

Jesus Christ and Human Liberation

Tissa Balasuriya OMI

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FOREWORD

Fr. Tissa Balasuriya presents us in his booklet a picture of Jesus of Nazareth that is both relevant and meaningful to our times. He does so by interpreting for us the very words and deeds of Jesus Himself. That it departs from a picture hitherto accepted among Christians calls us to reflect seriously on what he says.

Luis Segundo the Latin American theologian concludes his book on “Our Idea of God” with these words “Our notion of God must never cease to travel the road which runs from Atheism to faith – because, a person cannot say he has found God if he stops searching for Him. He can only have found a caricature of God”. He bases his conclusion on the argumentation that man has not always escaped the temptation of absolutising a concept of God that is only valid in a particular socio-political-cultural context.

Other things being equal, Father Balasuriya seems to argue that the Jesus of the Gospels has suffered the same fate and attempts to re-interpret the life and message of Jesus in order to bring into bolder relief aspects of his life that have been either overlooked Or misrepresented.

The section on the Cosmic Christ seems to me to go along with the modern trend for a search of a “One World Spirituality” the preoccupation of many spiritual masters of today.

In any case Fr. Balasuriya’s booklet convinces me that the Spirit of Prophecy is not extinct in the Church. The Prophet of today must make use of the medium of the printed word to deliver his message. This is sufficient reason for this booklet to be published.

Easter 1976

Leo Nanayakkara. O. S. B.
*Bishop of Badulla,
Sri Lanka.*

PREFACE

In Sri Lanka today there is a certain questioning both among Christians and others as to what it means to be a follower of Jesus in our times. Some Christian groups have passed the stage of a defensive rearguard action against the social, nationalistic and religious changes in our country. They commit themselves to social justice precisely because they consider it a demand of service to their neighbour as well as of their discipleship of Christ.

When Christians espoused rather conservative socio-political options it was taken for granted that the Church could adopt such stances even with a religious motivation. Those who opposed them were regarded as not of God. Today on the other hand, all over the world some Christian groups foster more egalitarian measures. They are prepared to live within socialistic regimes as in Cuba or Vietnam, and support movements of national liberation in Mozambique, Angola and Portugal. In Latin America, in the Philippines and in South Korea, Christians are in the vanguard of the struggle for human rights and social justice. We are thus witnessing significant changes in the Christian interpretation of the gospel - at least in relation to the prevailing orthodoxy.

How can this phenomenon be understood? Is it a temporary aberration? Or is it a real deepening of Christian life? Some accuse Christians who are active in the cause of social justice of being too concerned with temporal issues and neglecting spiritual values; others charge them with not paying attention to individual problems, or the eternal salvation of souls. Church documents are quoted in one direction or the other.

In these circumstances it is necessary to seek deeper foundations for our faith and our motivation. For us in the Asian countries, there is an urgent need to rethink the message of Christ as far as possible in its original and authentic source. This little booklet is an effort to draw out from the gospels and the rest of the New Testament an understanding of Jesus Christ that can help us face the personal and specially social issues of our time. As it is rather brief many aspects are omitted or inadequately developed.

During three years 1972 - 1975 I wrote weekly comments on the Sunday Scripture texts for Catholic weeklies in Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and New Zealand. I had also occasion to develop these ideas in numerous conferences and study sessions in this country and in many other parts of the world. The substance of these pages has been presented to several sessions of the International Movement of Catholic Students of which I have been Asian Chaplain since 1969, to the first meeting of the Women Religious of Asia in Hong Kong in 1972, and to the Bishops' Institute of Social Action (BISA III) in Kuala Lumpur Nov. 1975. In September 1974 I participated in a workshop of a dozen theologians from all the Continents of the world to prepare drafts for the sections on society and justice for the World Council of Churches General Assembly held last year in Nairobi.

I have had the privilege of meeting numerous groups of persons in many countries working for better human relations and social justice inspired by Christ. This is today a rather universal phenomenon. . The ideas presented here have been

gathered at these meetings, in study, in quiet reflection and in the midst of our own struggle for human liberation in Sri Lanka.

It is a growing conviction within me that the poor in the villages, estates and urban areas of our country have a terrible yoke imposed on them by the prevailing unjust social system. This in turn dehumanizes the affluent elite too. Frustration, and even a certain desperation, are growing in certain areas of the country, specially among the youth and the ethnic, sociological and caste minorities. The majority population in the rural areas too feels that the course of history has made them scapegoats of successive waves of exploitation.

At the same time we notice that many groups are interested in justice at local, national and international levels. The oppressed nations of the world are grouping themselves in different forums such as the United Nations, UNCTAD, Non-Aligned Conference etc. Within this background we note with joy that “a responsible and adult Christianity is coming increasingly to expression everywhere throughout the world”, as the World Council of Churches draft for Nairobi stated. “To realise this is a great joy, living as we do in the midst of tremendous sufferings of this present time. It is a sign that despite our betrayals and division, the Gospel is at work as a vital liberating force. We are really fortunate to live in such a time as this when men and women of all races, languages and peoples have manifestly discovered, along with faith, the meaning of their lives, and have decided, whatever this may cost them, not to live for themselves alone, but engage in the liberating service for the benefit of mankind. It matters little whether they ‘succeed’ or ‘fail’ outwardly; whether victors or vanquished they are those who in our time are making history and creating tomorrow’s world.”

The Catholic Students Movement of Asian countries and the world at large has been a stimulus to constant rethinking and revaluation. The Catholic intellectual movement - which with the students, is part of Pax Romana - has also helped me have wide and deep contacts with such groups in every Continent. The Christian Peace Conference has enabled me to experience the issues faced by and the dedication of Christians specially in the socialist countries and in those carrying on national struggles for liberation.

Several authors have contributed directly and indirectly to the growth of these ideas. I wish to mention in particular C. H. Dodd of Britain, Gustavo Gutierrez of Lima, Peru, Albert Nolan of South Africa, Francois Houtart of Belgium, Sebastian Kappen and Samuel Rayen of India and Christy Joachimpillai of Sri Lanka, Philip Scharper of Maryknoll New York has been a source of great encouragement to me.

* * * * *

May this little booklet help in the liberation of all - poor and rich, oppressed and oppressor - in our country. That it should meet with criticism is to be expected. I hope such criticism will help correct any shortcomings and also bring into relief its basic thrust, for the good of all in this country.

Good Friday , 16th April 1976

PREFACE TO REPRINT IN 1981

Due to requests for this book we are reprinting it. It was written in the early 1970s, and I would like to retouch and update parts of it, but lack of time prevents this.

The main core of the thinking concerning Jesus Christ and human liberation still retains a validity. In my own mind, if anything, the process of time and events have added greater conviction to the main perspectives. The sections on Asia and the Churches, however need updating, and await a more detailed work.

In the Asian region the political and economic evolution has continued with the further consolidation of blocs like ASEAN and an opening of China to dialogue with the Western capitalist countries. Dictatorial regimes still hold sway in the free enterprise countries of South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia. The Middle East has benefitted from the petroleum boom, but has not yet emerged from its internal turmoils. Pakistan and Bangladesh are going through particularly a difficult period. India and Sri Lanka continue to bungle along with somewhat democratic regimes. Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos have entered a period of deep internal troubles after their struggles for liberation from foreign control. The search of Asian peoples for social justice and democracy continues despite many set backs.

The 1970s have been a very creative period for Islam, which has expressed itself as a major motivating force in several Asian and African countries.

The Churches in Asia have also gone through a maturing process during the post decade. Though by and large, the Churches remain socially uninvolved or rather conservative, in some countries they have made significant contributions to the on going struggle for human liberation. In the Philippines the Catholic Church is the main popular force that can stand up against the inroads on the freedom and rights of the people by the dictatorship. In South Korea the Churches are one of the few mass organizations which can openly stand by the oppressed masses. In Taiwan some Christian groups are beginning to articulate a critique of the repression of human rights, even though feebly. In Japan Church related organizations have an influence far beyond their numbers in issues of human rights, disarmament and control over Japanese multinationals. Though Hong Kong is a colony, the Church there has off and on expressed itself in favour of the rights of the people. The colony is also a valuable base for the communication among Asian groups working for human liberation in different areas of oppression. In Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Singapore, the Churches are very small minorities. For them existence itself is very often a problem. Yet some small groups have an impact for justice and equality in their difficult situations. In India and Sri Lanka the Churches are numerically larger, though not necessarily as a proportion of the total population. In both these countries sections of the Churches are moving closer to the peoples who are struggling to improve the lot of the masses and effect more radical socio-economic transformation. In Vietnam the Churches are going through the novel experience of participating in the building up of socialistic structures and mentalities. North Vietnam went through very difficult times prior to 1975 due to the war, and thereafter with the effort of reconstruction. The Churches in North Vietnam have had a different

experience from that of China under the communists as they were more prepared to share in the struggle for national liberation from imperialism and capitalism.

In the whole Asian region the Churches act more ecumenically. They are also opening themselves to closer relationships with the other religious and secular movements for freedom and justice. After several decades contact is being established between the Churches in China and those in the neighbouring countries, through the flow of information and contacts are still far from adequate to form a clear picture of the situation.

In all this process *the evolution of Theology in Asia* has had a moulding influence on Church groups. The 1970s have been a period when Christian Theology in Asia began to express itself as a distinct strand of thought in the life of the churches, particularly of the Protestant and Catholic traditions. The Orthodox Communion has been Asian from their inception in Apostolic times. In the early 1970s theological reflection evolved in the Asian countries without much connection with each other. The main linkages of the Churches were still vertically with their European and North American counterparts. The lay organizations, religious congregations and even dioceses were also related in that manner rather than at the Asian level.

Through the 1970s, however linkages began to be forged among Asian Churches, specially among groups engaged in theological reflection. Several factors contributed to this:-

- Christian Conference of Asia, the Asian student and workers movements, the Asian religious congregations, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, the publications of reviews with an Asian Christian focus, the influence of more radical thinking from Latin America and North America. The most important factor ~as the greater closeness that Asian Churches, or groups within them, had with the struggling masses in these countries. The dialogue with the other religions in Asia also was a challenge and an inspiration to the evolution of Christian thought in Asia. In the process, the interest of Christians in other continents, specially the Orbis publications of the Maryknoll Fathers from New York helped create a wider network of theological exchange and cross fertilization.

By the beginnings of the 1980s there are significant theological works from several Asian Countries: South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka etc. The Asian Theological Conference held in Sri Lanka in January 1979 was an occasion for the coming together of such groups and writers. Their statement and work provoked much comment, even internationally, due to their emphasis on openness to other religions and commitment to human liberation being central to theology. The Asian context is influencing theology more than ever before, though, as yet, it cannot be claimed that the theologians are from among the real masses of Asia's poor.

In the coming decade, if the Christian groups and theological writers I get closer to the struggling poor in the villages, urban slums, factories and plantations of Asia they will present much deeper challenges to present day Church life. Then the

churches too are likely to be closer to the movements of the Asian Peoples, instead of being rather fearful of them or marginal to their struggles as in the colonial period.

One of the principal concerns of Asian Theology has been the rethinking concerning the person of Jesus himself. These Asian writers have almost instinctively gone back to the re-reading of the Gospels to get an understanding of Jesus that may be more meaningful to them. This may also be more true to the Jesus of history, in so far as it is based on sound scholarship and appreciation of the life and times of Jesus. Our centre has published some representative writings of Jesus in two small volumes entitled "The Asian Face of Jesus" - with contributions from India, Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, Japan and Sri Lanka.

Jesus, is a liberator of Asian theology. By meeting him more directly the Asian Christian thinkers can bypass or relativize the centuries of theology when the problems of Western Church organization and of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation dominated Christian thought. In fact much of the theological conflicts among the Churches were also products of these European divisions exported to the rest of the world. A return to Jesus and the religion of the Spirit of God given to all humanity can be a way out of the tangles which Western Christian theological traditions have got themselves involved in.

Asia is a much wider human context than any of the other Continents, or even the rest of the world all taken together. Peoples, religions, cultures, ideologies, millennial traditions all intermingle in this half of the world called Asia. Through the teachings of Jesus Asian writers can meet a wider humanity. For them the new humanity is the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of. It can include all religions and cultures as well as the contemporary revolutionary movements of human liberation. Churches as communions of groups of believers have to find meaning and mission within the wider human quest for the Kingdom.

Jesus understood in such a wider and liberating sense is welcomed in Asia. No Asian religion or ideology can then find Jesus either foreign or negative to the genuine aspirations for liberation of sex, race or class. The Churches themselves are challenged to be more Jesus like, to present his message more integrally. The Churches are called to understand their traditions within this wider human pilgrimage towards truth and justice, freedom and equality.

In the coming years this challenge to the Churches from Asian Theology is likely to deepen and spread. In this Christology and the understanding of Jesus of Nazareth will be central. The traditional teachings of the churches are likely to be questioned at their very roots. This will not be an infidelity to Jesus or the gospels, but rather an effort to understand them from beyond the Western experience, methodologies of analysis and modes of perception.

By the turn of this century the Churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia will be more than half of Catholic Christianity. Their "Third Worldness" itself may give Christianity a greater identification with the oppressed races, exploited castes and classes, and the dominated sex in the world. We can look forward to a renewal of the Churches themselves from and in such a flowering of theology in Asia.

The activities of the different world Churches would do well to understand this trend in advance, so as to avoid unnecessary tensions, warnings and condemnations. These Churches themselves are called to grow to a wider world and deeper human dimension. In this sense Christian Theology is still young; the Western elaborations of the past 1500 years should not be an incubus on new searches; much less should they be used as a spiritual sledge hammer to crush emerging theological insights.

This little book is more like a simple pathfinder, a small contribution towards a much more profound and radical rethinking that is to be awaited in the coming decades. When theology comes forth from the poor, the women and men of Asia, and is a motivating force of their struggles for personal meaning in life and integral human liberation within the context of their cultures, religions and ideologies, then the Churches too will come closer to the Kingdom of God to which all humanity is called and yearns for.

Pentecost 1981

Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I.

Chapter 1

TRADITIONAL PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN RECENT CENTURIES

(a) Impact of Social Forces on Religions

Christian theology is today deeply challenged at the different levels ranging from the personal to the world order. To meet this, it must deeply rethink its fundamental bases. Our understanding of Jesus Christ as the founder of Christianity is foremost among these issues. The position of Mary as the next in importance too needs to be reconsidered. All over the world there is an on-going search as to the personality and message of Jesus.

Religions seek to give an explanation of the meaning of life at the deepest level of human philosophical search. Why does man live, suffer, enjoy and die? From where does he come, what becomes of him after this life? Is there a supreme being who regulates the universe and human destiny? How can a person find meaning, joy and peace within himself, in relation to others with nature and the transcendent values, power or person he believes in? The inner core of the religious experience is the way a person relates in his conscience to himself, his neighbour, nature and the fundamental values or God in whom he believes.

Each religious tradition has also a particular relationship to the society in which it takes root and lives, thus Hinduism in India, Islam in the Middle East and Christianity in Europe. The religious intuition influences social forces. On the other hand, the social powers tend to condition religions, to make them evolve teachings and practices consonant with the needs, values and position of those in power. Religion organized as a special group tends to seek the support of the powers-that-be for its continued peaceful existence and external growth.

The social powers can find in religion a valuable justification of their own position. Social power depends very much on physical and economic strength for its

maintenance. It finds that religion can offer a meta-social legitimation of its power, and a “spiritual” motivation for its continuance and for eliciting the obedience of the subjects. Thus the idea of the Europeans’ responsibility for saving the rest of the world coincided with the European expansion into the rest of the world.

Hence in a religious tradition or organization we have to distinguish these two elements: the core message and its social-cultural conditioning. The former is a basic intuition of life and can have a permanent value; it can even be a criterion for evaluating the organizational and external aspects of a religion. On the other hand, the religion as a socio-cultural phenomenon may relate more to a given human grouping than to the content and quality of the faith of a religion. Faith is a response to the core message; it need not necessarily accept the whole of the socio-cultural conditioning of a religious tradition.

Religions tend to adjust themselves to the ruling values of the society. We need not therefore be surprised that the understanding of the life of Jesus too has been subjected to this phenomenon. Throughout the centuries since his death, successive generations of Christians have thought of Jesus in many different ways. The accent has varied around such themes as: the near advent of his second coming, his divine nature and humanity, his position in the Trinity, his sufferings, his presence in the blessed sacrament, his obedience to the Father, his works of social service, his continued unhappiness due to humanity’s sinfulness, his universal kingship, his personal love, his redeeming love, his mercy... There have been long crusades for centuries for preserving his tomb in Jerusalem.

In terms of a sociological analysis of religion, these have all been within the framework of an acceptance of the overall socio-political status quo. The early Church of the first three centuries was an exception. At that time Christianity contested the values of the Roman Empire and its claim to the total and absolute loyalty of its subjects as if to a God. In subsequent generations Christian rulers and Popes interpreted the sayings of Jesus in favour of their own interests.

Can we in our time, reevaluate the life of Jesus without falling into the same position? We can try to be as objective as possible, by being attentive to the total picture as in the Gospels. However, what we do is also a reflection from our own experience and background. This can be a contribution to an understanding of Jesus without any claim to being an exclusive one.

Our times permit us to make a critique of the past perspectives, because historical experience is wider. We are a generation that has become aware of the oneness of the world and of our common human destiny. We have come to know other religions as a valuable spiritual patrimony of humanity. We have seen ideologies, that are not religious, or claim to be anti-religious, making significant contributions to human advancement. All these, can help us critically rethink the past.

We in Asia have also gone through an experience of throwing away colonial domination. With it the Christian expansion and presence in Asia is also being reevaluated. Presently, we are involved in a process of a search for personal identity and societal liberation. Both these also call in question traditional religious positions, including our traditional understanding of Jesus.

(b) Jesus as Presented in Asia

Jesus of Nazareth is one of the persons *most misrepresented and misunderstood* in history. We Christians are largely responsible for this. He was presented to Asia in modern times in the manner he was thought of in modern Western Europe and later North America. This was an understanding of Jesus that suited the Christian religious institution which had become the handmaid of the Roman Emperors and later on of medieval feudal lords and rulers, including the papal states. By the 16th century *incipient commercial capitalism* had subordinated the religious institution to its own requirements. Both the Protestant and Catholic institutions of religion adapted themselves to the capitalistic ethic, though with some what different accents.

The differences between the Catholic and Protestant understandings of Jesus were not as significant as was their basic agreement on subserving the developing world order. The Catholics, being Latins, were more expansive in their devotionism than the Protestants who were more German and Anglo Saxon. The differences between Catholics and Protestants were concerning issues such as the Papacy, the nature of the Eucharist, ministry in the Church, auricular confession, the relationship between magisterium and the word of God. These were not of substantial importance to the relationship of the churches towards growing Capitalism and the imperial expansion of the Western peoples. Protestantism may have been more appreciative of the capitalistic “virtues” of saving, hard work, and the amassing of wealth. But both Catholicism and Protestantism were together in wanting to benefit from the western technological superiority over other peoples.

Both Christian groups regarded the *Western Expansion* as a God-given opportunity for missionary activity. They competed among themselves, but were basically agreed in accepting the commercial and colonialist expansion of the Western peoples. Both groups sought the patronage and favour of secular powers for their missionary expansion in the Americas, Asia and Africa. The Protestant Reformation asserted certain aspects of personal liberation in the sphere of religion, such as the right of the human conscience to resist religious authoritarianism. However, the Reformation was not against social exploitation as such. The Protestant Reformation helped subordinate religion to the national rulers and their priorities. “Cujus regio, ejus religio”, whose is the region, his is also the religion, was a saying of the time.

There was a fundamental agreement in the thinking on Jesus among Catholics and Protestants, in so far as *both neglected liberation from social exploitation*. It is in this background we have to understand the presentation of Christ in the different Asian countries during the past five to seven centuries. The Catholics brought to Asia a Christ as understood by the Spaniards, the Portuguese and later the French, Italians, Belgians, Irish and North Americans. The Protestants carried with them an Anglo-Saxon version of Christ.

