century.

¹⁸⁴ Tissa Balasuriya. *Jesus Christ and Human Liberation*, CSR, Colombo. 1976. pp. 85-91.

¹⁸⁵ Matthew Fox. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Collins Dove, Melbourne, Australia. 1989, especially Part III, pp 75 ff. This is a follow up of his “*Original Blessing A primer in Creation Spirituality*”

He presents texts from these writers indicating the relation between the Cosmic Christ and the divinization of humans:

“Without the Word of God no creature has meaning. God’s Word is in all creation, visible and invisible.”

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), (p. 111)

“The only begotten Son of God, intending to make us partakers of the divine nature (*2 Pet .. 1:4*) took our nature on himself, becoming a human so he might make humans Gods.”

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274): Summa Theologica 2-2.xiv, 6 (p. 116).

“These sparks, human souls,
which come directly from God,
have no end:
they are imprinted forever
with the stamp of God’s beauty”

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) : Divine Comedy; (p. 119)

Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) celebrates the “logos” or “word” of God as applying to each and every creature “All creatures are words of God”, “People think God has only become a human being there – *in his historical incarnation – but that is not so; for God is here – in this very place – just as much incarnate as in a human being long ago. And that is why God has become a human being: that God might give birth to you as the only begotten Son, and no less.*” (*p. 121*).

For *Julian of Norwich (1342-1415)*, all creatures are enclosed in the Christ at the same time that Christ is in all creatures – a Christological panentheism. (*p. 124*)

Cardinal *Nicolas of Cusa (1400-1464)*: “every creature is a word of God and a book about God”; “divinity shines forth in creatures as the truth of a reflected image”; “we are as it were a human deity” “The Divine Giver does not give anything other than divinity ... But this gift cannot be received as it is given ... Therefore the infinite is received finitely”. (*p. 125-126*)

These writings remind us of the early Church Fathers who conceived of the Logos as the wisdom of God manifesting itself in many and multifarious ways over time. This tradition of creation theology did not receive much acceptance from the established Church, which preferred the Fall/Redemption approach.

Teilhard de Chardin, 1881-1955, was a modern forerunner in a more creation centered theology and spirituality. Today many favour a more positive attitude towards creation. An inclusive Christology is implied in the dialogue that churches have opted for in relations to other religions. Liberated from captivity in an exclusivist theology we can find in the Cosmic Christ the inspiration to work for a just and peaceful world and the ultimate bliss all seek expressed by the Hindu sages as Sat Chit Ananda, truth-consciousness-bliss.

B. Jesus in the Trinity

Concerning the nature of the participation of the human Jesus in the divinity we must *respect the mystery of God* the Transcendent as the Indian tradition insists the divine cannot be contained or defined in human language. Our minds cannot grasp how a human being can be God or a God can be human. This is not to question the divinity of Jesus Christ but to note the limits of the human intellect. The expressions such as “Jesus was with God”, “was the divine presence among humans”, “was so sublimely human as to be for us the closest to the divine” are more intelligible.

The divinity of Christ, as such, need not be a problem in inter-religious relations, if he is not presented as a God who favors the Christians, or who excludes any other manifestations of the divine on earth. Most Asians and Africans accept the concept of a supreme transcendent being both in their religious doctrines and popular religiosity. Concepts of a triune God are found in Hinduism as has been pointed out by Raimundo Panikkar in his numerous writings.¹⁸⁶

While some schools of philosophical Buddhism are non-theistic, popular Buddhism has deities and invoke their favors.

Our position is to affirm the divinity of Jesus; but to question the possibility for the human mind to know clearly how Jesus is God. We acknowledge the divinity of Jesus in an inclusive, non-competitive sense; but have great difficulty in being convinced of claims to an exclusive, triumphalist divinity for Jesus of Nazareth. We are suspicious of the claim by some to know how Jesus is God, especially when they have used that claim to degrade our fore-parents of all time, especially in their relationship to God. We intuitively sense that such perceptions are disrespectful to us, our cultures, our religions and even to God and Jesus.

As discussed earlier, many of the early church Fathers pointed out that the scriptures do not claim Jesus to be so divine, as to be co-equal to the Father in all aspects. They did not hold the Trinitarian doctrine as was later defined by the Councils. They were generally *subordinationist*, considering Jesus a secondary god. Several modern scripture scholars too tend to agree with this view.

The Nicene teaching was not understood clearly in the fourth century, the issue depending on the understanding of the terms used in Greek philosophy e.g. ‘ousia’ and ‘homoousios’. This is a form of inculturation of Christian dogma that need not bind all cultures and periods of history. In any case human intelligence cannot comprehend what is the “substance” of divinity that could be shared by God equally with a human person. Can physical terms such as “substance” be used concerning the inner composition of God, and words such as “be-gotten”, “processing” or “proceeding” concerning the relationships within the Trinity? Can we thus describe, and even prescribe, what God is or should be?

The claim that the historical Jesus is Christ should be such as not to deny God the possibility of manifesting the divine in and through others in human history. The Nicene - Chalcedon view of the identity of Jesus as “two natures in one person”, and

¹⁸⁶ Raimundo Panikkar: “The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: *Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*” Orbis, N.Y., 1981, and “Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross Cultural Studies”, Paulist, N.Y., 1979.

“three persons in one God”, has been a particular difficulty in dialogue with other religions, including Judaism and Islam that are faithful to monotheism. It led to unacceptable situations like the arrogance of Christians and their persecution of persons of other faiths, or even of other theologies. We should express our faith in Jesus and his relationship to God in a way that is respectful of the mystery of the divine and God’s universal love and care of all.

C. Jesus as God-Man

The difficulty is not with the idea that Jesus is a divine-human being, but with the way this has been interpreted exclusively. Jesus, as in the gospels is very inspiring and acceptable to our peoples. Many would readily acknowledge that Jesus is so sublime in his whole being that he comes closest to what humans can conceive of as being divine. On the other hand since all human goodness is a participation of the divine, no one can deny the presence and action of God in anyone else. Problems arise when Jesus is presented as humankind’s unique and exclusive saviour. This, in turn, is due to the Fall / redemption theology of the human-divine relations.

Jesus identity has been explained according to different philosophies, especially Greek, using terms that are hardly intelligible to ordinary persons. The Bible is not definite on these issues and has not been understood in the same sense from the earliest centuries. The numerous and ingenious hypotheses proposed by theologians concerning his divinity and humanity show not only human ignorance, but also a tendency to give free rein to imagination, myth and even prejudice. The power holders imposed their elaborations as divine truth about this life and the next.

The classical Christology of ‘*homoousion*’ of Nicaea stressed the divinity of the person of Jesus Christ, and in the process down played the presentation of God in the actual human life of Jesus. This traditional Christology inspired much spiritual and mystical reflection. It motivated social action and widespread missionary endeavour. The priesthood, religious life and lay apostolate have been fostered by this theology and devotion.

But it has “often served to take the ‘bite’ out of the life of Jesus” ... and “tended to lessen the credibility of the life of Jesus as a truly human life.”¹⁸⁷

Popular religiosity has interpreted the God-man Jesus by veneration such as through feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Precious Blood and celebrations as of his birth and circumcision. Easter celebrations generally relate to redemption by Jesus suffering for our sins. In popular liturgies the resurrection of Jesus is interpreted literally, without serious reference to his overcoming the death inflicted by those whose ways and teachings he opposed.

The theology of the Eucharist has in this background, fostered the belief in its redemptive value in applying the merits of Christ to the living or the dead. The celebration of the Eucharist was privatized emphasizing the celebrant’s role. The devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has been very much focussed on personal relations

¹⁸⁷ Franz Josef van Beeck: “*Christ Proclaimed – Christology as Rhetoric*”, Paulist Press, NY., 1979, p. 379.

with Jesus. The eucharistic devotion is now more communitarian but not yet adequately concerned with the wider social issues.¹⁸⁸

6. ‘Unchurched’ in the West - Nemesis of a Domination Theology?

In more recent decades there has been a very significant moving away of people in the traditionally Christian Western countries of Europe, North America and Oceania, from the practice of religion based on the sacramental life, including the Sunday Mass, the confession to a priest, baptism and solemnizing of marriage in church. Vocations to the priesthood and religious communities have dropped drastically, though there is a slight increase in the past few years. It would seem that the clerical church built around the full time celibate clergy and religious is on the way out in Western countries. The traditional appeal of the “foreign missions” to build the church among “non-Christians” has worn away almost completely, except for assisting in human development of the poorer peoples.

The “unchurching” of, perhaps, the majority of the people in the Western capitalistic countries during the past half century shows that other values influence them. Many remain Christian without any church affiliation. Quite a few of them may be materialistic in their thinking and way of life. There are others who are more spiritual in their concerns without being religious in their affiliation or worship. Many creative people’s movements are often not church mandated or even church related e.g. the peace, women’s, human rights and ecological movements.

These phenomena indicate that the popular acceptance of the classical theology, [flowing basically from the Augustinian synthesis and Chalcedon, concerning the exclusive salvific role of Jesus in the Fall/redemption perspective] has been rapidly decreasing in the Western countries.

In Eastern Europe, some Christian churches were a rallying point of dissent against the dictatorial regime in the Soviet Union and of national liberation movements in the Russian satellite countries. To a certain extent these countries experienced the conditions of the church in the first three centuries when the church was a counter-culture and subjected to persecution. Now with greater freedom and the inroads of the capitalistic spirit, they too seem to move towards a more secular approach.

Now the West has come to the acme of power in the world system. The Augustinian morality cannot inspire the modern humans in inter-personal relations. The Constantinian compromise has worked its way towards largely neutralising the church vis-à-vis the unjust social system. The church has been very much marginalised in the dominant West. The new Christian Fundamentalists have no effective solution to these as they seem to support the dominant social establishment.

That traditional theology does not challenge the materialistic persons with a radical message, and does not inspire those of goodwill to greater commitment with a renewed sense of mission. Christian mission as earlier thought of is no longer

¹⁸⁸ Tissa Balasuriya: *“Eucharist and Human Liberation”*, Orbis, NY.; S.C.M., London, 1977.

meaningful, given the situation of inter-religious relations and the general non-acceptance of the need of baptism for salvation.

Further the traditional Christology has been a major source of inter-religious misunderstanding in the Asian and African countries, despite the increase in the numbers of Christians there in this century. Almost all significant Asian theologians discuss this issue and argue for a more inclusive Christology.

In Latin America, and elsewhere, the theologians of liberation are re-emphasizing the forgotten dimension of Jesus and the social message of the gospel. They do not generally directly question the Chalcedonian synthesis, but try to bypass it in affirming the social gospel, orthopraxis.¹⁸⁹

The Feminist theologians, specially of North America and Europe are sharply critical of the entire framework of this Christian theology that has bolstered male domination using Genesis and this Christology to the advantage of the males. They are among the most insightful and incisive in presenting alternative approaches to understand human liberation, generally as relational and in mutuality.

If Jesus is proposed as an inclusive Word of God, who does not exclude other divine manifestations, and not as the onto-logical unique redeemer of an utterly fallen humanity, the dialogue with the other religions would be better. Then they can be respected as also of the Spirit. Buddhism can acknowledge Jesus as a teacher of a path to salvation, without feeling being considered inferior in the Christian perspective. Islam can see him as a prophet. In the Hindu background he can be accepted as an avatar, manifestation or theophany of the One Divine Being. Christians would acknowledge him as saviour, redeemer and liberator in the sense he was accepted in the early church.

Jesus needs to be liberated from a domination theology. The church too has to liberate itself to follow more closely the teaching of Jesus, as in the gospels and as understood in the first four centuries than as seen in the post Constantinian era. It is more important is to see how Jesus lived, what he taught and why he was killed by the people of his time. We therefore reflect in the next chapter the core of his teaching.

¹⁸⁹ Jon Sobrino: *Christology at the Crossroads*, Leonardo Boff: *Jesus Christ Liberator*, Sobrino seems more critical of Chalcedon than Boff.

Chapter 8

Return to Jesus

A return to Jesus as he is seen in the New Testament and the early church would be the best antidote to the de-routing that has taken place in Christian life and theology concerning the identity, message and role of Jesus. Many of the things which were (and are) elaborated and discussed in theology are not from Jesus. They are often a distraction from the central message of Jesus, as we have seen historically. We need to make theology more simple, deep and challenging as were the words and life of Jesus. To help in this we reflect on his personality, his teaching, his understanding of his mission and consequently the conversion that Jesus wants.

1. The Personality of Jesus

From the gospels we see Jesus as a many sided personality He moved freely with persons of all categories, but the poor and the weak were his special concern. He was mentally and emotionally very mature. He was intensely human. He loved children and nature. He lived as a poor man in a society in which inequality was very marked, he was a person who lived for others. He was friendly, loving and understanding to all. He forgave even his executioners.