Since Christianity came to Asia in modern times along with colonialism, it is only natural that the Churches in Europe or Asia could not evolve a theology of Christ that would contest the colonial exploitation of peoples. On the contrary, theology saw in such exploitation a divine plan for human redemption. Thus salvation was conceived of in terms that did not relate to their social and personal emancipation.

In the Catholic theology of the time the emphasis was placed on the importance of membership of the Church for a person's salvation. Theology was in fact more Church-centered, than Christ-centered or even God-centered. After the Church the emphasis was on *sacraments* and *saints*. The sacraments in turn make the Christians Church- or priest-centered. In the life of Jesus, the texts about baptizing all nations and obedience to the Church authorities were highlighted. In the case of Catholics, the relative neglect of the Scriptures helped further strengthen such accents.

(c) 19th Century View of Jesus

The 19th century Western European schools of spirituality influenced very much the thinking of Asian Catholics. For the main missionaries of the time were from the religious congregations and organizations like the Missions Etrangères de Paris M. E. P. – The Foreign Missionary Society of Paris. Their spirituality emphasized *a personal relationship to Jesus understood as a friend*. The apparitions as to Blessed Margaret Mary strengthened this perspective.

Jesus was viewed as the one who had to redeem the human race from the consequences of the original sin of Adam. The accent was on Jesus as the second person of the Blessed Trinity, who became man in obedience to the Father in order to make reparation for our sins. Man's sin was a crime against the infinite majesty and love of God. Only an equivalent reparation could make up for such a heinous crime. The death of Jesus was sufficient reparation because he was God-Man. Thus he redeemed all humanity vicariously.

The life and death of Jesus were seen mainly as an act of obedience to God rather than as a logical working out of his own personal options made in the context of the society of his day. His love for persons in their oppressed situations and the consequential liberative process were almost completely by-passed. It was even said that any single act of obedience of Jesus would make up for the disorder brought into the universe due to Adam's disobedience. Such elaborations of theologians and spiritual writers, unfortunately neglected the gospel narrative. For in the gospels we see the life and death of Jesus within the social and political context of his time and place. In those circumstances, obedience to God meant his following his conscience to the bitter end, even unto the death on the cross.

Jesus was seen as the *obedient servant of the Father, the faithful religious of God*. Religious here meant one vowed in self-sacrificial, immolative obedience. The trial and death of Jesus were meditated on from the point of their value due to the hypostatic union in Jesus of God and man. An individualistic social environment would, quite naturally, not foster anything but an individualistic approach to the understanding of Jesus. The theological researches were concerning questions such as whether Jesus as God-man could suffer, whether he had perfect knowledge, whether he enjoyed the beatific vision while on earth etc.

The *personal life of the historical Jesus* of Nazareth was seen as a combination of evangelical zeal for converting people, active social service towards those in need and the practice of the more passive virtues of obedience, self-sacrificial victimhood, meekness, kindness, tolerance and patience. This fitted in well with the orientations of the 19th century missionary Church. The main tasks of the Churches

and missionaries were the establishment of groups, of baptized worshipping Christians, the provision of social services and the running of schools. All these were regarded as means for the eternal salvation of souls.

The understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ was almost exclusively in relation to the Church. The Church, in turn was thought of as the unique means of salvation. Hence the absolute necessity of spreading Christianity. The claim to a divine right of missionaries to go to foreign lands, and even upset other religious institutions and beliefs followed from such a perspective. This was seen as an obligation of charity towards others for; otherwise, how would they be saved? It was part of the Christian missionary obligation to go, baptize and save all peoples.

In the Church, Christ with his divine power, was said to reside much more in the authoritative elements of the organization. The Pope, the Vicar of Christ, was represented in the diocese by the Bishop, and in the parish by the parish priest. Ecclesiastical authority was from Christ, and therefore divine. The principal quality or virtue of the inferiors down the line was to follow Christ in his meek obedience to the Father. The paternity of God the Father was said to be represented by the authority in the Church, at the different levels.

Such a perspective was grafted on to the traditional feudal authoritarian and superstitious trends in Asian societies. *The devotionalism* of the Asians found in the Catholic practices a suitable substitute for their earlier religious as well as superstitious practices. They would now ask for favours from St. Sebastian, St. Anthony or Our Lady of Lourdes, instead of having recourse to the local deities, astrologers and sorcerers.

Almost the whole of Catholic life was built around such an *individualistic, romanticized concept of Jesus and Mary*. The litany of the Holy Name of Jesus reveals how Catholics regarded Jesus. He was the sweet Jesus, the Sweet Heart of many Catholic hymns and prayers. The books of meditation were replete with considerations of the almost effeminate qualities of Jesus: meek and mild, sweet and gentle, obedient unto death like a lamb. The overall presentation is of a conformist, domesticated, apolitical Jesus.

Such a Christian spirituality was particularly developed by *pious women, specially nuns*. For them Jesus was the “chaste spouse”, “the bridegroom of the soul,” the innocent lamb who takes on himself the sins of the world. He was meek and humble of heart. He looked for one to console him and found none. He would be specially consoled by long hours spent before the tabernacle where he was a prisoner of love, often neglected by the vast majority of mankind. He was shown as prayerful, prudent and interested only in the salvation of souls. But there is no reference to his concern for structural problems of social relations. He was thus seen as a conformist rather than a true liberator.

The liturgy gave a similar emphasis. The feasts of Our Lord were reduced to celebrations of birth, childhood and death as expiation. In the Holy Family, Jesus was seen as one who was always obedient to the elders. The feast of Corpus Christi stressed the need of consoling Jesus for the sins of man. Jesus was seen in his agony in the garden, as suffering humbly. But it did not understand the social liberative

nature of calvary and the Eucharist. The choice of scriptural texts showed Jesus as always wise, calm, patient, loving and doing good.

The litany of the Sacred Heart too has little relation to human life and the problems of personal fulfilment and social justice. It speaks of the Heart of Jesus as infinite in majesty, abyss of all virtues, desire of the eternal bliss, patient and abounding in mercy, our peace and reconciliation, atonement for our iniquities, victim of sin ... made obedient unto death. If prayer is an indication of belief (*lex orandi est lex credendi*), these prayers tell us of the type of beliefs of Catholic Christians for many generations. Even the idea of praying to the Sacred Heart as if considered separate from the person of Jesus seems a division in his integral personality. The Sacred Heart of Jesus was romanticized as needing human consolation “Could you not watch one hour with me”? This was understood as a personal call to spend lonely hours before the tabernacle, without much impact on what was happening outside in society.

The “Imitation of Christ” by Thomas A. Kempis is a book which has given expression to such an otherworldly, anti-intellectual and passive spirituality. The Chapters of the 4 Books of the Imitation spell out this attitude in detail. In the first chapter it begins with the idea of “despising the world to tend to that Kingdom of heaven” Bk. 1.1.3. Its chapters are almost all negative in their approach to nature, the world, life, and human love. It is a contemplative monk’s reflection on Jesus, that does not see his warm personal humanity and his deep committed interest in public affairs of his day.

The “*Imitation of Christ*” was read for centuries (till very recently) in religious houses, seminaries and Christian families. By being so one sided, it has been responsible for a well-intentioned but disastrous, distortion of Jesus Christ. That it was accepted by so many, for so long is an indication of the extent to which Christians found it *satisfying to think* of Christ in such terms.

Art also helped in the domestication of Jesus. He is portrayed as a child in the arms of Mary, as a wonder worker, as suffering and dead on the cross. Pictures of Jesus as a heart aflame with love were quite common in Catholic homes. But the Jesus who taught personal and social liberation and died for it was not present in the art of Christians. The Risen Lord portrayed by the oriental tradition also lacked socio-political relevance to earthly problems.

The *Catechetics, preaching and liturgy* of the past century knew Jesus mainly as mentioned above. After the 1960s Catechetics brought in the ideas of Jesus as love and of the love of God for man. This was not yet Jesus as related to integral human liberation. The official teaching of the Church such as the encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ by Pope Pius XII in 1947 was still rather on the old pattern though with a communitarian dimension. It is doubtful whether any Bishop in Asia wrote any pastoral on Jesus of Nazareth during the whole period from 1800-1940 or so. Pastorals were related to matters of devotions, discipline and defence of church privileges.

This whole combination of theology, spirituality and devotionism fitted into the background of oriental feudalism, despotism and superstition and Western Capitalism in its imperialistic phase. Hence there was a strange support for Christian

missions by European Governments which sometimes attacked religious institutions in their home lands. A British Protestant Government granted Catholic emancipation in Ceylon in 1806, whereas it came about in Britain only in 1829.

(d) Even after Vatican II

It may be claimed that all this has now been given up with Vatican II. This is not so. Most of the Catholic groups in Asia still live the old spirituality in their personal and cultic lives. Where there have been changes it is due either to the influence of socio-political forces, such as Marxism or the spread of a theology of liberation as among certain groups as in the Philippines. Vatican II did not directly re-assess the role of Christ in terms of personal and social liberation – though, it may be said, to have prepared the way for it. The key concepts of Vatican II were openness, service, participation, dialogue, collegiality, ecumenism, liturgical renewal, the Church in the modern world. These did not deal directly with the personality, mission and liberative message of Jesus of Nazareth.

In any case Vatican II has not yet changed the Asian Churches very profoundly. It is understandable that the institutional leadership of the Churches may be slow to present a liberating Jesus, because this would have a demythologizing impact on their own hold on the people. They would then not be seen as so necessary or so important in the plan of God for personal salvation. On the other hand, they would find themselves burdened with requirements of action for socio-political liberation; and this can be challenging to them personally and to the religious institution as a group. Hence, one witnesses a great slowness on the part of the official Churches to present a more total view of Jesus, other than the individualistic, social service oriented, “supernatural”, suffering image of Jesus and Mary. The people too find the individualistic view of Christ a comfortable tranquilizer that permits them to neglect common human issues, and gives them a sense of security in religious practices.

It is not difficult to see why such a presentation of Jesus should lead to an alienation of the adults, specially the males from institutionalized Christianity. Even in the personal aspects of life Jesus was not understood as teaching a liberative message concerning the rules and norms imposed by the religious authorities affecting human relations in matters such as freedom, love, marriage, war, other religions, fasting and prayer. This concept of Jesus was useful for legitimizing the power of the religious authorities over peoples’ lives down to the details of personal behaviour.

Hence we find that many thinkers who developed philosophies of human liberation and men of action who participated in such movements not only found themselves estranged from the religion of the day but even thought that the Christian religion had to be attacked and destroyed as an enemy of human values such as justice, equality, participation, freedom and truth. Men of religion responded to this attitude by considering such philosophies and movements as merely humanitarian, this worldly, materialistic, irreligious, atheistic, anti-Christian and not compatible with a genuine love of God and work for the salvation of souls.

A deep opposition grew up between the forward-looking movements of human liberation and the Christian religion. In the process since Christianity claimed to

represent Christ and was thought to have a quasi monopoly of Christ the opposition to Christianity was considered an opposition to Christ. Jesus was often regarded as an enemy of science, of modernity, of democracy, of socialism, of the struggle of the workers for social justice, of the exploited peoples for their liberation. At least he was not seen as on their side.

Vatican II tried to reconcile the Church and Christianity with these movements, and rightly so. However, we have to go further in our search. We have to ask ourselves why the founder of Christianity has been so interpreted over the centuries. Was he such a passive, anti-social, anti-human, conformist as he has been made out to be during so many centuries? Can we find answers to these questions and orientations for a new approach merely from the return to the theological sources of the past 5, 10 or 15 centuries? Or, should we return to the scriptures, the Gospels themselves, to find out who Jesus was, what sort of a person he was in his earthly existence?

Modern studies on Christ based on as scientific an exegesis as is currently possible and his popular rediscovery through the return to the scriptures and “Jesus movements” give us new emphases for reevaluating the life and message of Jesus and institutionalized forms which Christianity has taken. A meditation on the gospels in the light of our modern problems and searches presents new perspectives on Jesus that can be the take-off point for a reorientation of Christianity. Evidently it cannot be claimed that any person or age can exhaust the understanding of Christ. All that we can say is that what we see as essential to the life and message of Christ are from the Gospels and cannot therefore be divorced from an integral spiritual experience inspired by Christ or from a religious institution claiming allegiance to him.

(e) Traumatic Experience of Christians in Sri Lanka

The Christian Churches in Sri Lanka, as in other Asian countries, are profoundly marked by their origin and historical connections with the ruling powers. Catholicism came to Sri Lanka with the Portuguese conquerors in the early 16th century. The Catholic Church *in the Portuguese period (1505-1658)* had a clergy that was almost wholly Portuguese in nationality. They largely identified the interest of the Catholic Church with those of the Portuguese colonial rulers. Even if they were at times critical of the Portuguese business practices, they operated under the umbrella of Portuguese imperialism. Hence it is understandable that they could not present to Sri Lanka Catholics a view of Jesus Christ that was truly liberative in social, economic and political life. On the contrary, Catholicism then legitimized Portuguese colonial expansion. Nor could we expect at the time the Portuguese clergy and their followers to be critical of the military and commercial exploits of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka in the rest of Asia, in Africa and Latin America. Spain and Portugal tended to positively correlate their self-interest with their concept of the salvation of souls and the spread of Catholicism.

The Dutch who replaced the Portuguese as the rulers of the maritime provinces brought their brand of Christianity – the Dutch Reformed Church. Though the Dutch predikants exerted much efforts to spread Dutch Protestantism, the Dutch Reformed Church was a small group in the country. Their numbers, which were always few, dwindled during British times and after Independence.

During the Dutch period (1658-1796) the Catholics of Sri Lanka were subjected to severe hardships. Catholic children had to attend Reformed schools, the marriages of Catholics had to be registered in the Reformed Church, Catholic marriages were heavily taxed. Protestants were given advantages in appointments by the rulers. For three decades the Catholics had no clergy and even later had the services of only a handful of priests from India led by the saintly Joseph Vaz. This persecution had the salutary impact of testing the faith of the Catholics during several generations. They persevered in their faith inspite of many social and economic disabilities. This long and bitter experience has given Sri Lanka Catholics a certain resilience and sense of belonging to this country. Then towards the latter part of the Dutch regime they were granted more freedom. It was due both to their tenacity and the conviction of the Dutch rulers that Catholics were not seditious. By then the Catholics were reconciled to Dutch rule; they requested not to be regarded as second-class citizens as they were not disloyal to the “Honourable Company” – The Dutch East India Company.

During the Dutch period the main emphasis among the Catholics was on safeguarding their faith against the Protestants who attacked them on specific points such as the fidelity to the sacraments, loyalty to the Pope and the respect due to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In general they faced the Dutch persecution courageously and consistently. In certain areas they reverted to their earlier Hindu and Buddhist religions. (cf. *Boudens Robrecht: The Catholic Church in Ceylon under Dutch Rule*, Rome 1957.)

After the conquest of Ceylon by the British, the Catholic Church had a much freer existence in the country. *The British Period (1796-1948)* saw also the introduction of other Protestant churches. While the Protestants, particularly the

Anglicans had special privileges, the Catholics too were free to receive foreign missionaries and reorganize themselves. The 19th century was thus a period of consolidation of the Catholic Church and of the origin and spread of many other Christian denominations.

The Churches were set up mainly around the Christian schools, parishes and social services - with the support of the government of the day. They helped in the growth of education and the reduction of some social evils such as disease and caste discrimination. But by and large, they did not directly participate in the struggle for the political and economic emancipation of the people from British colonial rule and economic domination. There were Christian patriots involved in this cause, but the Churches as institutions were solidly on the side of "law and order." They were foremost among the Westernizing agencies in the country.

Throughout this period there was a theological dependence of the Churches on the European and American thinkers and teachers. The theology in Western Europe and North America was developed within a capitalist-colonialist framework; and it was this theology that was transplanted to our country also. A local clergy and religious leadership was brought up within the Christian Churches to faithfully accepted such a theology and spirituality.

With *political independence* in 1948, the Churches were indigenized in leadership. However, their thought-content continued substantially as before. Even in the country as a whole the transfer of political power to the Sri Lankans did not mean a significant break with the dependent colonial economy or the social values dominated by the English-educated, urbanized elite. It is mainly after the General Elections of 1956 that the Churches began to be troubled about their position in the country, for the rural masses were awakening themselves to a sense of their rights and powers. The masses of the people being Buddhist and Hindu felt themselves underprivileged in the process of historical evolution. They wanted to redress the balance by curtailing the advantages of the Christians.

The entry of foreign missionaries was stopped or severely restricted in the early 1950s. The services of the religious nursing sisters in State hospitals were terminated in the early 1960s. The nationalization of the schools – including the Christian owned ones – in 1961 was the biggest blow that the churches experienced after over 150 years of relative calm and even considerable state patronage and social prestige.

During the past 20 years Sri Lanka has been going through a fairly rapid social transformation that has involved major changes in the political relationships within the country and in the world. The economy is more socialistic; the control of the economy by the British has been reduced in the plantation areas. The languages of the people are coming back into their own and the Buddhist and Hindu religions are more vigorous as social forces. New struggles for liberation are going on in the country. The trends are towards a more self-reliant egalitarian society. There are major areas of confrontation among the social classes, political ideologies and racial groups.

In very recent times there has been an intense discussion and debate going on within the Christian Churches in Sri Lanka. Now in the second half of the 1970s

there is an implicit agreement on some issues which were hotly debated earlier e.g. on orientation towards the national cultures, the respect for other religions, the liturgical changes introduced by Vatican II. The present differences of opinion are related to such issues as: social options of the Churches; development, salvation and liberation; spirituality and social justice; involvement in political issues; human rights in society and in the Church; the nature of the priesthood and ministry; formation of clergy and religious; life styles and relationships within the Church; patterns of authority, decentralization and participation; family life etc. Underlying all these are more fundamental issues such as the nature of religion, the understanding of God, the Spirit and of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity.

While our Christian background has such historical connections with colonialism, capitalism and the supremacy of Western man over the rest of the world, our country is being profoundly influenced by the currents of thought that are transforming the world today. The liberation movements of nationalism, of the exploited peoples against the rich oppressive nations, of women, youth, workers and peasants all impinge on the life of this country too. Many Christians themselves are sensitive to the values of socialism specially as they are being pursued in Asian and African countries. A radical questioning is taking place specially in the minds of the youth and the oppressed masses concerning the meaning of religion itself.

On the other hand, there are still many in the Church who view religion in the socially conservative manner described above. They are mainly of the Westernized middle class and elite. This elite would like the Christian religion to tranquilize them in their relatively affluent position within a sea of misery and among a mass of unemployed. The Sinhala and Tamil speaking masses are generally less well off economically and hence are more radical socially and politically, even if they are rather traditional in religio-cultural matters. It is still the English educated elite that determines overall policy within Churches. The columns of the *Messenger* (the Catholic English Weekly) bear witness to a greater social conservatism among the affluent lay elite than among the clergy as such.

It is quite understandable that persons, who have grown up in the traditional theology and spirituality mentioned earlier, should feel that the foundations of what they called religion are crumbling; for they have confused Christianity with one form of social organization – the Western, capitalistic, individualistic model. Naturally they suffer a cultural shock as the world and our country advance and the new generations of believers both among the laity and the clergy take new options more in keeping with the liberative struggles of the masses of our people. The columns of the Sinhala Catholic weekly – the *Gnanartha Pradeepaya* – do not reveal a similar apprehension. The masses of the Christians are closer to the peoples' struggles than are the elites.

A good number of our Westernized elite have absorbed and internalized the individualistic spirituality even more deeply than present day Christians in European countries. The process of liberation from this cultural domination is extremely painful when it is ingrained within us with a sense of religious conviction. We can therefore understand the tensions that will exist within the Churches, among persons and groups in spite of their good intentions. Our

historical conditioning influences us very much and sometimes makes us react negatively even to creative and positive contemporary values.