At the same time he was strong and uncompromising in his stand against injustice and the abuse of power by religious and civil leaders. His kindness was not complacency; and his gentleness was not conformism or indifference before unrepentant evil.

He was venturesome and adventurous in being open to the unconventional. While preaching a lofty message, he associated closely with sinners. He was a fearless man of immense courage. In a society where social conformism was the norm, he challenged the prevailing values. He did not mind the risks of being misunderstood. He was prepared to take risks for the cause he lived for, including the ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus was a teacher who lived his message. He challenged persons like the rich young man to make an option in life. He was an extraordinary person by any human standards. He combined the seemingly opposite qualities of being simple and magnanimous, gentle and strong, contemplative and dynamic. He communicated a sense of joy, peace and security. He was a true lover of persons and a revolutionary, a revolutionary because he loved all.

His interpersonal relations have a deep social significance. For he was breaking through the taboos of his environment. Here was an eminently holy teacher making common cause with the down and out rabble. This was unthinkable for the Roman way or life, or even for the Jewish establishment. Thus the way he lived was a challenge to others; his friendships were a threat to those who despised the ignorant masses.

In every instance of a dichotomy or clash of values he favoured the value that was for the dignity and freedom of the human person. He opposed the domination

of the rigid law	above genuine love;
of the learned lawyer	above the ignorant laymen;
of the letter that kills	over the spirit that vivifies;
of the hypocritical Pharisee	over the humble Publican
of the shrewd priests	over the simple faithful;
of the guilty accusers	over the adulterous woman;
of the vendors in the temple	over the worshippers;
of the luxurious Dives	over the beggar Lazarus;
of the exploiting rich	over the miserable poor;
of the proud Jew	over the outcast Gentile;
of superstition	over the true religion of the Spirit
of formalism	over sincerity;
of unjust power	over weakness;
of hate	over love.

He transcended the bigotry of race, class and religion. He was truly a liberator of the human person and of oppressed groups in society. At the beginning of his public ministry he announced his mission in the words of Isaiah “He anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to set-at liberty those who are oppressed” (*Luke 4.18*). He contested the alienations of the day to which the poor Jews and others were subjected. He was thus introducing into human life and religion an element of contestation of the evils in every establishment. He tried to help persons to take responsibility for their lives with understanding and freedom.

Such personal liberation was to be: from selfishness, the desire for self-promotion strongly rebuked in the apostles who were concerned about their places in the messianic Kingdom: from materialism which places its trust in wealth and not in God’s Providence. Rejecting the ruling ethic of the time he proposed the beatitudes. True human happiness is in loving service, and struggling to bring about a just society even at the cost of personal sufferings.

He preached a message of interiority, sincerity, authenticity, and honesty – values which the modern world is beginning to recognize especially through the youth. He detested all forms of hypocrisy and duplicity whereby a person thinks one thing and says another, preaches one thing and lives another.

We can see this in many of his relationships with persons. He motivated Zaccheus the rich man to part with a large portion of his wealth. He called the apostles to leave all their possessions and follow him. He revealed to them the real meaning of life. He entrusted a mission to them. He gave them a sense of purpose, a new hierarchy of values, an understanding of a deep relationship to God, the courage to be their better selves.

Jesus explained the nature of true worship to the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands.

“Woman believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... But the hour is coming, and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (*Jo. 4.21-24*).

He was a liberated and liberating person in his relationship to women. His parables reveal an understanding of feminine psychology, e.g. the poor widow’s mite, the woman with the lost coin, the joys of childbirth. Women cared for him. They were part of his group of followers. They went with him up to the cross. They believed in him beyond death and were the first to find the empty tomb and proclaim the resurrection. We can think of these exquisite qualities by reflecting on his relationship with his mother. Mary was with him throughout his life, she followed him up to the foot of the cross a source of strength and sorrow to him. In his dying moments he shows his solicitude for her in entrusting her to John, his beloved disciple.

He gave a basic dignity and auto-sufficiency to each person in the context of the fatherhood of God and the inner voice of the Spirit within us. He thus de-emphasized external authority of all types. He helped liberate persons from the fears of soothsayers, sorcerers and others who benefited from human ignorance and misery.

Jesus thus stressed the personal worth of every human being whatever his social condition. He helped persons understand that their worth did not depend on the prevailing social values of power, wealth, social position, physical strength, intellectual acumen, legal eminence, or even of religion. Mere external laws had no moral binding force before God if they were unjust. This is a foundation of human responsibility and freedom.

He liberated persons from the fear of external authority. They had to be self-reliant and have confidence in the Father who loves all. “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air ... Do not be anxious about tomorrow ... ” (*Mt. 6.25-34*)

He strengthened them to face civil and religious authorities with an inner courage and trust in the Father.

“When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (*Mt. 10.19-31*)

This personal liberation was the way both to interpersonal relations of genuine love and to courageous commitment to social justice. The deepest level of personal liberation is in the union of the believer with Jesus and the Father who has sent him. Jesus invites persons to follow him.

“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me.”

He constantly refers his message and his actions to the Father. In his moments of profound anguish he speaks to the Father as in the garden of Olives. He asks the Father to forgive his executioners. He has confidence in the Father to whom he goes at death and from whom he expects to return to his followers.

The spirit of God, whom Jesus promised, will guide those who accept him. “When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” (*Jo. 16.13*). Human persons too can be divinized by keeping his new commandment of love; for thereby we abide in him and in the Father with the grace of the Counsellor, the Spirit. We touch here the mystique of Jesus’s inner life and his call to personal and societal liberation. It is in working for others that we truly realize ourselves and become one with God.

The teaching of Jesus concerning liberation from sensuality and selfishness to genuine love and other centeredness has a great relevance for today too. We live in a civilization where inspite of much material advancement, human personalities are often underdeveloped, disequilliberated and even shattered. The desire for individual pleasure without concern for others ruins the happiness of many families. The consumerism so dominant in our society keeps persons in a competitive tension of ever desiring more and more consumer goods. The lack of loving acceptance by others is one of the principle causes of psychological stress and mental disorders which are so widespread in our urbanized and “developed” societies. Class, race and other forms of social discrimination further alienate persons from one another.

Jesus on the other hand lived a life of great detachment from material comforts and of intense openness to all persons.