A better appreciation of Jesus Christ may help bring understanding among the different trends within the Christian Churches.

Chapter 2

JESUS AND HIS MESSAGE

In this Chapter we discuss the substance of the message of Jesus of Nazareth specially as it relates to human fulfilment in society. These are only a few perceptions which are not all-inclusive or exclusive of others. We believe however that they are based on the life and teaching of Jesus. The words of the gospels are woven into the text of this and subsequent chapters without giving detailed references to chapter and verse. Many readers may be quite familiar with the gospels and will notice the references. Others are advised to read at least one of the four gospels alongside these chapters.

In these reflections there is a certain amount of repetition of events and thoughts. This is partly because the same event relates to many issues, and partly because this is a work written in a reflective style meant for reading and meditation by persons and groups.

What sort of person was Jesus of Nazareth? How did he live; what message did he give; what atmosphere did he radiate to those around him? Why was he considered a threat to the Jewish religion and the Roman power over the Jewish people? What was so attractive about him that so many followed him? What is the message of perennial value beneath the relationship of his life and teaching to the events and circumstances of his day? Can we disengage that universal content and make it bear fruit in our time? Can we see the revolutionary dynamism of his vision concerning persons and society in the context of our contemporary concerns?

We can distinguish different dimensions in Jesus Christ for the purpose of understanding him better:

- (1) Jesus of Nazareth as a historical person
- (2) the actual presentation of Jesus in different centuries by the Christian Church - as we have seen in Chapter 1
- (3) the Cosmic Christ - who is the alpha and omega of all things

(a) **The Personality of Jesus of Nazareth**

Jesus of Nazareth as a great spiritual leader gave a profound insight into the nature and meaning of human life. This insight which is the substance of Christian faith is much more than any organizational form which the Christian religion may take in any given time or place.

For Christians, Jesus is the *Incarnation* of the second person of the blessed Trinity. The incarnation is a union of extremes: of God and man; of the Creator and

the creature. It is the greatest bridging of gaps that we can think of. God, in Jesus, took human form becoming like us in all things except sin. God so loved the world that he sent his only son to redeem it.

From the gospels we see Jesus as *a many-sided personality*. He cannot be contained within one type of character or one school of spirituality. He combines contrary virtues in a fine balance. Past ages have seen and reflected on many of these qualities. Our age too sees in him new perspectives. These can help give an integral view of Jesus and broaden and deepen our understanding of him. Some aspects of his personality have been traditionally well known. We do not therefore deal with them at length here, but have always to be kept in mind along with the new insights.

Jesus was a worker, probably a carpenter. He earned his living most of the days of his life. Perhaps during his last three years of intense public life he may not have had much time for it. In his youth he was a political exile due to the hatred of Herod. His foster father Joseph and Mary were migrant workers in a foreign land - Jews in Egypt. He is perhaps exceptional as a religious leader springing up from the oppressed proletariat - even though the family might claim a long distance relationship to the royal house of David. He knew the people's suffering. He shared their condition. Due to his keen mind and sensitive spirit he must have suffered much in spirit at seeing the oppression of his people by the foreign imperial rulers and their local religious and political collaborators,

After John the Baptist was arrested Jesus came forward to give leadership to his people. He was a wandering teacher, a rabbi. He was not a cultic minister. He did not belong to the Jewish priesthood. In fact he had much trouble with the high priests who eventually killed him. He did not claim to be a "sacred" personality according to the social norms of the day. On the contrary his life was secular. He is not known to have carried any exterior signs of authority or consecration about his person. He was a spiritual leader who taught in the public places more than in the temple or synagogues. He was in the line of the prophetic tradition of the Jews.

He moved freely with persons of all categories, but the poor and the weak were his special concern. He was friendly to all; He loved some in a special manner. He mingled with the young and the old, the Jews and the Samaritans, the "good" and the "bad" men and women.

He was mentally and emotionally mature. He was intensely human. He was a good mixer. Unlike John the Baptist who came with fasting and penance, Jesus went about eating and drinking with people. He even provided the additional (and better) wine at the wedding feast at Cana. He could rejoice with those who rejoiced and weep with those who wept.

He loved children and nature. His simple straightforwardness was child-like. He liked wine and flowers. He loved the mountains like Thabor and Olivet, the beautiful lake of Galilee, the river Jordan and the desert. He was a good story teller. His stories have a profound meaning and have stood the test of 2000 years of retelling.

He lived as a poor man in a society in which inequality was quite marked. He identified himself physically and in understanding with the poorest of the poor. He did not stand on his dignity, insist on his privileges or hang on to his status. He was close to the people; he was one of them, with them. In his public life he was dispossessed of almost everything in order to be for all. He did not have even a house to call his own. He walked the streets speaking to individuals, small groups and multitudes. He retired to the mountains to reflect and pray. His option was a self-liberation in order to be for others more wholly.

Jesus was a person *who lived for others*. He was loving and loveable; kind and serviceable to others. He was friendly, open and understanding to all. He welcomed those in difficulty to come to him. He went out of his way to help people, like the widow of Naim who had lost her only son. He was merciful and forgiving, compassionate and understanding to those in trouble and to repentant sinners. He was never legalistic as the religious leaders of the day were. He was never bitter and harsh. The story of the prodigal son manifests his mercy and his view of God's forgiving love. 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. He could be devastatingly ironical and sarcastic in his critique of evil, specially of hypocrisy and exploitation. He called Herod a "fox", and the Pharisees "a brood of vipers". 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, women of ill-repute like Mary Magdalene and the woman at the well. He was prepared to scandalize the narrow minded. He did not mind the risks of being misunderstood, especially in an Eastern society. He preached liberation to the poor. He lived poor and yet he had friends among all classes of society including the rich: e. g. Zaccheus, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus. He was against violence and retaliation, yet his apostles like Peter, carried swords. He loved his mother, Mary, yet he did not spare her the anguish of the ups and downs of his public life and especially of his ignominious death. He was prepared to take risks for the cause he lived for, including the ultimate sacrifice. He challenged persons to make an option in life: e.g. the rich young man, the apostles. He polarized groups when necessary. He did not merely want peace and unity at all costs.

Jesus was a *teacher* who lived his message. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Jo. 13. 14. He did not sacrifice others for his cause, or asks others to bear the risks first. On the contrary he had a leader's sensitive concern for his companions and followers. When he was apprehended by Judas and the soldiers he told them "if you seek me, let these men go" (Jo. 18. 8). His disciples were thus free to go away; he was seized and bound for trial and execution.

He was a fearless man of immense courage. In a society where social conformism was normal he challenged the prevailing values. No tradition was too sacred to be questioned; no authority too great to be contradicted; and no assumption

too fundamental to be queried. His contemporaries attacked him for his radical non-conformism. Some called him a glutton and a drunkard; others insinuated that he was insane; still others were bewildered at the company he kept. "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7. 34).

He did not accept the dominant values of the society in which he lived: viz. the ascription of worth to a person according to his social status, wealth, family, ancestry, race, or intelligence and achievements. He had a profound respect for all human beings for their basic personality, and challenged all to transcend their selfishness.

Jesus and His Family

The deepest impact on the life of Jesus must have been made by Mary his mother and Joseph his foster father. The gospel tells us very little about Joseph. But we see Mary with him through the different stages of his life: from the birth in the stable to the death at Calvary. Mary herself was a lowly, humble woman of the people. Yet she was undaunted in her courage. The flight into Egypt with Joseph and the infant Jesus is an adventure which few would undertake even in modern times. Shrewdly she awaited the death of Herod for her return to her homeland. She followed the growth of Jesus in wisdom and grace before God and man, contemplating all these things in her heart. The two must have long conversed on the views which were developing in the mind of Jesus.

It is very unlikely that Jesus suddenly decided to take to his public prophetic role at about the age of 30 years. It is more natural that he grew into it gradually by responding to events and situations. It is not likely that his fine social and personal sensitivity sprouted out instantaneously as he announced his public ministry. Mary, to whom the revolutionary words of the "*Magnificat*" are ascribed would also have encouraged Jesus to his public commitment. Her song was that the mighty have been brought down from their thrones and the rich sent empty away while the humble were exalted and the hungry filled with good things. (Luke, 46-55) Throughout his turbulent public life Mary was with him in a discreet but sympathetic manner.*

Jesus did not however have the same felicitous relationship with all his close relatives. These were times when the family was a more cohesive social unit than it is today. People were judged by their family origins. The gospel tells us how Jesus was despised in his own country, and that because of his family connections. People could not accept that such profound teachings and extraordinary happenings could come from one of their own. "Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, a brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters our neighbours here?"

Some people, specially the leaders, accused him of being "out of his mind" or possessed of the devil. Later they wanted to kill him. Jesus was thus not accepted by his own people and his country.

* We hope to write in a later work at greater length on Mary and her role as the co-liberatrix with Jesus. cf. our article "Mary - a mature committed woman" *Logos*, August 1974, pp. 49-69.

That his own kindred, his close relatives did not easily accept him was even more distressing. They were sceptical about him. They wanted to take him away from the crowds “to take charge of him; for people were saying he is out of his mind” (Mk, 2.21; 3.31). Partly out of love for him they wanted to save him from the Jewish leaders and the crowds who thronged around him, and perhaps even from his own sense of mission.

The members of his family found it more difficult to understand him and his way of life. Why did he live like a wandering teacher without a house to call his own? Why did he associate with the “down and out” and persons of low moral repute? If he wanted to be a religious leader why did he not become a priest and even a high priest instead of attacking them? Was he not thus courting personal disaster and trouble for the family? In those times of insurrection and repression by the Romans, they would naturally have thought it better for Jesus to be like many other young men - hard working and contented with their lot.

Jesus took a clear stand that the narrow interests of the family must be subordinated to those of the kingdom of God and of the wider human community. “Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For, I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s foes will be those of his own household. He who finds his life will lose it, he who loses his life for my sake will find it” Mt. 10, 34-39. He taught the mother of James and John to overcome her desire to see her sons having prominent places in his kingdom. He offered them only partnership in drinking of the cup of suffering that he too was going to drink (Mt. 20.20) Jesus teaches a subordination of family selfishness to the larger social good. The happiness, joy and love within a family are to be fulfilled in living for others. All the same he chose his disciples from among his relatives too. In the long term they were among his most loyal associates and followers.

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 was a remarkably cheerful person - unlike his predecessor, John the Baptist. Being in the company of Jesus was a liberating experience; the gospels give so many instances of persons transformed by him both physically and spiritually. He communicated a sense of joy, peace and security. He was a *true lover of persons and a revolutionary, a revolutionary because he loved and loved all.*

(b) Jesus Preached the Kingdom of God

Jesus lived in a situation similar to ours. The human person was not respected for what he was, but only according to his social status. 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. Even sicknesses were considered a consequence of one’s sins or those of previous generations. Sin was regarded as hereditary and having lasting consequences on persons. Hence there was social ostracizing of public sinners and long penances before they were restored to social communion and grace. Jesus cured the paralytic man, lowered to him through the roof of the house, to prove that he could also forgive them their sins. The scribes

thought this was blasphemy “who can forgive sins but God alone”. They dominated the weak through such a connection between sickness and sin. Jesus liberated the paralytic of both sin and sickness (Mk. 2. 1-12).

Within such a situation of deep seated exploitation Jesus presented a radical new teaching, backed up by the witness of his life. He announced it as the “Kingdom of God”. In today’s terminology we may say that he spoke of a new person and a new society, of new personal and societal values. This was his good news, his gospel. He dethroned the prevailing values of money, power, prestige and group selfishness. Instead, he proposes sharing, service, the love of the human person for what one is, and a universal human solidarity. Naturally this upset the social establishment of the day.

God is Love

A central theme of the teaching of Jesus is a revelation of the nature of God whom he called “Abba”, Father. He had a loving trust in the Father. He reveals clearly that God is love. God loves us, understands us and fulfils us. In return we must love God and all human beings in God. This is the substance of his message of the law and the prophets. If anything is to give specificity to the followers of Jesus, it has to be the living of this deep revelation of the Divine nature and of human fulfilment in response to such love understood in the context of our interpersonal and societal relationships.

With this central theme Jesus introduced a new understanding of the human person and of social institutions. Every human being was important and had to be cared for. This was the criterion for admission to the Kingdom: “I was hungry, and you gave me to eat ... Enter into the Kingdom”... (Matt. 25) Jesus preached a new view of life which was to be the fulfilment of the revelation of the Jewish religion. As against the abuses of the religions of his day he witnessed to God as love. Where there is genuine love there is God; and where there is no real love, God is not there.

The love of God for man is such that anything done for man unselfishly and disinterestedly is accepted as done for God in Christ. “Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers you do unto me.” God’s love is universal; it makes no discrimination between Jews and Samaritans, Pharisees and publicans.

The message of Christ has love as the principal virtue, motivation and constituent of goodness. This love has to be operative, effective, creative. Love bridges the gaps, tends to unite, to build solidarity and brotherhood. Love shares, is self-sacrificial and other-centered. In this sense *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 a mother when her child is endangered.

Sin is the turning away from God who is love. Sin is lovelessness. Love requires sharing; sin is selfishness. Sin is untruthfulness, insincerity, a turning away from God who is the truth. Jesus therefore opposed sin as contrary to the values of the rule of God on earth. Sin could be both personal and societal, individual and communitarian.

The Kingdom of God is a situation in which sin, lovelessness, selfishness, untruth and injustice are overcome and love, mercy, truth and justice prevail. 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.” Mercy and forgiveness are essential conditions of the reign of God over us. One would say that Jesus even conditions God’s mercy to our forgiveness or others. With unforgiving hatred of others we cannot be friends of God; for God loves all. Hence Jesus worked for a condition in which mercy and love would be predominant.

It will be noticed that Jesus emphasized the Kingdom or rule of God 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 evangelization was concerning the values of the kingdom rather than about the institutions or power of a temporary nature. It is a movement rather than an organization. He speaks constantly of the kingdom and very seldom of a Church. Jesus speaks twice of the Church: in Mt. 16.18. “On this rock I will build my Church” and Mt. 18. 17. “Tell it to the Church and if he refuses to listen to the Church...” The whole of his teaching on the other hand is concerning the kingdom of God: e.g. seek ye first the kingdom of God, Mt. 6 33; difficulty for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God Mt. 19.24; harlots go into the kingdom of God, Mt. 21.31; preaching the kingdom of God Mt. 14; 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.

He speaks also of his kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of the Father. The prayer he taught is “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done...” The eternal reward is in the kingdom of heaven. “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 n heaven.” Mt. 7. 21.

Jesus preached such a kingdom in the time of the Roman Empire when the Jews were being cruelly exploited by the Romans. The values he proposed 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” was in itself an inner personal liberation from total allegiance to any temporal power. His preaching thus relativised the authority of both civil rulers and religious leaders. God alone is the Absolute.

The community he gathered around him was to live the values of this divine dominion. This is a very fruitful perspective at the present time when humanity is looking beyond the narrow confines of particular churches and religions to more universal values on which human understanding can be based. The kingdom of God is also a criterion for evaluating particular historical Churches.

His kingdom means that the plan of God for mankind *is being fulfilled in a profound way already*. 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, the weary find rest, those who weep laugh, the mourners are comforted, the sick are healed, the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the humble inherit the earth, the prisoners are freed, the lowly are exalted, the oppressed are liberated, and the dead live. Those who lose their lives find it (Mt. 23, Luke 14).

These are the strange promises of Jesus to be partly realized in this life by persons and by humanity over the ages. We can discern it through faith, contribute towards it by struggling in hope. Love is its fulfilment, 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, selfless, 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 -- to live in solidarity, friendship and effective sharing in love. Then heaven would have begun for us here on earth. We would find the meaning of life, and self realization of the deepest yearnings of our being. Such a person would not be frightened by threats of physical punishment or even death. Death would be the final confirmation of the continuance of such a liberated condition in the never ending kingdom with the Father. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” Io 15.11.

However, the search for the divine is a permanent quest; a journey. Jesus says I am the way. The way is the way of the cross; through the cross to the light. We are a pilgrim people.

The kingdom of heaven requires a *clear option* by us in favour of its values. We must be prepared to give up other interests for its sake. It is like a “treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. It is like a pearl of great value” worth many sacrifices. Mt. 13.

The kingdom of heaven tolerates much till the final reckoning “like a net which was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind” ... It is like a householder hiring labourers for his vineyard”, Mt. 20. 1. A man going on a journey “and entrusting his property to his servants, giving one five talents...” Mt. 25.14. It asks us to give an account of our stewardship of the different talents entrusted to us. It requires foresight and wisdom like the five wise virgins who had oil in their lamps when the bridegroom came Mt. 25. 1. It is like a marriage feast of a king. The invited guests did not come and he called others from the byways and highways to it. Mt. 22.

The kingdom of God is within persons as a transforming power that is communicative and contagious. It grows and spreads like the mustard seed that becomes a big tree, the leaven that transforms the mass. It is power of the spirit that can be released in human relationships too. It can transform entire peoples. It is a power of human determination combined with divine sanction, support and sustenance. It is the stuff on which the battles of ultimate liberation are fought and won. It is the force of truth that sets us free.

“Fear not, I have overcome the world”. “I will be with you all days even unto the consummation of the world”. It is important that throughout our consideration of

the teaching of Jesus on human liberation we remember this ultimate nature of human fulfilment beyond institutions limited by time and space.

Whereas the teaching of Jesus as recounted in the gospels is replete with the idea of the Kingdom of God, and mentions a Church only twice, Christian theology has concentrated much of its attention on the Church. This is perhaps due to a preoccupation of church personnel with their own institution and intra ecclesiastical concerns. On the other hand a 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. It cannot be too easily presumed that seeking the interests of a Church is necessarily synonymous with the kingdom of God. Churches too need to evangelize themselves so as to ever 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 neighbour and human society than with their exclusive interests.

Those who accept the discipleship of Jesus must endeavour to rediscover this movement like dynamism of his teaching. The rigidity of cult, the avid formulae of dogma and the institutionalism of churches tend to subdue this thrust and render it innocuous. On the other hand the Churches can themselves be the standard bearers of this message and therefore agents of a profound transformation of humanity. They can be the torchbearers that help light the path as men, women and 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 today.

(c) Jesus and Personal Liberation

Personal liberation can be understood as the realization of the innate desire of human beings to be their true and better selves. We want to be able to live unhampered by personal weaknesses and undue social conditioning. We want to be accepted as persons, for what we are, for what we can be and the little we can give to others or to a cause. To expect too much from a person is to place too heavy a burden on him, and to expect too little is to fail to draw out sufficiently his potentialities for good. We want to be able to decide for ourselves within the areas of our concern and competence. We want a measure of responsibility that we can bear. We want to love and be loved; to give and receive. A human person develops and blossoms only in an environment of acceptance, warmth, encouragement and love.

Personal liberation implies a *freeing from* the inhibitions that limit our personal growth. We want to be liberated from the ravages of nature, disease, fear, myths, prejudices, the abuse of power, the rejection by peer groups and society at large. We want to live with a certain sense of security and acceptance. We want to be known and appreciated for what we are in our aspirations and better selves in spite of our human weaknesses and failures. Personal self-realization has thus a social aspect too. It is only a narrow individualistic tradition that separates personal growth and holiness from social relationships. This is a myth of individualistic capitalism. Persons exist only in relationship to each other i.e. in society. A Robinson Crusoe is less a person till he meets another human being to whom he can relate; then he is in society.

The social framework can either help persons become themselves more truly and fully or stifle and crush them. Society can ennoble our lives or make them stunted and miserable. What others think of us and how they treat us has a deep impact on our self-image of ourselves and our own self-assessment.