He recommends a radical sharing and a child like simplicity. “Who ever humbles himself like this child he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” *Mt 18 4*

The golden rule of conduct proposed by him is

“As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them love your enemies, and do good and lend expecting nothing in return” (*Luke 6.31-35*)

Liberation from attachment to material goods, from the tyranny of sensuality and the false concepts of social status were to be principal elements in one’s personal liberation.

Such a teaching and example naturally had a social and political implication too. It was a categorical rejection of the colonial greed, moral debauchery and class exploitation of Roman society as well as of the rigid, stratified, hypocritical values of the Jewish leadership. His views on personal liberation had a social impact in addition to helping individuals and groups resolve their own personal dilemmas and realize their aspirations.

2. Core Teaching of Jesus: Love God and Neighbour

The teaching of Jesus is very clear in his words and deeds as reported in the gospels, without the philosophical complications of later theologies. Jesus lived in a situation similar to ours. Exploitation of persons was rampant. The poor, the weak, the ignorant, the women, the children, the publicans and “sinners” were all exploited in different forms by the rich, powerful, local elite and the foreign rulers. Religion, too, aided in this ill treatment.

Within such a situation of deep seated exploitation Jesus presented a radical new teaching, backed up by his life witness. He announced it as the “Kingdom of God” ... the good news of a new person and a new society, of new personal and societal values, of a reign of righteousness, of right relationships ... Dharma Raj. He dethroned the prevailing values of money, power, prestige and group selfishness. Instead he proposes sharing, service, love of the human person for what one is, and a universal human solidarity. Naturally this upset the then social establishment.

a) God is Love

The central teaching of Jesus is that God is “Abba”, Father. God is love. God loves us, understands us and fulfills us. In return we must love God and all human beings in God. “I give you a new commandment love one another ...” (*Jo.13.34*) This is the substance of his message, of the law and the prophets. The specificity of the disciples of Jesus has to be such love in interpersonal and societal relationships. Love gives glory to God and fulfills human persons.

The criterion for admission to the Kingdom is love:

“I was hungry, and you gave me to eat ... Enter into the Kingdom” ... (*Matt. 25*).
Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers you do unto me.”

Where there is genuine love there is God; and where there is no real love, God is not there – whatever be one’s religious affiliation or forms of religious worship. The religious organisation is for fostering such love.

For Jesus love is the principal virtue, motivation and constituent of goodness. Love has to be operative, effective, creative. Love bridges the gaps, unites, builds solidarity and mutuality Love shares, is self-sacrificial and other-centered. Thus love is radical; it does not compromise with injustice, corruption, waste and unconcern for others. It is active tenacious and even ferocious when the loved one is in danger as mother when her child is endangered. Love never gives up (*1 Cor 13:4-13*)

Love is expressed in relationship to oneself and others. **Relationality**, openness to others, is central to the life of Jesus. He responded to persons in need, understanding them, empathizing with them; helping to resolve their problems. He was dialogical in his approach. He learnt from them, as in the instance of the woman who touched his garment as related in *Mark ch. 5* Jesus manifests God’s concern

“Relational power seen as passion for justice-making has to be shown as the driving force of the death and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the elemental yet

redeeming force by which God operates in and through us; possibly even the special giftedness of God's presence among us at the present time: 'a passion for justice, shared and embodied, is the form God takes among us in our time'.¹⁹⁰

Jesus passion for justice that led to his death at the hands of the powerful of the day. The life of the early church that believed in his resurrection was one of social equality, of sharing and contestation of the claims of emperors to be divine unto martyrdom.

Sin is lovelessness, the turning away from God who is love. Love requires sharing; sin is selfishness. Sin, both personal and societal, is untruthfulness, insincerity, a turning away from God who is the truth.

b) Jesus Message: The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is a situation in which sin, lovelessness, selfishness, untruth and injustice are overcome and love, mercy, truth and justice prevail. It is in *right relationships* between persons, among groups and with Nature and God.

Jesus taught this in the prayer.

“Our Father, thy Kingdom come thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Sharing of food is of the essence of the kingdom. Mercy and forgiveness are primordial conditions of the reign of God over us. Jesus conditions God's mercy towards us on our forgiveness of others. With unforgiving hatred of others we can not be friends of God; for God loves all. Jesus worked for relationships in which compassion and love would be predominant.

Jesus emphasized the Kingdom or rule of God and righteousness over us rather than the rule by any earthly power or organization. The Kingdom of God is primarily within us. He did not stress the power of the religious authority or of a church. His mission and gospel were concerning a movement of love and understanding rather than about the growth of a religious institution or organization.

The kingdom of God is central to his teaching:

- seek ye first the kingdom of God (*Mt. 6.33*).
- difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (*Mt. 19.24*),
- tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God, (*Mt.21.31*)
- preaching the kingdom of God in parables (*Mt. 13*),
- better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, (*Mark 9.47*),
- I must preach the kingdom of God (*Luke 6.20*),
- behold the kingdom of God is within you. (*Luke 17.21*),
- is nigh at hand (*Luke 21.31*),

¹⁹⁰ Mary Grey: *Redeeming the Dream* – Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition, SPCK, London, 1989, pp. 102-03.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven (*Mt. 5.3*);
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice' sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven (*Mt. 5.10*);
- Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (*Mt. 7.21*).

His values implied a fundamental critique of Roman power and greed. They made the Jews aware of the heinousness of the military rule that was imposed on them. Hence the view that "the kingdom of God is within you" (*Luke 17:21*) was in itself an inner personal liberation from total allegiance to any temporal power. His message thus relativised the authority of both civil rulers and religious leaders. **God alone is the Absolute.**

c) The Jesus community

The community, gathered around him, was to live the values of this divine rule. His mission is "to announce the good news to the poor, to liberate the captives, to set free the oppressed" (*Luke 4.18*). His kingdom means that the plan of God for humankind is to be fulfilled in a radically profound way, here on earth. It is a reversal of the usual conditions of society.

- The poor became rich (*Luke 6.20*),
- the first are last (*Mk. 10.31*),
- the small become great (*Mt. 18.4*)
- the hungry are filled,
- those who weep laugh,
- the sick are healed,
- the lame walk,
- the humble inherit the earth,
- the lowly are exalted,
- and the dead live.
- the weary find rest,
- the mourners are comforted,
- the blind see,
- the deaf hear,
- the prisoners are freed,
- the oppressed are liberated,
- Those who lose their lives find it (*Mt. 23, Luke 4*).

We can discern it through faith, contribute towards it by struggling in hope. Love is its fulfillment, joy its fruit. To live the values of this spiritual mastery over our lives is to realize a new power, a joy and a peace that surpass all other joys. It is a pure, unselfish, active, creative and liberating joy. This is the joy of the wedding feast to which liberated humankind is invited. It is for us to respond willingly by a conversion of heart, a reversal of values and a fundamental option for life, solidarity, friendship and effective sharing in love. Then heaven would have begun for us here on earth.

This is redemption, salvation, human liberation, and fulfillment. Jesus died testifying to these values. Jesus preached the kingdom of God, not himself.

d) Conversion Jesus Wants

Jesus invited persons and society to a radical conversion :

From Death	to	life, through death to self
darkness	to	light
error	to	truth, knowledge,
ignorance	to	Awareness of self, others & God.
selfishness	to	unselfishness
injustice	to	justice
hatred & prejudice	to	love, including love of enemies & Peace, Shalom, Forgiveness
greed	to	sharing
profit-seeking	to	need-serving
pride	to	humility, service
privilege	to	equality, empowerment of all
abuse of power	to	power being service
patriarchy	to	mutuality, partnership
hierarchy	to	community, reciprocity
domination	to	participation
isolation	to	cooperation, communion
indifference	to	caring, concern,
apathy	to	empathy, concern, commitment
unfreedom	to	freedom
hypocrisy	to	sincerity
dishonesty	to	honesty,
duplicity	to	authenticity

These pairs of words may not sometimes express correctly the difference between virtue and vice or good and evil e.g. there could be a healthy self love. It is sometimes necessary to stress one's self worth, especially when this has been downplayed as in the case of oppressed persons and groups, including women. The oppressed need to affirm their self-worth to themselves and others due to long interiorization of a sense of their inferiority.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. This is the path he calls us to follow. His mission was not the presentation of highly intellectual dogmas, but the practical call to conversion of all persons from evil, and injustice to love, sharing and communion – to koinonia, and diakonia. These are also the content of what we understand by redemption, salvation and integral liberation for persons and communities, both here and hereafter. Return to the consideration of the kingdom of God and its values can have a very salutary effect on the Churches themselves. The words of Jesus “seek ye first the kingdom of God” have a relevance for the churches too.

“Only in a secular history in which men and women are liberated for true humanity can God reveal his (sic) own being. There are many histories of suffering and disaster in human history; God cannot reveal himself in them

except ... as a veto or as judgment. Believers see the face of God in the history of human liberation. Unbelievers do not, but at the level of human liberation (the material of God's revelation) that process can be discussed by both believers and unbelievers in a common language. Here understanding and indeed collaboration are possible. So the deciding factor is not the explicit confirmation or denial of God, but the answer to the question, 'Which side do you choose in the struggle between good and evil, between oppressors and oppressed.'¹⁹¹

Churches too need to be evangelized so that they determine their priorities in terms of the gospels. A shift of accent from a church-centered theology to a kingdom-centered one can make Christians much more concerned with the love of neighbor and right relations in human society than with their exclusive self-interest. Seeking the interests of a Church is not necessarily synonymous with the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

Disciples of Jesus need to rediscover this movement-like dynamism of his teaching. The rigidity of cult, the arid formulae of dogma and the institutionalism of Churches tend to subdue this redemptive evangelical thrust and render it ineffective. If the churches are renewed by the sap of the gospel they can be standard bearers of this message and therefore agents of a profound transformation of humanity. They can then be torchbearers that light the path as peoples advance through the night towards their self-realization. For this the churches will have to allow themselves to be nailed on the cross by those who oppress the poor and the weak.

The past policies of the church were oriented primarily towards a conversion of persons to the church. Now this view has been altered substantially. Hardly anyone maintains today that membership of a church is essential for salvation. The more open view is that God's grace, (in so far as it is necessary), is adequately available to every human person for attaining one's destiny. The role of the church is seen as more concerned with the building of the rule of right relationships, of love and justice.

This perspective needs to be communicated very clearly to the world as a whole. Many still suspect Christians of considering conversion to the church to be the goal of our faith. We must not only clarify our present thinking and orientations for the future, we should also accept that we made mistakes in the past and seek the deeper causes for them. We should try to see where we went wrong and be prepared to correct ourselves frankly and publicly.

e) Redemption in Jesus is in the realization of right relationships:

The teaching, life, death and resurrection of Jesus show that Jesus did not share the presuppositions of classical theology about the original blessed state of humanity and an original sin that is communicated by generation. Neither did he teach that his death was to be salvific in the manner that was argued in the later centuries; nor, that the merits gained by him were to be distributed by the church through the sacraments. If these presuppositions are not accepted, much of what is done as the pastorate of the church would be seen to be not directly from Jesus teaching and example but due to later church formulations. The real demand and command of Jesus was for a conversion to right values and right relationships among persons and communities.

¹⁹¹ Edward Schillebeeckx: *Church – The Human Story of God*, Crossroad, New York, 1990, p. 7.

Such a conversion has to be the principal goal of the Christian mission. If religions cannot impact personal salvation beyond this life, the effective task of religions would be to transform humans life on earth. This is a supremely spiritual task.

The perspective that Christian redemption is in the realization of right relationships is now gaining ground among theologians. It follows from the teaching concerning the centrality of the kingdom of God. The studies on the human life of Jesus and his social commitment have brought this understanding into greater relief. Such a view on right relationships is, of course, the main teaching of religions like Buddhism, as in the noble eightfold path.

Feminist theologians insist that women see better the importance of human relationships for our liberation, fulfillment and holiness. Women bring forth new life in suffering and with risk to the mother's life. They nurture life, are closer to the sources of life, and generally more sensitive to human feelings. **Mary Grey** develops this position in "Redeeming the Dream". This is one of the principal themes of her work. She stresses that

"... the relational situation, its resources and strengths be recognized as the redemptive scene, and that the focus of this be widened from self-development alone, although it will be included, to the transformation of the very structures of society."¹⁹²

She widens the context from interpersonal relationships to embrace the natural world both as resource and as itself in need of redemption. Quoting Martin Buber, she notes that the fundamental category of existence is relationality.

"What I mean by relationality as a basic category is a mutuality, a dynamism, a responsiveness expressed in a myriad of different ways."