The Roman and Jewish Social Background

We can appreciate better the significance of the contribution of Jesus towards personal liberation when we reflect on the conditions of the time and how human beings were treated then. The Roman empire was then at the height of its power. The Emperor Augustus had given it a sense of unity and administrative cohesion. But its decline had already begun to set in. The Roman empire was built on qualities of discipline and military valour; the virtues of dignity and filial piety were in high honour among writers of the time. But the decline of the empire was due to the ills of Roman society. The booty from the conquered territories had a corrupting influence on the nobility and the soldiers.

Roman society was basically unequal and exploitative. Slaves formed about a third of the population. With the success of empire, the upper classes gave themselves to lazy, luxurious living and moral debauchery. Family life broke down and divorce was widespread. Slaves were not regarded as “persons” with legal and human rights. They were “things” that belonged to their masters. The slaves had to labour hard and long while their masters and mistresses amused themselves. Discontent was rampant among the slaves. It gave rise to several revolts of the urban and agricultural slaves.

The Romans despised the conquered peoples even when they ruled them with a mixture of tact and firmness. They extorted heavy taxes from the colonies. They ruled the colonies with the help of the local collaborators such as the traditional elites from among the people whom they subjugated.

Though the Roman soldiers were the ultimate defenders of the imperial rule, the Romans made use of the people’s traditional authority patterns for governing the Jews. Jewish society too was very unequal and hierarchical. The high priests represented the religious as well as the political and social authority. The Jewish religious leaders lorded it over their ignorant poorer people.

Neither the Romans nor the Jews had a concept of human freedom applicable to all persons. They were racialist and particularist. The human being was not respected as one having an intrinsic dignity, value and right. Power was used in the defence of the privileged classes. The majority of the Jewish people lived in fear both of nature and of social authority. They feared the elements, sickness, the high priests, the evil spirits, the law and the Romans.

The Jews were unhappy with their exploited situation. They had a proud feeling of racial superiority as the chosen people of God. Hence there were revolutionary currents among them even during the period of the life of Jesus. The Pharisees were more intransigent in their opposition to the Romans than the Saducees who were more for peaceful collaboration. The zealots were a group that attempted armed rebellion to overthrow the Roman yoke.

We have to understand Jesus and his message in such a background. Today we take the universal heritage of human rights almost for granted even though dictatorships dominate most peoples. But at that time to propose a doctrine of the human dignity of every person, and specially to live it, was truly radical and revolutionary.

Jesus proclaimed the good news that God is the father of all "*Our Father*". Therefore all human beings are brothers and sisters; God is present to all. He speaks to each one. The spirit of God resides within us; God cares for all. Human beings are extremely valuable before God. "Consider the birds; they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds ... Consider the lilies, how they grow..." Luke 12. 22.

There is no fundamental need for other teachers beyond the Spirit within each one (Mt. 23.8 - II). 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. More external laws had no moral binding force before God if they were unjust. This is a foundation of human responsibility and freedom. Historically it has been the ultimate stand of champions of freedom and justice. He was giving a principle of the rights of every human person as a child of God and a bearer of free will. He challenged persons not to fear even death but to stand firm for truth, authenticity and justice.

Jesus lived this message of *universal fellowship*. He moved about with all. He offered all his love and friendship. Only the arrogant and hard-hearted merited his reproaches. He was close to the socially rejected and marginalized. It is perhaps difficult for us today to understand this as we are in a "democratic" age. But, perhaps, it is not so difficult. How few of the elite of our society, even religious leaders, would feel free to be in the regular company of slum dwellers, plantation workers, or frustrated rebellious youth - not to mention prostitutes? Jesus was a threat to the social power elite because he practised what he preached.

Jesus' relationship to persons was one of deep understanding of the human condition. He cured them as a physician; the main part of the treatment was just *his friendship*. He was drawn to those who were sick in mind or body, because they needed help that he could give. "Healthy people do not need a doctor; sick people do. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2. 17). He combined a sensitive personal response to such need with a building up of the strength and self-confidence of the weak. Contact with him communicated a sense of courage and strength. Even touching the hem of his garment seemed enough for this.

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 of 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 outcaste Gentile;
of superstition over 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 religious distinction by freely associating himself with sinners including women of bad repute, tax-gatherers, Zealots and Samaritans. He contravened the prevailing religious customs and laws about food, fasts, social company etc.

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 was upsetting accepted patterns of thought and behaviour for the sake of righteousness, authenticity and justice.

Jesus was not merely doing social service to persons. He was concerned with more than healing their physical ailments; he wanted them to grow as liberated persons. He loved persons; and wanted to *help in their personal liberation*. He wanted them to understand themselves, and the real nature of true religion. He helped them to distinguish between personal sinfulness and social ostracism that had an element of hypocrisy in it. 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 in 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. His formation of the apostles was a process of liberation from their own selfishness, narrowness of perspectives and Jewish chauvinism. 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 to the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands the nature of true worship. “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. We see him relaxed in the house of Mary and Martha; sharing in their joys and sorrows as one of them. He teaches them the deeper meaning of life He was friendly and affectionate to Mary Magdalene. He was understanding to the sinful woman who spent money on anointing his feet. Jesus appreciated the meaningfulness of the gesture, the repentance and affection it implied. He was affectionate and loving, and accepted to be loved by women as Mary, Martha and Mary Magdalene. He chose married persons too as his disciples and apostles. He healed the mother-in-law of Simon Peter in whose house he stayed. When she was cured she ministered to them with characteristic feminine solicitude.

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*, being the purest of creatures, must have given him a love both tender and strong. 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.

His human concern for women in difficult circumstances is seen in *his attitude towards prostitutes*. They are mentioned in the gospels as being among the followers of Jesus. That Jesus appealed to them can indicate many things to us. He was open to them; he would have listened to their life stories. They must have felt free to speak to him. They must have had confidence in him. Through them he would also have come to know many things about the personal life of their patrons. This may have contributed to his being able to tell the crowd that brought the adulteress to be stoned “he who is without sin, let him throw the first stone”.

It was not an honourable thing for a religious leader, the teacher of a new group, to be found in the company of prostitutes, and that at a time when men and women did not mix so freely in society. He was accused of being a person of unsound mind and ill-repute because of the company he kept, or because of those who followed him. He was prepared to face the difficulties of being an innovator; of being unconventional. He risked the success of his whole mission in thus being friendly to persons hypocritically rejected by the “respectable” society of the day.

He probably understood the plight of the prostitutes; why they were reduced to a condition of selling their bodies; why they accepted a profession that clients privately desired and publicly scorned at. He may have seen the causes in the social conditions of the time; when these women could not earn a living easily otherwise. He was much more critical of those who prostituted their minds for power and wealth and were unrepentant.

Once a woman detected in adultery was brought to him hoping he would justify her being cruelly stoned to death according to the Mosaic Law or expose himself to condone immorality. Jesus with characteristic compassion and shrewdness turned the tables on the accusers and invited the innocent ones to throw the first stone. The melting away of the group also indicates the moral tone of the society of his day. Yet Jesus did not condone the sin. “No more do I condemn you. You may go. Do not sin again” Jesus thus combines compassion for the woman with a devastating scorn for her accusers. He turns the incident into an occasion to invite her to virtue.

Liberation in a Personal Response

He spoke as one with authority. He made astonishingly *exacting demands* on those who came to him. He “called” them to follow him, even cutting loose from home, family and livelihood. He asked of his disciples a total commitment to the cause, with a complete confidence in him and in the Father who provides for all. Thus he combined tremendous personal appeal and leadership qualities with loving compassion for those in need. He invited persons to make an option for the values he proposed. This was an intense call which reverberated within the personality of the one invited.

Yet he awaited *a free and responsible decision*. Sometimes the call is reported as abrupt as to some of the disciples. At other times it is the result of a dialogue as with the rich young man or the lawyer who asked the question “what must I do to gain eternal life?” and merited the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus told him “Go and do so as he did”. His was an authority that was powerful in spirit and yet let the individual decide for himself or herself without much pressure. He respected the freedom of the person.

Jesus gave people *a sense of security, and hope*. He did not accept the idea that sickness was due to the sins of past generations. He liberated them 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.

St. Paul explains in the epistle to the Galatians how Christ has freed them from the earlier bondage of ignorance and fear. “Now as Children of God we are sons and heirs of the Father and hence no longer slaves.” “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” This is a freedom not to laxity “but through love to be servants of one another”. (Gal. 5: 1, 13.) “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you... let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Jo. 14. 27.

Through the teaching of Jesus we have come to know of the Father and the Holy Spirit. In Christian theology the supreme example of persons is the Trinity. Three persons – yet one God. Three who are completely equal to one another. Three who know and love one another eternally and everlastingly. This love is fulfilling. They lack nothing. Their relationship is dynamic, communicative, and creative. The universe flows out as a flowering of their inter-personal relations. The Trinity is personal; the Trinity is social. In the Trinity everything is in common. The Trinity is a theistic communism. Jesus bears witness to such a God. He reveals to us the loving nature of God. God is love. God is the fulfilment of our personalities.

The personal liberation proposed by Jesus is not merely in the knowing of a message. It is essentially in living in a new way. He invites persons to be his disciples in living at a deeper level of human existence i.e. in intimate communion with him in the service to the neighbour. His teaching is thus not merely a philosophy; it is the revelation of an intimate personal link between human beings and God whom he calls “Father.”

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 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.

He invites others to believe in him, to live in intimate union with him. “Abide in me, and I in you.” It is a condition of our fruitfulness and fulfilment: “as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches... As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, abide in my love.”

At the same time Jesus demands a loving service of others. The only way to abide in his love is to keep his commandments. “If you keep my commandments, you

will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." Jo. 15. 4 - 14.

In the teaching and life of Jesus personal union with the Father, the consciousness of the Divine, is the source of light, strength, confidence and security. As one's God consciousness grows one is also more sensitive of human needs and rights. Living in union with God in Jesus is a freeing from fear and anxiety at the deepest level of one's being. Naturally we will always have fears and apprehensions about ourselves, our future and our action for a just society. But beyond such fears there can be a deeper sense of mission and strength in the consciousness of union with God in the service to neighbour. This is a level of personal liberation in which one is prepared to lay down one's life for others.

It is also the level of a great peace and joy. "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" Jo. 15.1. Thus the fulfilment of a human person according to Jesus is in this self-giving or oneself for others in union with the Father through Jesus. This requires a conscious option in freedom. 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.

This teaching of Jesus concerning himself, the Father and the Spirit is also the revelation concerning the Blessed Trinity and our own personal fulfilment in a concern for others. Thus, humankind is enveloped in the relationships among the divine persons. Human persons too can be, as it were, 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' 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 in spite of much material advancement, human personalities are often underdeveloped, disequibrated 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, caste and other forms of social discrimination further alienate persons from one another.

All these dehumanize both the affluent and the indigent. The rich *are* never satisfied with what they have; and the poor are discontented at what they lack. The adults seek pleasure, wealth and power and often neglect the children who yearn for acceptance and affection. Men and women both seek personal fulfilment and fail to achieve it if they do not subordinate their individual desires to a common design for family or community.

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. Thus 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.

The early Christians manifested a deep conviction and heroic courage in trying to live according to his values in the different countries of the then corrupt Roman empire. The Christians were proposing a sort of counter culture to that of the Roman Empire and the Jewish social establishment. Hence the Christians were ostracized and even regarded as enemies of the empire. Yet through all these they persevered, even as an underground movement of fellowship and sharing. The Catacombs of Rome bear testimony to this as do contemporary witnesses. It is important to see that there is a close relationship between the personal liberation and the social commitment of the followers of Jesus.

Then conversion to Christianity meant a deep personal option to change one’s attitude towards others, specially towards the slaves and the under-privileged. It meant an acceptance of a human fellowship with persons of differing social backgrounds.

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He told them a parable also: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on all old garment; if he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.”

Luke 5.36

(d) Jesus and Liberation in Religion

Whereas social traditions tend to tie persons to institutions, Jesus teaches a message in which the freedom and responsibility of each person is of supreme importance. This is not a freedom to be exercised outside of a social context or without concern for it, as we shall see particularly with reference to his message of social liberation.

The traditional Jewish religion of the day had become very much a matter of religious formalism. The accent was on the external rituals. The men of religion dominated the lives of believers by imposing onerous obligations on them. The letter

of the law was considered more important than its spirit. The people, especially the poor, ignorant, powerless masses were so thoroughly impregnated with the idea of these ritual obligations that they were hardly free to think, much less do, otherwise. Thus, in the main spheres of life - in work, in food, in racial relationships, family relations, in prayer, in religious observances - there were minute details which were socially regulated. The religious and socio-political authorities controlled the ideas and actions of the people by dominating their mentalities and customs. Religion was a factor of social domination, that implanted in the minds of the people the sense of obligation, to observe these customs and rituals. The authority of God and of the law was invoked for this.

Jesus made a powerful *critique of the Jewish religion of the day*. Jesus came into the world to liberate human beings; and this included liberation from religious structures which embodied sin. *Judaism* at the time was an alienation, a corruption of what religion should be. It had built up a system of taboos, inhibitions; formalisms and rites which were walls of separation between man and man, and man and God. Jesus was severe in his criticism of the existing religion, “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees... you blind guides... you blind fools... hypocrites... for, you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside you are full of extortion and rapacity... You are like white tombs... you serpents... you brood of vipers...” All these from one chapter in the Gospel, shows the extent of the challenge which Jesus flung at the religious establishment. (Mt. 23)

Jesus chastised religion for being one of the basic forms of oppression of the people at the time. The religious leaders had become so loveless as to tolerate the injustice to the poor, rather than lose their own privileges. In a sense for Jesus the complacency of the religious exploiters was even worse than the exploitation by the alien Romans. His outbursts against the vendors in the temple were against both the economic exploitation and the connivance or participation of the religious leaders.

He exposed the ostentation of the religious practices of the day. “Beware of practising your piety before men in order to be seen by them.” ... Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may be praised by men... But *when you give alms*, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your alms may be in secret. He said likewise of fasting: “And *when you fast*, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”.

Jesus invited his followers to great spiritual heights. Sanctity is unselfish love. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be Sons of your Father who makes his sun rise on the evil and the good - You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father” Matt 5. 44 - 48.

Jesus thus points out that the essence of religion is in a deep inner relationship to the Father and one’s conscience. It does not consist in mere external show of almsgiving, fasting, praying. Such conspicuous religiosity contributed to the arrogant self-righteousness of the Pharisees: Jesus soundly criticized their travesty of religion. True holiness is in the interiority of our actions and not in mere external fasts and

ritual: rend your hearts and not your garments (Joel 2. 13). The essential value of worship is in our inner participation in the spirit of self sacrifice that love implies: the offering at the altar should be accompanied by purity of heart and genuine love of others. In this Jesus was re-emphasizing the basic message of the Old Testament, especially of the prophets. He thus showed how being deeply spiritual meant also an authentic human experience and witness.

Jesus in prayer gives us a good example of what he wanted the true spiritual person to be. Jesus teaches us to pray always to be in constant communion with the Father and with our inner selves. He prayed in different forms - alone as on the hillside or by the lake, or in the manner of the Jews. At other times he prayed as the occasion demanded. He spent long hours in meditation, in quiet reflection, as in the forty days in the desert at the commencement of his public life or in the garden of Gethsamane before his passion.

Jesus detested the hypocrisy of the formalistic prayers of the Pharisees. "When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room, and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your father who sees in secret will reward you."

He did not want prayers which were mere empty words repeated ritualistically. "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words." Mt. 6. 5 - 7. He then taught his disciples the "Our Father", which is an example of the linking of his message of the Kingdom of God with human needs (daily bread) and genuine forgiveness. The whole teaching of love of God and neighbour is in it.

His prayer is related intimately and creatively to the circumstances of his life situation at his baptism, before choosing the apostles, before or after his miraculous works, at the last supper, in the Mount of Olives, on the Cross. It was a prayer related to the situation, issue, need, mood and problems of the time.

His *last supper* is the finest experience and example of his prayer. Negatively, it may be said, that he did not choose a sacral place, time, things or words for his supreme prayer. The last supper was an eminently human event in a secular setting. It was a dinner, a fellowship meal (agape) in a private house, late in the evening with a fair measure of flesh and wine. The room was an ordinary one (not in the temple) and so were the cups, plates, the basin of water, the towel and the dining table itself.

For Jesus the sacredness of prayer was not from outwardly assigned sacral quality of persons, things, place and time, but from the seriousness and depth of his *personal commitment* to love others to the end. The meaning and value of his prayer was in his love and loving self sacrifice to the end. In this his personal prayers in the garden and in the supper room are of one piece honest, authentic.

The lack of these qualities in our prayer cannot be compensated for by external legality, formality, the sacredness of persons, things, places, times, words,

etc. Jesus gives a new meaning and depth to prayer that we need continually to rediscover in meditation and in serious collective prayer as did the early Christians.

The teaching and practice of Jesus concerning prayer can provide us a norm for a fundamental reevaluation of the present forms and practices of prayer in the Churches. How far are we like Jesus, and how far like those whom he criticized?

Jesus was profoundly contemplative, intensely human in his personal relations and authentically radical in his social options. Jesus was a mystic given to quiet contemplation, solitary prayer and silence. "He would steal away from them into the desert and pray there" Luke 5. 16. At the same time he was a person of intense action and radical commitment. These two aspects were intimately connected; inextricably intertwined. It is because he was in union with God that he could not accept the way in which men and women, children of God, were treated in the society of his day. The vision of a Godward-oriented human community spurred him to announce and try to realize the apocalyptic vision here on earth. The "good news to the poor" was the fruit both of his meditation as well as of his deep awareness of the condition of his people. His was an integrated personality.

Jesus thus proposed *a new view of religion* that is more a personal experience and an inner response to God rather than an external organization. He wanted the true inner dispositions of mind and heart that should characterise religion rather than mere emphasis on the minutest formalities imposed by the traditions of the elders.

The primacy in religion is genuine charity and he advocated the radical transformation of persons, of human relations and of society. "The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath". Mark 2.27. His followers were to be freed from sin and servitude, prejudice and pride in order to truly live for the ultimate values of his kingdom, viz. truth, justice, freedom, peace and above all unselfish love. He did not want his followers to lay up treasures for themselves on earth where moth and rust would consume it and where there are thieves to break in and steal it. "You cannot serve God and Mammon".

In this context we can understand his attitude towards the religious institutions of his day. He was not a priest of the Jewish religion. If we regard him as a priest and high priest we must not too readily attribute to him the role of a cultic or administrative priesthood even of a Christian denomination. He is a priest in a more fundamental sense; he mediates between God and man at a deeper level of being and with a more universal significance. *His priesthood* is one in which sacrifice is to consist not so much in externals as in love and kindness, in which prayer is to be not merely with the lips but in the heart, and in which ritual is for man and not man for the ritual.

Jesus is accepted as the one and only High Priest in Christianity. There is only one priesthood in the New Testament and this is a participation in the *priesthood of Jesus Christ*. All share in this priesthood, while the ordained clergy have some specific functions within the communities of Christians. Jesus was constituted a priest by his very incarnation as a mediator between God and man. He was sacerdotal in his teaching, in his way of life and above all in his victimhood particularly on Calvary. In

his priestly sacrifice what was fundamental was not the ritual of the meal together but the actual offering of his own life as a victim for all.

He did not seek privileges for himself. He did not want to stand apart from others with symbols of distinction, or even sacredness. As St. Paul says he was like us in all things except sin. The lesson he teaches us is that it is more important for the teacher and leader to be identified with the people than to be separated, distinguished and elitist. It was precisely the type of elitist, arrogant, leadership of the scribes and Pharisees that he vehemently denounced. "They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honour at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues and being called rabbi by men." Mt. 23. 5-7.

He was a priest who did not belong to a priestly caste. He did not distinguish himself from others in anything except his loving service and self-sacrifice. As the master he washed the feet of his disciples and invited them to follow him. He was not married. However for him there was no contradiction between the married state and ministry to the community as is seen in the choice of the married man Peter to be his chief disciple. The ordained priesthood has evolved in different ways in the Christian Churches over the centuries.