Thus the action of God in creation, of the Spirit of God "brooding over the waters" (Genesis) is relational. God must be the divine ground, the limitless source of relationality.¹⁹³

"If broken mutuality and broken relationships underlie all injustices, it is there that the redemptive task must begin." Where the basis of a relationship is injustice, God's call may be out of such a relationship. In such a perspective, God is the motivation for a passionate energy for right relationships which includes justice.

"Redemption will be to take responsibility for all the forms of relationality in which we are involved, personal and political ... here and now". Redemption is healing of persons and relationships. Those who take their responsibility in relationships, in situations of suffering as well as of joy, are responding to the call of the Spirit. It is also their own peace of mind and joy. There are many who participate in redemptive mutuality in our sad world, with or without a religious motivation.

¹⁹² Mary Grey, op.cit., p. 84.P

¹⁹³ Mary Grey, op.cit., p. 86 ff.

A more otherworldly theology of redemption may neglect the response due to the demand of right relations. Thus much of the celebrations around Christmas and Easter, in and outside the churches, may evade the deeper demands of realizing right relationships of class, gender or ethnic groups and religions.

Social services may themselves give us the sense of satisfaction in dealing with the victims and consequences of wrong relationships, without a serious concern for removing their causes. We may tend to evade the spiritual challenge of working for right relationships that can remedy the causes of the conflict or of the exploitation. We tend to opt easily for the path of least resistance. And in ordinary life, how much easier to accept existing norms and compromises, to be the reconciler, rather than the one who challenges the system.

If redemption/salvation/liberation are in right relationships the mission of the church would be carried out differently, and the whole church would be renewed thereby in more open inter-religious dialogue and cooperation in action. The Spirit of God would be then better acknowledged and effective in our mutual relationships for the common good of all.

*Chapter 9***The Jesus Mission****A. Is Universal**

The Jesus mission is for the realization of the values and right relationships Jesus preached lived and died for: It is universal and global. We are all in need of conversion. There in within each one of us good and evil in constant combat. It is a mission of all to one another. Human society as a whole is the subject or bearer of this mission. No one group is necessarily better or closer to the Jesus mission than others. Each one can contribute to the good of others. Each one's rights are an exigency on others demanding their recognition.

Mission is not so much a matter of doctrinal belief, as a life to be lived. The conversion required is not to a mere theoretical orthodoxy of doctrine, but rather a fidelity to his values in practical life-orthopraxis. In the parable of the Good Samaritan it is not the priest and levite who loved the neighbour, but the Samaritan who was not thought of as belonging to the chosen people of God.

A conscientious journalist, human rights lawyer, a sensitive artist, or a disinterested community worker may be more of a missionary of Jesus than a priest who performs merely an ecclesiastical function without much concern for personal fulfillment or social liberation of people.

B. And Other Religions

Jesus did not establish a religion to be in competition with other religions, or necessarily exclusive of other faith communities. He began a community of disciples who were to live and present the core values of the Kingdom of God that he preached.

In God's providence, the existence of different religions, can be a message to the disciples of Jesus and to Christians. A Hindu can make the message of Jesus known in some aspects to Christians themselves. Thus Mahatma Gandhi did more to make the Jesus message of truth and peace known and practiced than most Christians did over the centuries. No Christian saint, priest, theologian or Pope evolved in real life situation such a sublime and Jesus-like message of active, creative, non-violence as Gandhi did.

The Jesus mission is not necessarily a conversion from one religion to another; but rather from ignorance to truth and evil to good. This is a conversion that each person, religion and society constantly needs. It is a wrong understanding of the Jesus mission that would lead Christianity to compete with other religions as if it had a monopoly of truth and goodness.

Atheism itself can contribute to purify Christianity as Vatican II says in its Constitution on the Church in the Modern World": people turn to atheism partly because of a faulty and inadequate presentation of God in Christian teaching and life. The growth of atheism can challenge to believers in God to be more truthful and just.

The Christian community in the Acts of the apostles is the best, almost utopian example of persons and communities who understood well and took the teaching of Jesus seriously.

C. Jesus Mission and Evangelization

The word evangelization is often used to imply work for conversion of those who are not Christians to one of the Churches. We can however understand “Evangelization” to mean bearing witness to the “Evangelium” the good news of Jesus, announcing the Jesus message of the rule of righteousness, and of right relationships. It is a call to a “Dharma raj” – a community in which the Dharma reigns. Thus understood evangelization aims at improving the other-centeredness in our society. It is a call for a greater humanity and self realization among all irrespective of the particular religious affiliations. It means a responsibility of all to value the content of the message of truth, love, justice, freedom and peace, whatever be the source from which the message may come. The message is beyond particular formulations in a given period, language and culture.

The poor and weak can manifest the demands of the gospel message to the rich and the powerful. Women can evangelize men concerning the sin of sexism and the virtues of mutuality. The hierarchy can be evangelized by the laity concerning the burning issues of social and political life.

Evangelization can lead to our personal and community salvation in that it brings about the acceptance of the values of the kingdom by persons and groups. This can contribute to a better life for all here and in the hereafter. Evangelization is thus a process by which the love message of Jesus (and other spiritual leaders) becomes more pervasive in society. It is a qualitative transformation that can be beneficial to all persons. States and religions. Love has to be a substance and fruit of evangelization. Love is not competitive. Love gives and forgives. Such an action of evangelization is not harmful to any others and increases loving kindness.

D. Mission and Conversion of the Nations

The Gospel text “Go ye and teach all peoples and make them my disciples ...” Mt. 28:19 has often been interpreted to mean an obligation of Christians to convert all nations to Christianity. This has been understood to be the mission imperative. Leaving aside the authenticity of the text as Jesus’ own words, it is possible to understand it in relation to bearing witness to the core values of the Jesus message to all people. All nations are called to respect human life, human rights and human dignity of all persons and order society according to the values of truth, freedom, justice, equality and peace. These are the teachings of Jesus as well as other world religions and many persuasions.

The mission is for the transformation of the persons and social structures within each nation at a global level. This is an urgent priority task today. The conversion of the nations is not necessarily to a Church, but to genuine humanity and the care of Nature that makes human life possible. Some nations which do not call themselves Christian, may have conditions which, in some respects, are a better realization of the values of the Jesus mission, than some other nations that call themselves Christians. A

secular state may sometimes realise better the values of respect for all religions and persons, than one which claims to be Christian and tends to be exclusive and discriminates against others. The disciples of Jesus are called to take up position for the genuine emancipation of all peoples and groups: slaves, oppressed peoples, women, bonded labour, indebted nations, peoples under authoritarian regimes.

A. Global Mission

The next stage of the Jesus mission has to be a world wide endeavour for human freedom and dignity from a very oppressive world system and world structures. This is a global mission; and a cosmic mission towards all nature and the environment, now being polluted and degraded by the present patterns of development. The transformation of the relationships among nations is essential for realising the loving kindness that Jesus proposed. The conversion of the so called Christian nations to the values of Jesus, that they profess, is essential for the future of humanity. The conversion of the affluent persons and nations is the most important but most difficult mission of the Church. This should be an essential dimension of the re-evangelization of the West.

E. Who are the Missionaries of the Jesus' Mission?

The Jesus mission has to begin with a genuine, interior self conversion. It has to be a continuing search through life. It requires a qualitative deepening in right relationships and not a mere quantitative addition of members to a church. The spiritual environment of a society has to grow rather than the mere building of churches, schools and external worship.

In the Kingdom of God there is no discrimination on the basis of class, race, religion or sex. There is neither slave nor free person, Greek nor Jew, male nor female. There is no particular temple in the Kingdom of God. All are sacred, all are secular. The secular is sacred. All are loved and graced by God. As the mission of Jesus is the realization of right relationships, all those who contribute to this cause are the missionaries of the Jesus mission. Like God, Jesus does not belong to anyone group or community. Our faith which endeavours to discern the presence of the Spirit of God in all can inspire us to see the good being done by persons of different faiths and persuasions.

Some may exclude themselves from the kingdom of God by their wanton refusal to accept its values and norms.

Jesus criticized severely the hypocrites, *Luke 12.56, 13.15*.

“Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but pay no attention to the log in your own eye ... You hypocrite!”

The Locus of Mission has been also misunderstood in the Churches historically. It is not necessarily merely,

from	West	to	East, or vice versa
	rich	to	the poor
	Church	to	the world

Clergy	to	the laity
Christian countries	to	“mission” countries
Rome, Geneva, N.Y	to	Asia, Africa, Latin America

Christians and persons in Christian countries have had a sense of superiority over others - a feeling that they have God’s word which others do not have, and hence their missionary obligation. This implied sense of self righteousness and superiority, combined with a certain exclusiveness and use of power, made the Christian mission distasteful and even hurtful to others.

The study of mission or **missiology** should be the growth of the right relationships among persons and peoples, rather than the quantitative growth of the churches. **Mission history** would be human history seen from the perspective of the realization of the values of the kingdom. Such an approach is not yet accepted in the faculties of missiology even though the kingdom of God is recognized as the goal of the Jesus mission. Missiology hardly considers the questions of world justice or of crime and drugs in a community. The analysis of the structures of world injustice such as the International Monetary Fund or the multinational corporations like the world oil companies almost never enters the studies of missiology. These causes of so much wrong relations in the world are not yet seen as crucial for the spiritual combat of the Christians.

Christian education is not yet education in the sense of the Jesus mission that is universal and more value - oriented than communal. Growth in acceptance of the challenge of this universal presence of the Spirit is most difficult for Christians as we are accustomed to think of ourselves as specially privileged by God.

F. Jesus and Church

a) Let Jesus be Jesus

The Church is a community historically linked to Jesus,

- seeking its motivation in Jesus
- endeavouring to bear witness to Jesus
- claiming its mission and organization from Jesus

The Church does not fully contain or exhaust Jesus. *Jesus does not belong to the Church* in such a way as to exclude others knowing and relating to Jesus. Jesus belongs to the whole of humanity as do other great spiritual leaders of the world. Jesus cannot be possessed by the clergy or the hierarchy.

The alliance between the church and the Roman Empire under Constantine led to Jesus being made more a king and lord, rather than the one who was killed by the Romans for siding with the poor and the oppressed. The radical message of Jesus concerning personal, social and religious liberation was blunted; he was made the legitimizer of imperial power and of the patriarchal authority in the church.

Let Jesus be the human person he was, with as close a connection to the divine that a human is capable of being. He would then be a much more challenging inspiration to all persons.

b) Jesus and God: Let God be God

God is the Absolute, the infinite One, Immanent in all and Transcendent beyond all. The mystery that no human can comprehend or contain fully and still be human.

Such a perspective leaves God free to manifest the divinity in and through other persons, religions, movements, events and in nature itself. This is more in keeping with the core teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God. It also leaves the humanity of Jesus to be human. Then the life, passion and death of Jesus are more close to human experience, are more inspiring and challenging to us. This view is also much more in keeping with the gospel story. Jesus was an extraordinary human person; but he must not be so divinized as to overlook his humanity and human trials.

Theologians, Church dogmas and spirituality have made Jesus an abstract deity or a passive sufferer of oppression. One of the steps in seeking our identity as Asian Christians is *the liberation of Jesus from the cage of dogmatic definitions* in which he has been encased during many centuries. This is difficult due to the mental conditioning of traditional Christians and the consequential demands on his followers. The liberation of Jesus to be himself is the path for our own liberation. It is also a way of clarifying the identity of Christians in our pluri-religious societies. We should not too easily presume to define and confine God, the Absolute.

For us Jesus is divine; is of God, is with God, and manifests God, tells us concerning God – as Father, loving all. Jesus does not exhaust God; God does not belong to Jesus in such a way that God cannot manifest the divinity before or after Jesus or Nazareth. For us he is the most sublime manifestation of the divine in human form. But we cannot say the concept of God manifests Jesus i.e. we cannot begin with the attributes of the Absolute God and confer them to Jesus e.g. that Jesus had the fullness of all knowledge, or the beatific vision of God from his birth.