Leadership in the Christian community in the first centuries was closer to the ideal presented in teaching and life by Jesus. The first bishops of Rome were almost all martyred for their convictions. However, with the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity and of Christianity to the Empire, the Church leaders took on external paraphernalia of imperial authority. In the concept and practice of the Christian ordained priesthood even today there is a large admixture of what comes from Jesus who said "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant" Mt. 23. 11, and from the courts of the Caesars and the Roman Proconsuls. The higher we go in the ladder of ecclesiastical authority the greater is the direct relationship in the court of Rome.

The Christian people have become so accustomed to such authority patterns in their ordained ministers that they often fail to remember that ministry in the Christian community is profoundly distinct from the exercise of power in civil society where often might is right.

However going back to Jesus can help us get a clearer notion of how Jesus thought of his universal priesthood. This can be a helpful guide for ministerial priests of our day and for others to try to understand the deeper meaning of the priestly role among the followers of Jesus.

He wanted to liberate men and women from the *dominance of cult*, from the tendency to make of religion a sacred ghetto away from the so-called profane world. He placed the sacred within the depth of the secular, the profane, the human. He was not of the priestly tribe, but a lay teacher of religion, a rabbi. He met his Father in the context of ordinary life-as a carpenter, in the street, in homes, in boats, on the wayside, by the lake, on the mountain, in the desert. The cult of religion was to have meaning only in its relation to justice, mercy and love. For him religion is to be *one of*

spirit and truth: his religious ceremonial is taken from the daily food and drink of the people of the place.

Jesus began *a movement of fellowship and community* rather than a strict canonical organization. There is however a constant tendency for organized religion to become more a structure and less a community and a moral force. He advocated primarily sincerity, truth, justice, sharing and unselfish love. This is the permanent value in all religious experience and expression. It is the liberation Jesus wanted for religion. He died young in trying to realize it.

The Churches which have had their origin from Jesus Christ have also a long history of an over-emphasis on externals and a neglect of the message of inner liberation and social justice which are basic to the gospel of Jesus. Generation upon generation of Christians has been brought up in this externalized ritualism. Thus Christianity could co-exist with Capitalism and Imperialism. Unfortunately the countries which are most given to individualism, greed, ostentation and wasteful consumerism are the ones which call themselves "Christian". This is a far cry from the type of religion proposed by Jesus of Nazareth. The very reform of religion is impeded by the stress on organization, external uniformity and conformism to the prevailing social order. True religion should constantly help persons relate to God in his liberating love and justice. This demands profound changes in us as persons and in our societies as collective groups.

Christianity in Asia needs to be both more deeply human and more intensely God-centered; more human, in understanding the human predicament of persons and the contradictions within our exploitative societies; and more God-related in understanding that the depths of spiritual experience are in a relationship to the divine, beyond everything that mere external religious organizations can interpret or mediate, much less control. The contact with the other traditional Asian religions can help Christianity rediscover this dimension of an integral liberative thrust within its own inspirations. In certain countries small groups of Christians are becoming increasingly aware of this deeper meaning of the Christian religious and spiritual experience.

Christian Churches today can undertake their own liberation by a constant return to the Jesus of the Gospels. Religion thus liberated can be a most welcome and powerful ally in the personal and societal liberation of the men and women of our times. In Asia today there is a dire need of the moral force of religion for the realization of the true human values in our lives and in the development of our countries. Liberated and liberating Christian communities can join hands with persons and groups from other religions and ideologies in this urgent task.

* * * * *

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Jo. 10.11.

(e) Jesus and Social Liberation

Though we speak separately in this booklet of personal, religious and social liberation, in real life these are all linked together. This was all the more so in Jewish society where an individual's personal religious and social relationships were intimately correlated. The Jewish religion had an impact on the person as well as the whole of society. Hence, to speak of any one of these aspects is to involve the others. Since Jesus was for the liberation of the person from all forms of oppression he was consequentially in favour of social justice and liberation too.

However, the long association between Christianity and feudalism, capitalism and imperialism has tended to blunt the social consciousness of many Christians. Theology and Christology evolved in an individualistic direction. The Protestant Reformation, with the close alliance between it and the capitalistic elite did not help much to reawaken the Christian social conscience. It is therefore not surprising that even today there are many Christians in Asian countries who conceive of the Christian faith in an individualistic manner. In Sri Lanka we have seen their approach in the Letters to the Editor columns of the *Catholic Messenger* during 1975 - 1976.

It is argued by such Christians that the mission of Christ was one of love and service and of building the kingdom of God and hence he was not concerned with mundane, materialistic realities. Due to his love he was equally friendly to all - both rich and poor. It is suggested that he approved both; and that he was not concerned with social exploitation; Jesus came only to do the will of the Father and that he was obedient to all established authority. He did not question slavery or Roman imperialism. In fact he even legitimized the Roman rule over the Jews in saying "render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar..." Jesus was in any case not a social revolutionary because he asked Peter to put back his sword saying "All who take the sword will perish by the sword". Further Jesus was concerned with heart reform and not social reform. Concern for social justice tends to reduce Christianity to a mere sociological phenomenon. It distracts the clergy, especially at a time when there is such a shortage of priests for the administration of the sacraments.

This type of reasoning reveals to what an extent the thinking of Christians has been influenced by the capitalistic environment and ethic. There is a conscious or unconscious identification of the understanding of Jesus Christ with the maintenance of the status quo. They are so persuaded of the rightness of the reproach that they accuse those who sponsor social reform of being materialistic, unspiritual, hired servants of socialistic countries, simplistic and misguiding others both the laity and even the hierarchy with statistical data etc.

It may be noted in passing that persons who adduce such arguments for the Church's not concerning itself with social injustice rarely speak up against the close association of Christianity with Capitalism and Colonialism. Nor do they find fault with clergy and religious devoting themselves full time to the teaching of Biology and Mathematics, coaching sports teams, the administration of temporal properties or even running carnivals for good causes.

As mentioned earlier the concern of Jesus with social justice is basic to his whole mission and integrated with his total message. The kernel of his teaching is that there is only one law in the new dispensation viz. love of God and love of neighbour. This is the specificity of his doctrine in the context of earlier Biblical revelation. We

cannot love the neighbour without an orientation towards justice. The apostles emphasized this in their writings and in their efforts towards a communitarian life style.

Recently the Catholic Synod of Bishops on “Justice in the World” (Rome, 1971) reaffirmed this doctrine. According to the Christian message, therefore, man’s relationship to God; his response to the love of God, saving us through Christ, is shown to be effective in his love and service of men. Christian love of neighbour and justice cannot be separated. *For love implies an absolute demand for justice* namely, a recognition of the dignity and rights of one’s neighbour. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every man is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a brother of Christ, the Christian finds in every man God himself and God’s absolute demand for justice and love’ (*Italics added.*)

Jesus and the Rich

Jesus loved all human beings. But he did not so love them as to justify their personal or social sinfulness. His attitude towards riches and rich people is clear from several examples of his relationships. He dined with Zaccheus, the chief tax collector. But he did not cajole him or legitimize his wrongs. There must have been a long and profound discussion between Jesus and Zaccheus. For as a result of this visit Zaccheus said to him “Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore it fourfold”. Luke 19.8. This must have had a public impact for earlier the crowd had murmured “he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner”. Such an impact on Zaccheus would not have been possible if Jesus did not take a very clear stand against the evils of the accumulation of wealth, especially by unfair means.

Jesus knew how difficult it was to convert a rich person to share his wealth. He revealed this in the latter part of the parable regarding the rich Dives and the beggar Lazarus. After Dives, the rich glutton, died he was in torment in hell. At that stage he wanted Father Abraham to send Lazarus to his father’s house “for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” But Abraham replied that Moses and the prophets had not been able to convince the rich people to live as true believers in sharing. “Neither would they be convinced should someone rise from the dead.” Luke 15. So deep rooted is human avarice that the rich do not accept the message. Very few of them are really converted.

The incident of the rich young man who came to ask Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life shows once again the centrality of sharing in the teaching of Jesus, as well as the difficulty in implementing it. The young man or ruler said that he had observed the Commandments from his early days; what else was required he enquired. Jesus told him “One thing you lack. Sell all you have and distribute to the poor,... and come, follow me.” “At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.” Hence Jesus was not neutral towards the rich and the poor. He called for a clear option in favour of poverty and of the poor. His demand was hard on the rich. Though he was gentle in his ways he did not mince his words when he had to speak to the rich.

It is on this occasion that Jesus said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God” (Mt. 19. Mk 10 Luke 18). It is therefore quite clear that Jesus did not treat belonging to his kingdom as a mere external nominal affiliation or a matter of attending to the temple ritual. The demand of the kingdom is for a total conversion of heart and in life. Jesus called for a *clear option* in favour of God and justice rather than for money and greed. “You cannot serve God and Mammon”. The people got the message clear for St. Luke says “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed him.” Luke 16.

In the whole Biblical tradition God is closer to the poor and the weak. Already in Genesis God asks Cain, who murdered his brother “Where is your brother?”. God sided with the oppressed Israelites in Egypt and not with the powerful and oppressive Pharaoh. In the life of Jesus we see him likewise concerned with the little ones, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the hungry, the unjustly accused and the dishonoured and despised in society. On the other hand he exposed the folly of the rich who hoarded their wealth without sharing - e.g. the parable of the “rich fool” to whom God said “Fool, this night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” Luke 12; 20. In contrast to this hoarding his miracles of feeding the multitude are taken as indications of the value of sharing. The miracle is also said to be in that there was enough due to the sharing among the large throng that followed him.

We have perhaps got so accustomed to the words of the gospels and have so domesticated Jesus within the unjust capitalistic system that we tend to gloss over the terrible indictments of the rich in contrast to the blessings on their poor oppressed neighbours. Soon after the beatitudes, Luke mentions Jesus *maledictions on the rich*.

“But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation,
Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger,
Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep...” Luke 6. 2 - 5.

Jesus dined with a Pharisee, but this did not stop him from sharply castigating their social injustices and hypocrisy. “But woe to you Pharisees! for you pay tithe on mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others... Woe to you for you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it.

When one of the lawyers asked him whether he reproached them too he responded categorically “Woe to you lawyers also! for you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering” Luke 11. 37 - 52. Again in Matt. 23 “Woe to you blind guides, straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity... Woe to you... for you are like whitened sepulchres... so you also outwardly appear righteousness to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” This is a clear stand by Jesus against the elitism of the privileged classes of the day.

This is why the Pharisees began to plot against him till they finally had him murdered. When we read the gospels with an open and sensitive mind we cannot

but be struck by the acuteness and unambiguous clarity of Jesus' denunciation on the unjust leaders of the people. Their faults were not merely in their private life, but in their social functions. They brought about the injustices and irregularities of their society. They even went so far as to legitimize them with their monopoly of knowledge and power. In the light of all this it is strange how good Christians could still think of Jesus as not concerned with social justice and the denouncing of injustices.

The criterion of the final judgment brings all these into clearer relief. In the ultimate reckoning, God who is loving justice does not ask us about our external sacramental life or even our particular religious beliefs but how we respected our fellow human beings. The unique criterion of salvation is our loving service of the neighbour in his needs.

“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, for I was thirsty and you gave me drink... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” Mt. 25 & 35 -46.

It is important to remember that this is the criterion for evaluating every human being who has ever lived or will ever be on this earth. It is the widest possible criterion, in which the content is service to the neighbour whoever he be. This is also a foundation for an ecumenism as wide as the whole of human history and as profound as the inner most depths of our individual personalities. This ultimate criterion further reveals that there is an opportunity for every woman and man to fulfill herself or himself in service to others. This is *the one indispensable sacrament* which every person of all ages must participate in the Sacrament of the Sister and Brother, of the neighbour in need.

The theological implications of this teaching of Jesus still remain to be elaborated in different directions such as international relations, political commitment and the meaning of the Christian community, sacraments, and worship. In the world of immense poverty in the midst of unparalleled affluence, this criterion is a shattering challenge to the believer's conscience and way of life. True love of God and neighbour cannot compromise with poverty in a world of plenty, of vast empty continents in the context of the compulsory sterilization of poor people in poor overpopulated countries, and of an enormous waste on armaments when the majority of humankind needs food to combat malnutrition and starvation. This demand of the final judge cannot today be fulfilled outside of the political decisions within our countries; hence we cannot be indifferent to politics.

This teaching also implies that *salvation* is not merely individual, it is also social and communitarian. In order to be of the kingdom of God we must try to change the social relationships so that the essentials for life are available to all. If the gospel means sharing among all, then bearing witness to the gospel is not possible without an action for removing the obstacles to such sharing. This requires a liberation struggle to overcome the barriers to love and justice and build the human community of genuine fellowship.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches that this concern for neighbour has to be universal - beyond the barrier of racial prejudice. He also shows up the inhumanity of the priest and the Levite who "saw him and passed by on the other side". It is not the sacred character of a sacerdotal consecration that makes a person just, but his actions in a real life situation. For, here was a man who had been stripped, beaten, robbed and left half-dead on the road side, and yet the men committed to the official religious functions passed by. They were dehumanized in being insensitive to the human need of their fellow human being. On the other hand the one who understood the meaning of loving service was a Samaritan - apparently an unbeliever, one who was not of the chosen "people of God" with whom the Jews had no dealings.

This parable has a very close bearing to the contemporary scene. The masses of the people in the world are oppressed and marginalized by the type of development that takes place especially in the capitalistic world. Almost everywhere freedom is suppressed. The robbers may be individuals, vast multinational corporations or governments. Entire peoples are robbed, beaten up and left at the margin of world society. In the poor countries the workers and peasants have been robbed of their rightful incomes (and sometimes lands and resources) during many generations. What has been the response of the Christians, and of the official Churches? Why is it that often it is mainly unbelievers who struggle for the recovery of the basic human lights of the oppressed masses, and the suppressed peoples even today?

Here too the response of Jesus to the question of the lawyer "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is "Go and do likewise". This shows the primacy of effective love above mere sacral position, ritual or even belonging to the chosen people. This too gives a criterion that is universal and independent of affiliation to a given religious or church group.

We have seen in the previous paper how Jesus took a clear position in favour of a more just relationship towards different categories of persons: the public sinners, the Samaritans, women and the poor and oppressed of all categories.

What Jesus is proposing are *new values concerning society* and social relationships. He is presenting a new attitude towards human life, a new culture in which the human person and service to him are a supreme concern. In this sense the message he brings from God is human-centered. It is different from the type of values prevailing in Jewish and Roman society which he contested. His teaching can be the basis of a permanent critique and contestation of hypocrisy; bigotry and selfishness which are inbuilt in human nature and consequently in human institutions.

Jesus offers *a profound challenge* to the social conscience of those who wish to follow him. In him there is no separation of the divine from the human, of the supernatural from the natural, of the vertical from the horizontal, of the spiritual from the socio-economic. People ask for bread and we should not give them a stone. Bread for oneself may seem material, but bread for the other is a highly spiritual concern. It is one of our chief prayers to the Father in heaven "Give us this day our daily bread". The new heaven and the new earth are to begin in some way here in this life on this planet. Eternal life is to be a continuance of the life of loving service begun here.

The social teaching of Jesus has *a great relevance for today* when a whole civilization has been and is being built on individualism, elitism, consumerism and the ruthless exploitation of the weak by the strong, and of the poor by the rich. We are highly civilized barbarians, for we condemn millions to death by starvation while others feast themselves also to heart attacks and early death. We are technologically evolved, but spiritually unprepared to live up to the message of the religions. If only Christians accept the basic message of Jesus there would be so much more sharing in the world, and the whole of our socio-economic life would change. We would then have different concepts of development that would benefit the masses of the people to have the material and social conditions for a good life. Society would then be more egalitarian. Property instead of being monopolized by a few would be used for the common good of all. Those who have two coats would give one to the person who has none. The land resources of the earth would be more equitably distributed. The Providence of God would provide, as Mahatma Gandhi said, for everyone's need though not for everyone's greed. Today the glorification of the greed of the few deprives many of their basic needs.

For those who accept Christ's teaching, this is *a tremendous personal challenge*. How are we going to live? What amount of resources are we going to use for ourselves? Do we too want to run the rat race for competitive society? How far are we going to be conformist within a socialistic system that too needs permanent safeguards against the abuse of power? What does the cross mean today to the Churches? Will we seek our sectarian advantage and bypass the struggles of the masses especially in the oppressed areas and countries? Can the churches be indifferent to the class struggles within the countries, and the efforts of poor nations to obtain a better deal in the world? Are we satisfied that our life of worship is adequately related to these issues and not alienating believers from seeking radical solutions to our social ills? Such basic issues must torment the Christian's conscience today and lead her or him to accept the way of the cross which is the narrow path of radical contestation of this unjust social ethos. It is the road to a deeper peace and joy in the conviction of trying to fulfill the promise of God in Jesus as well as the deepest aspirations of humanity in our times. It is also the way to our self realization - to become our better selves in self giving for others at whatever level each of us is capable of.

When we consider the radically different values that Jesus proposed we see that while he loved all persons he stood for *a total social revolution* in favour of the poor and the oppressed. We see this also in his relationship to political life.

(f) Jesus and Political Liberation: Power as Service

The laissez faire capitalistic environment in which Christianity has evolved in the past few centuries has conditioned Christian thinking to seem to be apolitical. Christians often say that the Churches should not be involved in politics. This may have some value in so far as Churches should not meddle in the purely party rivalries of the political scene. But if it is meant that the Churches should be indifferent to political issues, this is neither an ideal nor is it a reflection of the reality. For throughout the centuries, the Churches have (been) actively engaged in political issues - whether in the Roman Empire, in the Holy Roman Empire, within modern nation states or today in the international scene. They were deeply embroiled in the colonial and capitalistic expansion of the Western powers. Important social forces

like religions are rarely neutral on fundamental political issues. If they are not for change, they favour the status quo.

Jesus of Nazareth has been interpreted as one not having a political role and a message for the political problems of societies. The type of argument used was mentioned in the previous section. The Gospels however make it abundantly clear that Jesus did take up a position concerning the social and political issues of his time. This is not to say that his message was only or mainly political or that he was merely an ephemeral political leader or agitator.

Jesus is essentially a religious and spiritual leader. Hence his teaching has a much wider significance than a political recipe for a particular place or time. His message is universal; his life is an example for all time. He dealt with the more fundamental concerns of human beings. In this sense he was not trying to substitute another political regime for the Roman rule over the Jews. He proposed deeper solutions to the human quest for righteousness in the political field too. As a Jewish religious leader he could not refrain from relating to their political issues. These were basic to their contemporary situation and expectations. Suffering under the yoke of alien oppression they awaited a Messiah who they thought would be their political liberator. Politics and religion were so closely connected in the ancient world and in his own country that Jesus could not have been without a political message and option. The high priests were not only religious leaders but also shared in the civil powers of the rulers.

However, the liberation that he proposed in the political field also was at a deeper level. He taught that all power be a service to others, especially the needy. He attacked the way in which *authority* was being exercised by the civic and religious rulers of the day - who *lorded it* over their subjects. His community and his kingdom were to be different. "Among you whoever wants to be great, must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all". Mark 10. 43. He was laying the foundations of a new humanity that is governed by an authority that is an expression of love and service, and not of brute force and exploitation. He *washed the feet* of his disciples, and he wanted them to do likewise. "If then I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Jo. 13. 14. Power and authority had to be genuine service, limpid and uncorrupt, not self seeking and not wanting to perpetuate itself for power. In all these he *contested the political structures and rulers* of the day. He saw that Roman rule was maintained with the cooperation of the corrupt, hypocritical Jewish religious and social leaders. He recognized the responsibility of the collaborating local elite for the continued exploitation of the masses. Hence he castigated the Jewish oppressors more than even the Romans. He wanted the Jews to understand that the bonds of tyranny were within them too. So long as they did not give up the false values of material wealth, false prestige, power hunger and narrow racialism they could not achieve lasting liberation even if they overcame the Romans. On the other hand if they continued merely in the adventurist Zealot way, he was afraid that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans, as actually happened in 70 A D.