G. Church and Kingdom

In the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus: all receive the Spirit, there is/are:

- no sacred persons; all persons~ women and men, are sacred
- is no clergy, no particular spiritual authority;
- no organization as such; no hierarchy; no patriarchy
- no exclusively sacred places, or times,
- no preferred race, no privileged people of God
- all places, periods of time, peoples loved and are of God
- no exclusive unique revealed Book
- no special sacraments, rituals that are so essential as to disadvantage those who have no access to them
- no unique, privileged religion, that degrades others
- no competition of religions for power, or to save souls

Some Trends and Forces in the Western Churches

There are trends and forces operating in modern society which we have to acknowledge as realities impinging on our lives, but we may find it difficult to accept, understand or approve them. Despite our good will and prayers, these forces and

trends seem beyond our control. Among these may be mentioned, with reference to the Western countries and Australia and New Zealand:

- the rapid reduction in the number of Catholic priests and religious
- the almost irreversible fall in the number of vocations to the Catholic priesthood and religious life, with several religious congregations having hardly any members below the age of 40 years. Young persons who join them have grave worries as to their future in such institutions and hence tend to leave after some time
- the number of priests and religious who leave the priesthood and religious life
- the ageing of priests and religious, many being in their 70s and 80s; each year the position worsens and leads to traumatic situations
- the small size of the family, the break up of even the nuclear family and the decline and ageing of the population in the Western countries compound the situation; these add to the unlikelihood of a reversal of these trends
- the conviction is growing among religious and priests that their days as an order or priestly fraternity are ending. This causes among them a feeling that they may have engaged their lives with immense generosity in a cause that is no longer needed nor even appreciated even among Christians. Not many face the past with contentment and the future with optimism. Worry and sadness tend to pervade the religious houses in these countries
- the preoccupation of the religious congregations and dioceses is becoming more about care of the aged. They are building more homes for the aged than novitiates and seminaries.
- some priests and religious are making heroic efforts to update their vision, life style and ministries, often in conjunction with committed lay persons. However, often they have difficulties even within their dioceses or religious congregations due to differences of opinion concerning their orientations. The more conservative members are afraid of such experiments, as they are not sure whether they represent a call of the Spirit.
- the ongoing reduction in the numbers frequenting the Churches. The Western Christians are being “unchurched” in very significant numbers while they remain Christians in name and in some non-institutional inspiration.
- the giving up of the sacramental practices such as baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance and marriage rites in a church.
- this makes the services of the clergy less necessary.
- the church buildings, houses and property of religious are being sold as they are becoming relatively empty and unmanageable. Some cannot cover even their cost of heating during winter. They are sometimes preserved by the state as buildings of archeological value or museums. Companies are buying them and converting them to secular uses,
- The official Church seems incapable of or unwilling to meet these issues. The very process of an ageing leadership renders it less capable of responding to the signs of the times.

These trends and forces do not necessarily mean that there is less spirituality among the people of these countries. The expressions of faith in relation to a religious institution or practices have diminished; but many persons and groups are committed to the human struggles for values such as justice, peace, freedom, human rights, women's emancipation and the care of nature. Many of the younger generation that may be somewhat concerned with these issues do not find the Churches adequately seriously engaged in these issues.

The Western churches are not responding adequately meaningfully to the demands of the more conscious women and women's movements. The feminist critique of both church teaching and practice is not receiving a response that would enable women to think and feel that the official churches would or could be the inspiration for the emancipation that they desire.

A major paradigm shift is taking place in Christianity before our very eyes. We have seen it evolving during our life time from the 1940s. Vatican II tried to respond to some of these challenges. But, by and large, the official Church has tended to be less enthusiastic about the more radical re-orientations that would affect the life and lifestyle of the membership including the leadership.

The theology and spirituality that animate the dominant establishment of the churches is not yet oriented seriously to responding to these challenges.

The churches are progressively becoming institutions in which the majority of the active membership is in the poor and exploited countries of the world - "The Third Church" as Walter Buhlmann mentions in his book with this title (*Orbis N.Y., 1977*). But the power in the churches is still substantially in the Western countries. In the coming decades there will be a problem of the direction of the Western churches being in the hands of ageing Western clergy, or their laity or else of clergy from elsewhere? How will the church face this new phenomenon of the majority of the leadership being either laity or persons from Africa, Latin America and Asia? Will there be a major theological and cultural change in Christianity when the church membership is mainly from the poor, exploited and non-dominant peoples?

How may we understand these trends in relation to the reflection on the priority of the kingdom of God over the Church and her institutions? Would it be that the disciples of Jesus Christ would be a less institutionalized church and more a communion of those who accept his values and work with persons of all other faiths and of no particular religion for the common human causes?

The Kingdom of God

- is prior to the Church
- is the goal of the Church
- is the criterion by which the Church and its activities
- some in the Church may be outside the Kingdom
- some outside the Church may be in the Kingdom

No one knows the membership of the Kingdom of God unerringly and fully. The Kingdom of God is within each one; within each one there is a conflict of the values of the Kingdom and the forces of evil, of virtue and sin. All persons of good will, in their goodness, are members of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not known by human statistics.

“From East and West people will come, from North and South, for the feast in the Kingdom of God. Yes, and some who are first will be last” *Luke 13: 28-29*.

The Kingdom of God can exist:

- before the Church, and before the birth of Jesus. Jesus announced the Kingdom, he did not inaugurate it.
- without the Church, outside the Church,
- in spite of the Church, as the Church can be sinful
- even against the Church, when the Church is wrong
- after the Church in eternity

Jesus announced the Kingdom, he did not inaugurate it. The Church has to grow to be the Kingdom.

The Church has to be a learning Church,

- learning from and of the Kingdom
- to be always open to reform - “ecclesia semper reformanda”
- can be educated by the Kingdom including the world and the so-called secular reality e.g. regarding science, tolerance, democracy, social justice, women’s rights, cultures, ecology, peace and even spirituality.

The Church can learn, grow and serve all by:

- discerning the Kingdom present in the world, in all persons, religions, movements, events,
- participating in the struggle of the Kingdom to be born, to grow and come into in fullness,
- being everywhere at the service of integral human liberation
- being a space of freedom, specially for those suppressed being a herald of truth in situations of untruth
- being a champion of justice, in a world of grave injustice
- being a promoter of equality in situations of discrimination
- being a harbinger of peace in the midst of war and conflict
- being a network of alliances in support for the poor and weak
- placing its personnel, goodwill, and spiritual resources, on the side of these struggling for the values of the Kingdom wherever they be, whatever be their religion or persuasion.
- a home of a holiness, a school of discipleship of Jesus and active love of all in contemplative commitment.

The churches have been learning some of these lessons during the post Vatican II period. Pope John XXIII, a student of history, himself long marginalized within the

church, was of a temperament that listened to and learned from others. Pope Paul VI endeavoured to keep together the different trends in the Catholic church. Pope John Paul II, of a more determined nature, is firm and rather uncompromising on some issues, with its good and bad results. The World Council of Churches grappled with these issues in its general Assemblies, as at Canberra in February 1991. Thus the community begun by Jesus continues in human history learning from all God's call in Jesus through the Spirit for the realization of the reign of right relationships among all.

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