For the political success of the total revolution that he preached, there had to be a profound change in values in the political field too among the Jews themselves. *They must love their enemies*. Luke 5. 44. This was much more than any spiritual

leader had asked of them so far. It meant an inner triumph over jealousy, selfishness and anger. It was the condition for a lasting triumph in which one local oppressor would not replace the Romans. It was also the definite victory over domination - for no one can really dominate those who are thus interiorly liberated. The ultimate reason for this was his deep understanding of the human person and of God as love and, mercy.

Jesus and the Roman Empire

It is often argued that Jesus did not oppose the Roman Empire and hence he did not condemn imperialism. The text “render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God” is usually quoted in this connection. This text has been subject to much controversy over the centuries. Temporal rulers have generally used it to claim the loyalty of their subjects. Others have argued from the ultimate loyalty to God to indicate the limits of civil authority.

The Pharisees and the Herodians, who held opposite views, came together “to entangle Jesus in his talk.” He replied with a characteristic statement that confounded both the Herodians who wanted taxes paid subserviently and the Zealots who were for armed rebellion against Rome. Jesus did not make a categorical statement in favour of the payment of taxes; for then the Zealots and even the Pharisees would have denounced him as a traitor to the Jewish cause. What Jesus did was to expose the hypocrisy of the questioners themselves. He more or less told them “you yourselves accept these coins of the tax; this means you acknowledge Caesar’s sovereignty - then you sort it out among your selves. However remember there are also the claims of God”. They were dumbfounded because they were exposed as hypocrites before the people. He had also shown them to be the real exploiters of the poor people. This reply is similar to Jesus’ masterly response to the accusers of the woman taken in adultery. “The one who is without sin, let him throw the first stone.”

It is however significant that one of the chief accusations against Jesus at his trial before Pilate was: “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to pay tribute to Caesar; and saying that he himself is Christ a King” Luke 23. 1. When Pilate sought to release him the Jews cried out “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.” Jo. 19. 12. The chief priests shouted for his crucifixion saying “We have no king but Caesar.” Jo. 19. 15.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world,” i.e. is not of the values of power, money and prestige as of earthly kings. But his teaching implied a contradiction in values between his kingdom and those of the Roman Empire. If he did not think they were contradictory he could have explained it to Pilate, the Chief priests and the people. Why was he silent against the charges? Why did he not say: “I am in favour of Caesar and of the payment of taxes to him?” When Pilate said to him “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you? But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor wondered greatly”. Mt. 27. 13-14, Mr. 15. 3-5. Jesus who could give such devastating answers to his critics would not have wanted to die under false accusation, if he was in favour of Roman

imperialism. He had only to say so and the Roman Governor and soldiers would have protected him.

The role of the Roman *Governor Pontius Pilate* in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus are a clear indication that the Roman authorities feared Jesus because of his teaching and his popularity. Pontius Pilate participated in the torture of Jesus. “The soldiers of the Governor took Jesus into the praetorium and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews! And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.” Mt. 27 - 31. Also Mk. 15. 16 - 20.

Roman soldiers too went to apprehend Jesus in the garden of Olives (Jn. 18.3); Roman soldiers tortured him inside the palace of the Governor; they led him to Calvary; “they crucified him and divided his garments.” They put up the inscription “The King of the Jews”, attributing political sedition; they reported to Pilate of his death and guarded the tomb. Mt. 15, 16 - 47. Jn. 19, 12 - 25. Mr. 27, 27 - 60. Pilate allowed his soldiers to participate in the arrest, trial, torture and execution of Jesus. Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish Philosopher and Josephus speak of Pilate as brutal, corrupt and harsh in the suppression of Jewish nationalists and insurgents.

He was not a armed rebel like the Zealots (whom he had among his disciples); nor was he a conformist pre-Roman like the Herodians or a hypocrite like the Pharisees who were in theory opposed to the taxes but in practice paid it. He criticized the Zealots for their narrow nationalism, racialism and Jewish sense of superiority in matters of religion too.

Though Jesus was not a violent insurgent he was killed on the charge of subverting the people and inciting them not to pay taxes to the Romans. Pilate authorized and supervised his crucifixion. Jesus did not deny these charges, and consequently had to face death. Pilate did not have the courage to prevent this killing of Jesus. Further the High Priests were themselves subject to Rome and could have been deposed by the Romans. “Eight were so dealt with between the years 6 and 41.” (Daniel Rops; *Jesus and His Times*, Image Books N. Y. p. 147).

The Gospels were written at a time when the Christians were being persecuted in the Roman Empire. It has even been suggested that the role of Pilate was toned down by the writers of the gospels in order not to bring the vengeance of the Romans on the small groups of Christians all over the empire. The text of the Creed “Suffered under Pontius Pilate” has more than a symbolic significance; it speaks of a historical reality.

Jesus may not have condemned the Roman Empire directly *but his entire teaching and way of life were opposed to the values of the Empire* specially in its corrupt stage, The Roman Empire was based on military conquest and no one will doubt that the use of armed power for building empires is contrary to the teaching of Jesus (unless of course the violence of the imperialists is not regarded as violence!). The Roman Empire was built on and for greed, and this is opposed to Jesus’ teaching on unselfish sharing. The Roman Empire used power to dominate and exploit other

peoples and this was condemned by Jesus in his teaching on and power as service. Roman society was one in which slaves were ill-treated as mere “things” and not persons. Jesus taught that all human beings are children of God and lovingly cared for by the Father. The Roman way of life at the time was one of an aristocracy given to cruel extortion, moral debauchery and the assuaging of the citizens with bread and circuses “Panem at Circenses”. On the contrary, Jesus lived poor and said his kingdom was for the poor, the pure of heart and those who served others.

Hence there was *an inherent incompatibility* between the values of Jesus and those of the corrupt, dominating Roman Empire. This was seen more clearly in later years when his followers spread to Rome and other part~ of the Empire. They lived differently. They were a counter culture. They refused to accept Caesar as God. They were persecuted. They had to go underground. They were accused and killed; hence the thousands of martyrs during three centuries. From the life of Christians in the first three centuries we see that what Jesus taught was not a justification of the values of the Roman Empire especially in its corrupt stages, but their contestation.

Jesus was not neutral before injustice and exploitation. To think that he was indifferent to the evils of the political system is to fail to understand not only the texts of the gospel but also the fine sensitivity and sense of justice of Jesus. It is a strange commentary on the understanding of Jesus by Christians that it took a Hindu like Mahatma Gandhi to realize the revolutionary significance and strategy of the life and message of Jesus. Revolution does not necessarily mean violence, but a radical change of structures and mentalities of society.

Jesus was a disturber of the tranquility of the lives of the people of his day, specially of those in power in Jewish and Roman civil society, and in the religious set-up. His teaching and way of life were a challenge to the indifference, apathy, self-centeredness and lack of concern for the others. He laid the foundations of permanent contestation of all forms of injustice.

What Jesus taught concerning power and law as a service to love, justice and freedom became in the course of centuries the rallying point of the revolutionary struggles for these values. The political tradition of Western countries has this stream of radicality linked to Christian thought coming down from St. Augustine, through the Middle Ages to modern times. Marxism too is profoundly influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the eschatological hope of a just society - even though it rejects Christianity.

If one accepts this in regard to Marxism, one can see a curious irony of history that some of the values proposed by Jesus should influence about half of Asia through the mediation of atheistic Communism. It is likewise a strange fact that the Asian countries in which the basic problems of food, housing and employment for all are resolved as political priorities are precisely the ones which consider the Christian religion an alienation of the masses.

This is an indication of the depth of the challenge that faces the churches in the Asian countries. On the other hand it can also be the meeting point for a dialogue between Asian Marxists and Asian Christians if both sides would have the humility to approach the human problem of our masses with an open mind. Unfortunately, the

closed minds of those who do not believe in religion is encountered by the even more closed minds of believers in Christ! The Churches in contemporary Asia must fundamentally rethink their stances in the political field. Are they really so neutral? How can they serve the masses of Asia?

Not for one Fixed Social Structure

Jesus did not however give one solution for all societies, or ages. Hence it cannot be argued that he was for feudalism, capitalism, socialism or any other definite form of social organization. He criticized the evils of his society very strongly without however suggesting one single alternative system. In this the youth of our time may be understood in their critique of contemporary society even when they cannot give alternative solutions.

The critique of Jesus was on the basis of the *absolute values* which he proposed as belonging to the kingdom of God. These values are: justice, truth, freedom, authenticity, love and peace. He was continuing and completing the teaching of the prophets of the Old Testament. It is precisely because his teaching is not tied to a given social system but to basic human values that it has a contemporary significance and relevance for every age.

These ultimate values are also the criterion by which any social structure is to be evaluated through time. They are the promises of God and the substances of our hope concerning the eschatological kingdom. They are sign posts beckoning us to work towards their full realization. Hence they are *a dynamic of action in addition to being a criterion of our social critique*. However, their particular expression varies from age to age and society to society and is always open to a critique in terms of the ultimate goal which will not be reached fully while mankind journeys towards the kingdom.

The followers of Christ cannot therefore be confined to one particular political party or even social system. They have to make their options as they advance along with human history. They have the mission to try to realize the fundamental values of justice and fellowship. They can therefore have a constructive and a critical role under any social system. The temptation would be to ally themselves unconditionally with a prevailing social establishment in return for guarantees and privileges. Then they would be making a God of Caesar and not seeing the relativity of all human institutions. Many, especially in the political field, may not easily accept that in a given situation persons could be concerned with political issues without giving their total loyalty to a particular political power group.

In the present time the teaching of Jesus concerning power as service can be an inspiration for an emphasis on a pattern of socio-economic development in favour of the masses of the people rather than of a privileged elite. It can also be the motivation for questioning a *militarism* that relies more on the power of the armed forces than on the consent of the people. It is such considerations that are leading Christians in countries like the Philippines and South Korea to contest the abuses of martial law and dictatorial regimes. This is a new development of the Christian experience in modern Asia. It is a contemporary trend that has a purifying impact on the Churches themselves.

Christianity, along with the other religions, can be a profound motivating force for a permanent on-going revolution in history. Mass secular revolutionary forces do have a powerful impact on peoples at a given time, especially when led by charismatic, self-sacrificing leaders. But once the major battles are won and the revolutionaries are installed in political power, the vision tends to fade and the basic human selfishness asserts itself. The dedicated radicals of yesterday are soon replaced by power seekers, bureaucrats and others who wish to enjoy the fruits of revolution without paying the price for it. Every revolution breeds its own power elite that gradually alienates itself from the masses.

The religions have a long tradition of being *the source of spiritual energy for social renewal*. While they themselves are also open to the corruption of power and complacency, their original inspirations, their sacred texts, their practices of meditation and self-purification and their very discipline and organization are capable of being a recurring dynamic of social critique and positive construction. The vision of the “Kingdom of God” in which “every tear will be wiped from every eye” is a permanent draw and pull towards the ideal of a more humanized and hence more divine society.

On the other hand the religions also carry with them a profound conviction of the ephemeral nature of all human life and endeavour. The religions in their philosophical quest are closer to the well springs of life as well as the death pangs of all living terrestrial beings. Hence they cannot be fully enraptured by the promise of a paradise on earth that political leaders so often hold before the populace. The dimensions of suffering and death as well as of self-seeking and corruption are ever present in the consciousness or sub-consciousness of the believers of religion. Hence, on the one hand they can never fully expect or accept an ultimate heaven on earth, nor believe that any earthly power is beyond the corruption to which all human beings are open.

The depth of the contribution of religious leaders of humanity is one of the reasons why they are remembered after several centuries, while political rulers are rather rapidly forgotten specially when their insights have been rather shallow and selfish. Jesus of Nazareth brings to this witness of the religious leaders a specific contribution of both a teaching on power as a service and the ultimate sacrifice of his life at the hands of the political power of the most widespread empire of the ancient world. He gave a supreme witness to the integrity of his option to serve the cause of his people’s total liberation and to his faith in the continuity of this cause beyond his own death.

“In the world, kings lord it over their subjects; and those in authority are called their country’s ‘benefactors’. But not so with you: the highest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the chief like a servant. For who is the greater - the one who sits at table or the servant who waits on him? Surely the one who sits at table. Yet here I am among you like a servant.” Luke 22:25-27.

Chapter 3

THE PEDAGOGY OF JESUS CONCERNING SOCIAL CHANGE

What means did Jesus take to communicate to his and succeeding generations his message of social liberation? They may be summarized as follows:

- (a) His way of life was one of identification with the masses – the poorest of the poor.
- (b) His method of teaching was public and challenging. He openly contested the unjust social structures of his day. He awakened people to a consciousness of their own struggle for liberation.
- (c) He risked everything for this cause and suffered death at the hands of the rulers of the day.
- (d) He formed a community to continue his work. He trained a few disciples more intensely to be his special witnesses in all parts of the world.
- (e) He promised a deep inner peace to those who follow him in this search for the values of the kingdom of God on earth.

In Jesus his message, his pedagogy and his life style are intimately inter-related. His pedagogy is simple and yet it is strikingly in consonance with the best insights of modern pedagogical science and experience. Along with his message it is a very significant criterion for evaluating our lives as Christians and as churches. If Jesus were to be physically present in our midst how would he live and what would his methods of communication be? How would he react to persons and situations in countries and at world level?

(a) Identification of Jesus with the Poor

Jesus was born poor, of a poor family, in a stable, rejected by the people of the day, among a subject race. He was an exile for many years, a migrant Jew in Egypt. He *worked as a manual labourer*. He was not reckoned as belonging to any wealthy, learned or social family – “is this not the son of Joseph the carpenter...” In later life his housing was poor. He did not have a place to lay his head. He lived rather as a travelling teacher, and more or less like a vagabond. His food, his dress and his mode of transport were those of the poor.

He identified himself with the poorest of the poor; physically as well as in his psychological *experience* of their poverty and trials. He said “learn of me because I am lowly, and humble-hearted”. He could invite the oppressed to come to him because he knew their condition. He lived it from birth to death. He did not teach the poor from outside their situation. He participated in their misery.

Because of his closeness to the poor he was quite aware of their suffering and of the impact of the exploitative system on their lives. He had a sharp mind and a sensitive heart. He could analyse and evaluate a situation well. He knew in his own life where the prevailing social order, legal system and religious ritualism hurt the

people. Thus he could speak clearly of the burdens that the Pharisees placed on the poor people. He saw through the hypocrisy of the power elite. He understood the cause of the powerless of the masses.

This is an aspect of the Incarnation of God in Jesus that is very significant for our times at least for the Christian who wishes to engage himself in social work. As St. Paul explains in the epistle to the Philippians Jesus, though he was divine, did not cling to his equality with God, “but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, in obedience, accepted even death – death on a cross” (Phil. 2.6 - 8). He emptied himself in voluntary self-abnegation. He did not stand on prestige or position. He was obedient to the salvific will of the Father for the liberation of persons He manifested the extent to which he invites his disciples to identify themselves with the wretched of the earth. “My yoke is sweet and my burden light.” It is not a command but an invitation to a form of personal liberation as a mode and condition of work for the liberation of others.

Such actual identification in life style with the oppressed and underprivileged is a profound challenge to those who wish to follow Christ. It is particularly difficult for those for whom it will mean a declassing of themselves. It is easier to struggle for the oppressed from a vantage point of economic and social privilege. It is much more difficult to live and walk with the poor. We easily rationalize our way into or through affluence. But it is precisely the lack of suffering in our persons with the oppressed majority that takes away the radical edge of our Christian consciousness. Due to the cushioned comfort of our lives we are often not sensitive to the agony of the masses. The very aura of “spirituality” that surrounds the lives of persons dedicated to the service of the Churches can be an immunization against such a social awareness. This tends to make many Church leaders rather complacent about social injustice though they are morally indignant about other areas of sin such as concerning sex and family life.

This way of life of Jesus has a special challenge to the Churches in Asia. For Christianity came here in modern times arm in arm with the colonial conquerors. It has generally developed a superiority complex specially among its wealthy members and ecclesiastical leadership, even when many Christians are very poor. This has made the Churches largely a force for social conservation. If they are to be with the poorer peoples in their struggles for liberation the Churches have to be dispossessed of their wealth, or be prepared to use whatever resources they have for the cause of the underprivileged peoples. The lesson of the life of Jesus is very clear in this regard. In modern Asia the great leaders of the liberation movements have thus been close to the masses in their life style too – e.g. Mahatma Gandhi, Mao Tse Tung and Ho Chi Minh. Today too the people appreciate such an identification and distrust leaders who live too well and too far from them.

The life style of Jesus is likewise a profound challenge to all women and men of goodwill in the rich countries. They will understand more deeply the call to discipleship of Christ as they endeavour to identify themselves even physically with the absolute poverty of two-thirds of mankind who are their sisters and brothers in Christ. The invitation is even stronger when they realise that in a large measure their prosperity is built on the exploitation of the poor peoples of all countries.

The church leadership at world level too has much to learn from the way of life of the humble Galileen. Unfortunately imperial Rome seems to have had as much an influence on ecclesiastical lifestyles as Jesus, if not more. These thoughts are offered as a reminder to all of us that the call of Jesus is for a radical change in our own lifestyles.

(b) His Way of Teaching

Jesus Christ is one of the great teachers of humankind. Many peoples and several generations have felt and experienced the impact of his word. Yet he lived a very short time on earth and consecrated only a few years to his public ministry. During this period his main task in addition to proclaiming his message and bearing witness to it, was to form a group of disciples who were to go to the ends of the earth carrying the good news which they learnt from the master. As a leader one of his strategies was to form a small group of followers who would have a long term multiplier effect through the new community which he began.

His method of teaching was *in and through events and action* concerning them. He did not take the disciples for long out of the scene of their day-to-day life – though he occasionally retired for reflection and prayer.

He taught in the synagogues, in the public places and in the real life-situations which he faced. He applied his teaching directly to the people of the time without any fear or favour. As the *Good Shepherd* he did not run away in the face of the wolf; he categorically opposed wrong and courageously championed the good. His teaching was clear and simple as was his whole personality. He was of one piece, without any duplicity or manipulation of persons. It was his transparent simplicity that attracted followers to join him.

He taught credibly, because his life was good. He did not buy his security or his personal safety by compromising his principles, by not attacking injustice and oppression when he met them. There is no credibility gap with reference to him. He was a strong person, and his strength was derived from his inner conviction in the truth of his message and the justice of his cause. When attacked he did not cringe, or withdraw his hard teachings instead he repeated them even more clearly.

He taught the people that they were born free and invited them to be free with the interior freedom of self-realization, unselfishness, sincerity, honesty, courage, service and universal brotherhood.

He taught *clearly, articulately, challengingly and courageously*. He made them aware of the injustice to which they were being subjected and proposed the true values of his messianic kingdom. These struck at the root causes of evil, both personal and social, prevalent among his people. He made persons conscious of their condition and of their inherent dignity.

In this he rejoined the teaching of the prophets of the Old Testament; for they too attacked the injustices of their day, including the corruption of religious leaders. He *contested* the whole social establishment of his day openly, publicly and irrevocably.

He was a *mass leader*; the people followed him in the thousands, for several days on end. They had to camp out in the open, day and night, to listen to him, to commune with him, to feel his presence, to receive his virtue, to be healed by him. His teachings were a demonstration of the popular support for his views, for the values which he espoused. People braved the elements to listen to him; they went hungry for days to be with him. They wanted to make him their king, their messiah, their temporal liberator. They hoped he would remove the yoke of oppression that was imposed on them by the foreigners, the Jewish high priests, lawyers, scribes and the elite of their society. He did not want political power for himself. He therefore escaped from the crowds when these were in a mood to make him their temporal leader.

Because he was a popular, outspoken and credible leader, the rulers of the society considered him a danger to their power. The Jewish collaborators were afraid of the wrath of the Roman governor; and the Roman governor was worried about his position with the Emperor. Therefore they all came together to get rid of this threat to their power and position.

The Jewish high priests and Pharisees were particularly upset that this upstart and imposter from Nazareth was challenging their rights and privileges and their interpretation of the Scriptures. They therefore plotted to trap him in his words. Several times they tried to catch him; they posed difficult problems to him; they tried to convict him of disloyalty to Caesar. He used each of these occasions to clarify his teaching and to reinforce his position.

He was, by present day standards, an *imprudent young man*. He was unwise and improvident in not thinking of his future; in not making friends with the rich and the powerful by accepting their ethics and their help. On the contrary, he angered the powerful who were unjust, the blind who were leading the blind, the whitened sepulchres – by his frank, uncompromising affirmations of the truth as he saw it. He was a non-conformist, a drop-out, a radical contestant of the law and order of the day. (One might even mention he is pictured as having long hair and a beard!)

His option was radical, his commitment was definitive, his stand was uncompromising. For these he risked everything. His reputation was impugned; he was maligned and accused of being an imposter, an agent of Beelzebub. His life itself was at stake; he knew it and yet he persisted in his teaching. He did not tone down his condemnation of the evils of his day; he went ahead in spite of almost certain death. He did not negotiate a compromise or explain himself to the satisfaction of the authorities. He was honest to himself, to his people and to God.

The Church in Asia can learn much from the way of teaching of Jesus. We have to ask ourselves how far our teaching is related to the issues which face the people. How seldom has the Church in Asia spoken of the major causes of the exploitation of the Asian peoples viz. local feudalism, absolutism, foreign domination, corruption, elitism, militarism. We are sometimes surprised that those who work for human liberation find the Churches an obstacle to their cause. But are we not in good measure the cause for this attitude? The Churches in Asia failed to understand the stand of Asia's great leaders in this century. Not only Marxists, but

even a religiously motivated leader like Mahatma Gandhi was generally kept at arms length by the Churches as he was a rebel against the established order.

The Christian Churches have been and are largely involved in *education in the Asian countries*. How far is our mode of teaching and the content of education similar to these of Jesus. Jesus made people aware of their position as subject to unjust exploitation. He condemned the false values of the rich. Do not many Christian educational institutions in Asia, on the contrary, tend to favour the affluent and foster the capitalist values of our social system? Are not the Churches in modern Asia purveyors of the individualistic and selfish thought patterns of Western civilization, along with their modernizing impact? The wealthy educational institutions of the Asian Churches are in measure responsible for the conservative social options of the Churches.

Bearing witness to Jesus Christ in Asia today needs a deep reflection on his way of teaching. This is closer to non-formal education and to training through movements of social justice. The current interest in conscientization is closer to the Gospel story than the system of teaching in the academic schools or in the traditional seminaries or the post Tridentine type. Compared to the pedagogy of Jesus our way of catecheis or presenting religion is so irrelevant and ineffective.

The Christians in the Western countries have to ask themselves whether the signal failure of the Christian mission in Asia in the past 450 years is not in part due to its absence of genuine witness to the message and method of Jesus in similar circumstances.

(c) Jesus Died for his Convictions

As his public life advanced Jesus knew that the Pharisees, high priests and other rulers of the people were plotting against him. They tried to dissuade the people from following him by saying “He is possessed. He is raving. Why listen to him?” (Jo. 10.20). As he continued to bear witness to his message, they picked up stones to stone him” (Jo. 20. 31) and later attempted “to seize him” (Jo. 10. 39).

After the resurrection of Lazarus “the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a meeting of the Council. ‘What action are we taking? They said, ‘This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone like this the whole populace will believe him. Then the Romans will come and sweep away our temple and our nation...’ Then Caiphas said ‘it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people, than the whole nation should be destroyed.’” (Jo. 11. 47 - 50).

Jesus’ life was evidently in danger at the feast of the pass-over in Jerusalem. “Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where he was should give information, so that they might arrest him.” (Jo. 11. 57). In spite of these circumstances Jesus continued to preach his liberative message and take his stand against the unjust structures and rulers of the day. By ordinary human standards he could have been considered a hasty young man who was trying to pitch himself against the Jewish rulers with their customs and the powerful Roman Empire.

The scriptures are clear that he was killed because he was considered a danger to the established powers of the day. He was thought to be a messiah in the political

order, though he maintained that his kingdom was not from this world in the manner of earthly kingdoms. But, his whole tenor of life was a threat to the power and influence of the Jewish high priests and lawyers, and Roman rulers.

Jesus knew that his enemies were plotting against him, yet he continued his radical teaching that was so revolutionary in its impact on the persons and the social relations of the day. He persisted, in spite of the fear of death, *because he loved his neighbour*, humankind. Love is the fulfilment of the law. This is my commandment, he said, that you love one another. “Greater love than this no man hath, than to lay down his life for his friends”, and all persons are his friends. His love was deep-seated. Universal, revolutionary and self-sacrificial. He was killed at the age of about 33 years - a young man in the prime of life.

Death is part of the process of the struggle for social justice and human liberation. It may be a physical death or a death to position of honour, wealth and power. It may be an early death or a slow process of dying. Jesus shows us that those who wish to follow him in the work for integral human liberation must be prepared to suffer much and suffer to the end. Many chapters of the gospels tell us how Jesus voluntarily advanced towards his betrayal and death.

Jesus gives us *an example of risk bearing* in the work of human liberation. It is the fear of reprisals and the risks involved in action for justice that induce many persons to be complacent about injustices of which they are aware. Jesus taught that risks had to be taken. “For the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”. Mk. 10.45. He also taught that a person desiring to build a tower first counts the costs and considers whether he can complete it; likewise a king going to war evaluates the strength of the enemy.

In going to his death Jesus would have thought about the continuity of his work. He risked death because it was a logical consequence of his option. But he had also a conviction that the Father in heaven would send the Holy Spirit to guide his disciples. He foretold his own resurrection and strengthened them in a resolve to continue beyond his own death. This is an aspect of his faith and of faith in him. It is also the ultimate testimony of his love for others.

We need to have confidence in the coming of God’s Kingdom, on earth also i.e. in the cause of social liberation too. When we have this conviction we are more ready to face risks involved in it, including the sacrifice of life itself.

Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps the person who realized most deeply the meaning of Jesus’ risking death for his people. His own evolution of the weapon of *Satyagraha* (of non-violent resistance) was very much influenced by his reflection of Jesus. He wrote “Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus’ suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions worldly and temporal.” (S.K. George: *Gandhi’s Challenge to Christianity*, Ahmedabad, 1947). Mahatma Gandhi made non-violent contestation and risk-bearing a main political weapon. In this he gave the world an experience of the political relevance and power of religions including Christianity. Subsequently, Martin Luther King developed it in the United States of America.

The countless martyrs of the early Church bear witness to a similar option to face death rather than surrender their convictions and rights. In modern times, the growth of totalitarianism and the suppression of the peoples' rights is inducing many, including Christians, to take this path of bearing risks in a non-violent manner.

In the theology and spirituality of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries - the death of Christ was generally explained in relation to a necessity of reparation to God by man for his sins. Christ took human form to offer a suitable reparation; since he was God though he suffered as man. In this manner the theology of sin, reparation, victimhood and sacrifice were developed. Obedience to the Father, patience in suffering, bearing the sins of the world were some of the chief characteristics seen in the passion of Christ in such a perspective.

During Holy Week the meditation of Christians and the preaching in the churches tended to highlight the physical suffering of the Lord and the evil of sin in general, but little attention was paid to the challenging nature of Christ's life and teaching. There was little in the reflection on his death and resurrection which led the Christian community to a commitment to the reform of the values and structures of society. Thus, even this central event in Christ's life had rather an individualistic impact on persons; where it was societal it was rather concerned with the building of the community of the saved in heaven. Little connection was seen between the life of Christ and the building of the community of man on earth. On the other hand the gospels show clearly that Jesus was killed by those who opposed his message and his radical stands. They therefore bought over one of his apostles to be an informant and betrayer, they roused up the people against him to ask for his blood. They created conditions of near-rioting so that Pilate felt obligated to hand over this innocent man to be scourged and crucified. They used money to bribe the guards who watched over his tomb so that the media of communication of the day carried the false message concerning his missing body.

Power, terror, intrigue, money, corruption, the forces of law and order and the high priests were all ranged against him in an unholy alliance to safeguard the prevailing orthodoxy and the power structures against this popular mass leader and fearless teacher who claimed a new form of prophecy, leadership and kingship. Jesus himself never stooped to their level of intrigue and power craft. He dealt with issues in a frank, straightforward and courageous manner. His weapon was the compelling moral force of his message and his life.

His death was the consequence of his values, his message, his options, his commitment and the risks he took. He told his apostles clearly that the "world" has hated him and will hate those who follow him because his values were not those of the "world". In the reflection on the death of Christ it is as important to think of the trial of the person who made such an option as it is to try to work out a theology of the demand for reparation by God the Father.

Christ is God; and as God he wanted to give us a message and the example or what human life is to be. He testifies with the ultimate sacrifice to the meaning of love. He begins thus the new life of redeemed mankind. He set in motion a movement of self-giving love for the true liberation of persons and society. He bears witness to

his absolute confidence in the values he stood for and in their relation to life after death, to the new heavens and the new earth of which the scriptures speak. His way of facing death boldly and with absolute integrity with reference to his goals and his means of action are an inspiration to a dedication of the highest calibre.

The *resurrection of Christ* is the divine seal of approval on his life and message. It is the guarantee of the *ultimate victory* of the cause he championed. It is also an indication of the type of victory that the followers of Christ can expect - a life in death and beyond death. We have to lose ourselves to find our true selves.

The cross has become the symbol of Christianity. It has almost become a sign of triumph. It is placed on the highest points of buildings of Christians. It is, however, often not remembered that it was on the cross that Jesus gave his supreme witness to his participation in the struggle for human liberation. Those who accept this challenge today find themselves also crucified by the powers-that-be. The provincial superior of a congregation of nuns related in 1972 how she had to undergo crucifixion thrice at the hands of fellow Catholics and the ecclesiastical authorities because she with her nuns decided to give up their elitist private schools in order to devote themselves more to the service of the voiceless masses in the slums of Manila and the sugar haciendas of Negros island.

Death to self can be very painful when it is inflicted by the religious leadership itself. For the ecclesiastical leaders have still a large say in teaching what is religion and spirituality. In certain Asian Churches such leaders have long held a view of spirituality that is closely associated with the legitimizing of social conservatism and apathy. They tend to regard concern for social justice as materialistic, and that only "direct" evangelization of proclaiming "Jesus is the Lord" is the primary task of spiritual persons. When the Church leaders intransigently maintain such views, they can have a paralysing impact on the social commitment of Christians. It is then not surprising that many persons actively engaged in the cause of social justice find little inspiration in the official Christian Churches. This is a major cause of the alienation of radical youth, intellectuals and workers from the churches of Asia. Some churchmen hardly realize how damaging an impact their complacent, conservative spiritualism has on others. It can only be hoped that the return to the scriptures with a fresh mind and a closeness to the social reality with a sensitive heart can change this position of ecclesiastical power being rigidly on the side of social reaction, even within the context of the revolutionary trends in Asia.

One of the virtues which Christians and the Churches have acquired is the *acceptance of death and the learning to die*. In Christ hope lies beyond death. The Churches in Asia have to die to much of their colonial and European heritage. We have to learn to distinguish between what is of the inner core of religion of Jesus Christ and what are merely human sociological accretions to a religious organization.

Thus in Sri Lanka we had to die to our private Church-run schools. We felt our whole world was collapsing in 1961 when the schools were nationalized. Now fifteen years later, hardly any Christian body would want them even if they were given back to us. We now realize how the loss of the ownership and management of private schools has released Church personnel to new forms of service. How many deaths

must we die as persons and institutions before we are fully liberated to genuinely witness to the central and ultimate message of Jesus. Acceptance of such deaths requires a historical vision, deep faith, an undying hope and the courage to face our own apparent disintegration and death. Jesus strengthens us by his example and his promise: Fear not; I will be always with you.

(d) The Following of Jesus

The parting words of Jesus to his disciples were the new commandment he gave us... “love one another; just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples”. (John 13:34). Love is the law of Christ; it is the constituent of his discipleship. Such a love has to be universal, and effective in bringing together persons and peoples. It has to be self-sacrificial as was that of Jesus.

Taking up our cross and following him implies also the serious effort to transform the mentalities of individuals and the laws and structures of societies so that love may be effective. This is a most difficult task, for the forces of selfishness have a very strong hold on them. Those who try to bring about genuine and meaningful sharing of wealth and power in our world meet with strong opposition from the beneficiaries of unequal and unjust situations and systems. Even the forces of law and order will be against such persons and efforts.

Jesus has warned his followers. “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own”. If you compromise with the “system” and values which dominate the world it will accept you and reward you on its own terms. “Remember the words I said to you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too.” (John 15: 18-20) Jesus foresaw the clash there would be continually between the universal, selfless love which he advocated and represented and human selfishness. He calls us to transcend the draw and the drag of our weakness to try to begin here on earth the life of the kingdom which he came to institute.

The following of Jesus is a difficult task because it implies dying to ourselves and to many aspects of our society. Yet his word and example are a constant challenge to those who listen to them. Jesus disturbs our tranquility; he invites us to contemplate the vision of a *new heaven* and a *new earth* in which mankind will live in peace and harmony due to the triumph of justice and love. To those who believe in him, his guarantee of ultimate victory is a source of confidence and strength.

It is this *vision* of the ultimate destiny of humanity and the example of Jesus that can urge the Christian to a radical commitment to changing himself or herself and society in order to make the values of love, justice, freedom and peace real in our time. The vision is a criterion for judging contemporary reality. No human society will be perfect while still in the order of time. Hence the Christian will always have a distance to go, a goal to be achieved. The present inadequacies will make the Christian *permanent contestant* of the existing order in order to improve and fulfill it.

Such contestation should, however, include an understanding of the effort being made by individuals and be critically constructive for it has a positive goal to be realised. A merely negative, carping and anarchistic approach should not be the total

impact of the action of a follower of Christ. The content of our *hope* is positive and creative. It looks to human fulfillment in an environment when the mountains would have been brought down and the valleys filled.

The work of Christ on earth was to begin a movement of love among humankind. He did not establish an institution whose finality would be its own self-perpetuation. He did not concern himself with buildings and reserves, with educational and social service institutions. His main effort was given towards changing the mentalities of the persons around him and through them of others. His insistence was not on the laws and structures of the society of his followers but on fidelity to the one law of unselfish love; and this law is most demanding for he wants such love to be more binding on a person than the love for any given structure or institution. He speaks to persons in the depths of their being manifesting to them the need for fidelity to such a love beyond the attachment to even father and mother.

The community gathered together by Jesus was to be such a movement of unselfish love, a witness to his message, a sign and initial realization of the new heaven and the new earth. It was a community of love and brotherhood that endeavoured in its earliest days to be genuinely faithful to his intentions. Thus the Christian Church began from the community of the disciples of Christ. This original inspiration is a criterion for the self-evaluation of the Churches.

Faith in Jesus means an option for the values for which he lived and died. Faith in him is a way of living, of being for others; and not merely a mode of thinking or a manner of speaking. Faith is not the mere external fulfillment of a ritual or nominal membership of a group. *Faith is a praxis*, not a mere abstract doctrine. It is a search in a given time and space by given persons to live his message. Hence the criterion of faith is the relationship of our actual life and action, our praxis to the person and situations of our time.

A great deal of what is taught as faith in seminaries and manuals of traditional theology is the superimposition of a philosophy concerning God on the person of Jesus. It is argued that God has such and such characteristics; secondly Jesus is God; hence Jesus has such and such characteristics. This is inverting the process of Christian revelation. On the contrary the gospels present Jesus to us as the manifestation of the love and compassion that God is. We know something of the unknowable God through Jesus whom human beings have seen and touched and heard of. Albert Nolan writes "Our belief in Jesus' divinity is our recognition that what he did and said is the ultimate truth about life. To recognize this is to recognize his divinity" (from his manuscript).

When faith is thus understood as the acceptance of the message of Jesus as a whole we have a *different concept of theology* from what is often taught as Christian theology. In this approach faith is in the effort to live according to his values in the given circumstances of our life and responsibilities. It is in the quest for personal fulfillment in the way he has shown us; it is in the search to live one's relationship to God as he did; it is in the effort to transform ourselves and our society according to the values he bore witness to. Faith then includes awareness of our relationships in society, participation in the struggle of persons and communities to realize the

kingdom of God in their own lives and inter-relationships. Then faith is understood within the realities of our daily existence.

Such a faith in Jesus would be quite different from the mere acceptance of an abstract set of doctrines, and the recitation of formulae of ritual that do not lead to a direction of our lives towards the values of the kingdom. The crisis of faith for many Christians of goodwill is not concerning Jesus Christ and his values but is a scepticism about the particular way in which many in the Churches they know interpret his message today. It is sometimes a faith in Jesus that makes them critical of the official expressions of religion. Still others do not accept the institutional forms of present day Christianity because they do not see these as helping in the realization of the human values which they cherish.

Hope in Jesus to be realistic must be related to meaningful action that can give some confidence that effective changes will be brought about by them towards the realization of the values of the kingdom among persons and in society. Hope is thus related to our awareness of the goals intended for humanity by God and of the effort required for realizing them. Hope believes in the possibility of overcoming the obstacles at least in the long run. Thus hope is optimistic in the ultimate analysis, though there can be layers of despondency when one is confronted with the hopelessness of situations. For individuals hope is often real only in the context of a faith in after life and of a God who is love. For the global evolution of humanity hope can be more encouraging of progress here on earth towards the values of the kingdom. Hope without adequate strategies of action can be an alienating hope that only perpetuates present evils. The understanding of hope in Jesus has thus to include both a personal expectation of a life beyond death and also a conviction in the meaningfulness of present struggle for liberation because of the human effort made and of the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

The Early Christians

The first followers of Jesus took their personal and social values very seriously. Belonging to the Christian community implied going through a process of deep conversion especially to love. The *Acts of the Apostles* describe their way of life. It was communitarian in prayer, reflection and the sharing of goods. We do not have to idolize this to the extent of expecting all Christians to live in that communal manner. However, we have to recognize that Christian living necessarily implies the active acceptance of the values of his kingdom, primarily of unselfish love.

The Christians found themselves at variance with the values of the society of the day: both Jewish and Roman. They expected the Messiah to come rather early and tried to live in preparedness for him. They opted for a *new set of values* based on sharing of goods, brotherhood, respect for the human person, honesty and sincerity (e.g. Ananias), prayer and the breaking of bread.

The Christians of the first centuries helped in the introduction of humanistic values to the Graeco-Roman world due to their insistence on the dignity of human person. Every human *being was of value* as one in whom the Spirit of God dwells and a brother or sister of Christ. This brought a hitherto unknown value and dignity to persons, so that a human being could not be a mere object of the action of those in power. Every person was the subject of rights. Hence they refused to acknowledge the

unlimited sovereignty of the Empire or the Emperor. They refused the rites of emperor worship.

They were, therefore, more considerate to persons such as slaves who were less well-off in society. They often refused to join the army and thus participate in killing other human beings. They did not approve of the lax morality of the Romans and refused to join in their more reprehensive practices as in the Baths. Their laws of marriage were more favourable to human dignity than those of the Romans.

All these made Christians a rather separated lot within the communities of the times. The Jews disliked them for getting away from their tradition; and the Romans were suspicious of this strange sect of people who lived a life of their own, based very much on mutual love. The Christians were regarded as breaking up the community of the Roman society by not observing their customs.

For the Romans this seemed a rather subversive group, a set of conspirators. Christians were subversive of the values of the Roman society in certain respects, though they often claimed to be loyal to the Empire as such. They distinguished between patriotism and emperor worship; they implicitly argued for a limitation of the rights of public authority to command the individual. They thereby opposed absolutism in politics; through their stands on morality they accepted higher norms on which human dignity were to be based.

Becoming a Christian meant therefore a conversion to a way of life that was not appreciated by many others. It meant a serious option especially in times of persecution; and there were intermittent periods of persecution during the first three centuries. Christianity at that time, had a profound sense of mission; a messianic expectation of a new kingdom; and many were prepared to suffer and die for their cause. Love of each other was their chief characteristic in so far as they were faithful to Christ. In subsequent centuries, especially in more modern times, Christianity lost in large measure this apocalyptic vision as well as the social dimension of its message. An individualistic theology and spirituality have predominated in the Christian churches in the past two to three centuries.

Today we need a return to the original vision of Christ and of the early Christians; and to think out the implications of love in the modern global society. The liberating message of Christ must be applied to the world today with its vast potentialities and grave imbalances. Christians are far more numerous than in the early times but in a sense, few of them are genuinely committed to make love of neighbor a reality according to the possibilities and needs of today.

It will perhaps be a long time before the entire Church as a community realizes this prophetic dimension of Good Friday in relation to our own society. If and when it does so it will also realize the meaning of the resurrection with Jesus. If one loses one's life one will gain it. As we lose our fears for ourselves and our families and institutions and live increasingly for others, i.e. for the values of the kingdom, we will find meaning and joy in being a community of service. It is particularly the poor and the oppressed that will then appreciate the good news of liberation which we would endeavour to bear witness to by our own death to self and selfishness in their manifold manifestations.

Peace in Struggle

Christ's *agony in the garden of olives* reveals his deep inner conflict and anguish. A great fear, sadness and distress came upon him. He said to the apostles "my soul is sorrowful to the point of death". In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. There was no person to console him, to share his burden. He was lonely, insecure, tense and even uncertain of his next step. Even his closest disciples seemed to fail him. "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?"

Jesus went through the whole range of human insecurity, fear, and distress. In the passion he suffered physically too; every bit of his body was wounded. In the garden his spirit was assailed, tormented and nearly broken. He had to face the dire consequences of his options, with the anxiety as to whether his whole life would end in failure.

However, he did not succumb to these fears and distress. He would have liked it if he did not have to face this severe trial and torture. Like the prophets of old he felt the burden of suffering. If he did not have to drink of the cup of anguish it would have been easier for him. Yet he was determined to face the consequences of his decisions. "The spirit indeed is willing. but the flesh is weak... yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." Mk. 14. 36-38.

In this he was strengthened by an "angel from heaven". In his deepest distress he found peace and calm, a peace which the world cannot give and which he has communicated to his followers. The strength from heaven may be differently understood. It is common to figure an angel bringing him Holy Communion to the garden. A more human understanding would be to see the levels of being and consciousness in him, and how he had a deep peace in the highest level of his consciousness while he suffered intensely in his body, his senses, his emotions and in his mind.

This inner peace and tranquility can be appreciated in terms of his relationship with the Father, with God, with the Absolute. In this relationship he could see the meaning and purpose of his life; he could realize the transitory nature of human suffering; he could have confidence in the ultimate realization of God's plan for him and humankind. In union with the Absolute, he could see the conditioning of the human lives even of his adversaries and he would, therefore, ask for their being pardoned. The intimate union with the Father which the prayer in the garden intensified in him, gave Jesus the unshakeable strength to go ahead to face his death.

In his life Jesus gives us an example of the attitude to be brought by us in facing the enormously difficult tasks of transforming ourselves, other persons and societies. We have to struggle much, face many obstacles including the possibility of eventual failure and disappointment. We have to face misunderstanding, distrust and even persecution both from fellow believers and others. It is useful and even necessary to articulate a thinking concerning these different levels of consciousness and experience them in life in order to understand in some way what Jesus endured.

As we seriously undertake action for justice we will realize that a determined struggle is required against the forces of injustice and in favour of the oppressed. Then those who benefit from the prevailing unjust structures will almost surely attack us in different ways. They will tend to identify their self-interest with the common good. They will accuse us of being unbalanced, immature, communistic, propagators of hatred etc. The following of Jesus and the service to the people require a preparedness to suffer these.

The experience of the joy and wisdom of union with the Transcendent Being can help us to a calm and cool determination of our options and of our action to realize them in spite of the personal suffering we will have to go through consequently. We can experience both: the suffering and the inner peace based on the integration of our being in God. We can thus preserve a balance in making our options and our life meaningful in spite of the difficulties and dangers of implementing our decisions.

While we develop the social dimension of the faith in Christ and strive for its fulfillment, as individuals we face many failures in our lives. Not all our efforts may bring into being in our time the new society that we desire. We have to live with the recognition of the ephemeral character of all temporal reality, while believing in the permanent value of whatever little contribution we can make to personal growth and the maturation of humanity. In the face of such a realization we must have the humility to accept our limitations and death itself.

On the cross Jesus gives us a supreme example of *forgiveness*: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” was his prayer. He does not judge his murderers; on the contrary he wants them forgiven on the ground of ignorance. When working for the kingdom of love and specially justice we have to face much opposition, criticism, and sometimes imprisonment and even death. Meditation on this forgiving spirit of Jesus can help us understand others and forgive them even seventy times seven, if necessary.

Jesus’ attitude to attacks on him reveals a calm composure and equanimity in his inner being. He had what Vinoba Bhave calls in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita a “*serene vitality*”. It is a poised profundity and unruffled mind that dispel dejection and grief in the face of apparent disaster. A fountain of serenity flows within one’s being when one is deeply united to God in one’s struggle and in consequent suffering. This dimension of prayer and contemplation needs to be further developed within Christian groups. Far too often prayer is thought of as an external recitation of formulae; while the life stream of inner communion with God generated particularly by adversity is not given its due value.

We have to realize our inner peace inspite of surrounding catastrophe. This is possible at a deeper level of being in which we encounter the Lord and Master of our lives and of the universe; we have to learn to rest interiorly in the midst of our activity and also to rest from exterior activity to unite with our own inner being. These are dimensions of life which Jesus discloses to us in his teaching on the deeper meaning of religion as a relationship to God, to the world, to our neighbour and ourselves. We have each one to work out our inner peace in reconciliation with the certain knowledge of our personal limitations. Our self-realization and fulfillment can only be

in this direction, while being linked to the hope of and the struggle for the new humanity, the new Jerusalem.

Chapter 5

CHRISTIANS AND THE ASIAN REVOLUTION

This is the text of a talk given in August 1971 to the Asian Catholic Student Chaplain Formation Course at Bangalore, India. Only a few lines have been altered specially with reference to the end of the war in Indo-China.

(a) What is the Asian Revolution?

By “Asian Revolution” I refer to the continuing revolutionary situation in the Asian countries during the past three or four decades. Generally the term revolution is used for a radical and rapid transformation of the political, social, cultural and economic structures and values of a society. In the Asian context of its millennial history and almost unchanging past, the period of three or four decades is a fairly short period; on the other hand the changes that have taken place in the past few decades are so radical as to be revolutionary even when they are spaced over a decade or two. During the last twenty five years, Asia has changed more profoundly than in the previous three or four thousand years.

The *modern Asian Revolution* can be studied in terms of two main strands: the political revolution towards a greater political freedom, and a socio-economic revolution towards a more equitable sharing of the country’s resources, with cultural and ideological elements orienting them. Sometimes the two strands have converged; in other places they have worked even in contrary directions.

The *political revolution* refers to the process by which countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Pakistan achieved political independence with the right to choose their rulers being vested in the mass of the population. This aspect of the Asian revolution is sometimes soft-pedalled due to the preoccupation with socio-economic issues.

The *countries of North Asia* have gone through or been subjected to a political and socio-economic revolution based on Marxism. China, N. Korea, Tibet, N. Vietnam and Outer Mongolia have socialist regimes in which the economy is centrally controlled and largely State-owned. These countries however do not have the right to choose their rulers on a democratic basis as is known in India and Sri Lanka. They are closer to economic justice, though some political rights of the citizens have yet to be won. S. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos have joined this socialist group since 1975.

Some countries like Taiwan, Hong Kong, S. Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Burma have varying measures of political freedom and unfreedom without economic justice. Most of the countries of Western Asia, West of Pakistan have not yet experienced democratic political freedoms, and are also far from realising the ideals of economic justice. Japan and Israel are highly developed countries with more free political institutions and strongly capitalistic economic regimes. Japan’s growth to the

position of an economic super-power in Asia and the world presents an example and a challenge to the rest of Asia specially those with free enterprise economies.

By Asian revolution, I refer to this process of very fundamental change that has taken place in Asia during the past 30 years and which will continue with increasing vigour during the rest of this century. We may call this a process of “social change” as some may have emotional allergies to the word “revolution”. But when we speak of the *Asian Revolution from 1945-2000 A.D.*, it might give us a sense of perspective that will make it easier to attune ourselves to the rapidity and radicality of the convulsions that our countries are going through. Can we see any meaningful trends within these elemental cosmic changes that can help us understand our vocation as human beings, and Christians in contemporary Asia?

The under-privileged of the modern world

In the earlier chapter we have meditated on the mission of Christ and hence of the church to liberate the captives, the oppressed, the down-trodden, the dispossessed, the poor – the “annavim” of Yahweh. Who are these peoples on whom the burden of history and existence weighs heavily in the world - is it not largely the poor peoples of Asia?

Asia is 3/5ths of the world’s population, and about 3/4 of the world’s poor. Asia is the continent of unspeakable poverty in a world of unprecedented plenty and surpluses. The Asian masses are the world’s landless peasantry in a world of vast empty spaces. It is a region of rapidly increasing populations, which double themselves every 30 years or so. Thus India increases presently at the rate of about 65 million every 5 years, i.e. over one million each month. China increases by about 75 million every five years. Thus China must make provision for an additional population equal to the entire population of France, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland every five years. These are enormous challenges which have to be thought in terms of so much more food, many millions of new houses, schools, employment opportunities etc.

Asian people are exploited by the elite within their countries and by the powerful nations of the world. Asia is the continent with the longest record of having been colonized by the western powers and there is still a deep resentment against the West among the Asian peoples.

Asia is *the continent of youth*. Youth form more than 60% of the population in many Asian countries. *The youth of Asia are about 1/3 of the human race*. They are the bearers of Asia’s destiny and therefore the future of mankind. Yet today they feel degraded, insulted and even ashamed of themselves due to their exploitation both by their countrymen and by foreigners. They are peaceful, lovable young persons who do not get a chance to live a decent human existence in most of our countries,

Socio-economic conditions in the S.E. Asian countries

What is said here refers in general to conditions in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan and S. Korea, though there are peculiarities in each country.

All these countries have low standards of living in comparison with the rest of the world; and most of them have a very slow growth rate of the economy specially in the rural areas. Population is rapidly increasing and unemployment is on a massive scale specially in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines. It is estimated that the number of unemployed in India is about 35 millions or about 12% of the labour force. Taiwan and S. Korea have had a good rate of economic growth in recent years.

The social conditions in these countries are far from being satisfactory. In all these countries there are very marked *inequalities* in wealth and incomes that make not only economic justice impossible in the present conditions, but also render political freedom rather illusory even where it exists. A few affluent families control large sectors of the economy: in land, industry, commerce or other services. In India, 14.4% of the households owning agricultural holdings cultivate 63.6% of the area, whereas 70.7% of the households control, only 16.8% of the cultivated area cultivated. (C.T. Kurian, *Our Five Year Plans*, 1966 pp 7-10). The inequalities are due to both the traditional forces and the growth of a new class favoured by contact by the West and colonial rulers. In the absence of a strong governmental push towards greater equality in wealth and incomes, economic growth tends to increase inequalities. The rich grow richer and the poor tend to become poorer at least relatively to the rich.

The poverty of these Asian masses is to be understood partly by the continuing *exploitation of the poor* by the more privileged local groups and foreign companies. The production and distribution of many consumer goods in these countries are in the hands of big multinational companies who are helped by the local business elite: e.g. drugs, soap, cosmetics, radios, electrical goods, cigarettes, footwear and commercial banking are often dominated by foreign agencies. The mass media, specially the Press, are monopolised by the financial magnates and foreign concerns. Inequalities breed further inequalities that have an undesirable impact on the social and political life as well.

The *system of education* in these countries helps to bolster the inequalities of the economic system. It is generally too academic or rather “bookish”, tends to cut off the youth from the employment opportunities available in these countries, fails to communicate required skills, and helps to imbue them with patterns of behaviour which are anti-development e.g. a distaste for manual work. The educational system fosters the individualistic and competitive spirit which motivates the economy. It is a cause of the cultural alienation of the educated from the masses.

The *false value system* fostered specially by the Western oriented middle and upper classes tends towards ostentatious consumption as in dress, transportation and housing, rather than to saving and investment for increasing productivity in a desirable manner. These values are backed by the higher incomes and purchasing power of the more affluent classes, and this leads to an emphasis on the production of relative luxuries for their consumption whereas the urgent needs of the majority of the population for food, clothing and housing are neglected.

Corruption is widespread in the countries of the South-East Asian region. Corruption is to a considerable extent the motor of the political and economic system. Corruption too favours the better off elite to obtain the benefits of power and position

for themselves and their favourites. The affluent minority though better educated often does not have a sense of morality so as to be conscious of human dignity, social values and national responsibility in their business transactions.

All these factors see to it that *politics* generally helps the elite in spite of the growing consciousness of the masses about their rights. Imprisonment without trial and torture are now quite common in almost the whole of Asia. Indonesia, Philippines and India have tens of thousands of political prisoners.

International economic relations have not proved to be so beneficial to the poor Asian countries. The manipulation of the markets of exports of these mainly primary producing countries by the big companies of the rich Western countries results in a continuing deterioration of the *terms of trade* for the poor countries.

Aid that is received by Asian countries is unsatisfactory in quality as aid is often tied to purchases from aiding countries. In 1967, as much as 84% of the aid was "tied" (Pearson Report). The burden of servicing debts is becoming increasingly a millstone round the necks of the poor countries. Much of the new aid is spent to repay old aid. Aid, as investment, is really a handing over of a sector of the economy to foreigners. The alien control over sizeable sections of the economies of these countries worsens their economic position; even when they develop it is often the foreign owners and the local elite who benefit.

To all these must be added the serious debilitating effect on the economy of the *military rivalries* and consequent 'defence' expenditure imposed on the poor people. Such conflicts have particularly affected countries like Pakistan, India and Indonesia not to mention the countries of the Indo-China region. Internal communal conflicts worsen the situation and sometimes prevent the democratic countries from having stable governments that can carry through an effective policy of development with social justice over a long period of time. Militarism is proving to be a bane in many Asian countries. Military regimes dominate S. Korea, Taiwan, Philippines and Indonesia to the peoples' disadvantage.

Growing sense of frustration

In almost all the countries of South East Asia there is a growing sense of frustration among the masses of the people. Time is running out for democracy and for pro-Western forms of economic policy due to increasing discontent of the poorer classes. Unfortunately the Western powers often cooperate in maintaining the inequalities of these countries. Discontent has now reached a position of questioning of the fundamentals of the way of life of these countries. The desire for revolutionary changes is growing in these lands.

The so-called "Development Decade" of the 1960s proved a failure in that the disparities between the richer and poorer countries grew during that period. It is estimated that 80% of the wealth of the world belongs to 20% of people in the world particularly the United States, Europe, Russia and Japan. The trend is towards a worsening of this situation and it is estimated that by the end of the present decade 90% of the wealth will be in the hands of 10% of the population. There is a world-wide trend towards *a concentration of wealth* and power in the hands of a few even

when (absolutely) the standards of living are rising. The poor are thus being more alienated and exploited and - the poor are mainly in Asia.

Unfair Land Distribution in the World

Asia, with 3/5 of the world's population, is also the continent which has received a rather unfavourable distribution of the world's resources – specially of land. It has only 1/5 of the earth's surface and contains some of the most densely populated areas of the world – such as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Asia is hemmed in by the rest of the world even geographically. Asians cannot move out to the empty fertile land masses of the world due to the present world system of nation states and the anti-Asian legislation in almost all countries which have empty land spaces – in Asia and the rest of the world.

This *pressure of population* on land and the lack of mobility is a very important factor which we often fail to consider. When Europe was expanding from the 15th century onwards, the whole world was open to the Europeans – or opened by them. They occupied most of the world. Thus North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, Southern Africa were chosen for residence and many other areas were exploited as colonies for raw materials, markets for their goods, supply of cheap labour and even slaves. Today the peoples of Asia are experiencing a demographic revolution of rapidly increasing populations but they cannot move out of their national frontiers due to the present world system.

The present world order is a sort of *WORLD APARTHEID* or “separate development” in given reservations. The white race alone has almost unlimited scope of migration and occupation of the earth's surface; the yellow and brown races are confined to their limits, and the blacks to Africa except those deported as slaves in earlier times. This too is a grave injustice at the world level; yet no serious attention is paid to it even by World Organisations.

The rich countries are prepared, however, to distribute any amount of birth control appliances and pills to the poor of Asia. Asian countries like Singapore and some states of India are resorting to inhuman practices like compulsory sterilization of persons. These are often an escape from the obligation of sharing the earth's resources among all mankind.

Asia is ringed round by Western and Russian *military bases*. There is a fear among these great powers that Asians will some day break through the present national frontiers. With the US withdrawal from Vietnam and the British withdrawal from Singapore, the Western powers are strengthening their Southern Hemisphere bases with Australia and South Africa as anchors of such a “defence” strategy. The growing population pressure in the South East Asian countries is likely to lead to further conflicts among these peoples. The great powers of the world will of course be happy to supply arms for such self-destructive conflicts among Asians.

Asia has been the *arena* of a continuing war during the past four decades. It is also likely to be the area of future conflicts among the great powers. The battle of ideologies and of power is fought mainly in Asia – from the Middle East, through Bangladesh to South East Asia. There are internal armed conflicts in Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Asia is thus *the proletariat of the world* that has been robbed and exploited for many centuries by its own peoples and by foreigners. Many countries such as India, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are in a near revolutionary situation due to the increasing frustration of the masses. As the women Prime Ministers of India and Sri Lanka have stated, we are sitting on the top of a volcano which may erupt anytime in the near future.

The attraction of the China of Mao Tse Tung

As the demand for radical and rapid change grows in the South East Asian countries more and more people particularly among the youth turn to China for inspiration.

Prior to 1949 China was weak, poor, divided, ravaged by instant floods, exploited by corrupt rulers, rapacious war lords, and foreign companies that tended to destroy the Chinese local productivity. The Chinese were not respected as a people; there was a manpower and brain drain from China to other countries. All in all conditions were somewhat similar to those in some of the poor Asian countries today.

Now we see a different China: developing rapidly, self-reliant, more egalitarian with a technology suited to its needs, a system of education more geared to communitarian values and a continuing cultural revolution that tries to maintain the revolutionary idealism of Chinese socialism. Though China does not ensure Western styled political freedom to its citizens, the Communists under Mao have carried out a radical and revolutionary policy of building a new China during the past 27 years. Not only has she achieved a profound social revolution in getting rid of the corrupt social system that had grown up over the centuries, China has developed economically and in science and technology. China has resolved the problems of food and employment for her 800 millions so that she is not a burden to the rest of humanity. Even capitalistic visitors to China admit and admire this self-reliance and equity in her development.

Today she is one of the super powers of the world. This is all the more creditable in so far as she had to develop on her own resources after the withdrawal of the Soviet assistance in the early 1960s. In spite of being ostracised by the rich Western countries China has achieved such a success in development that more and more countries are recognising her. During the past 27 years this large portion of humanity has given the rest of Asia an example of the potentialities of development through a regime that combines power with a sense of purpose and continual communication with the masses.

In all the South East Asian countries there has been a heightening of the sense admiration for the Chinese achievement. The revolutionary groups now look almost exclusively to China for a model for the capture of power and for the development of socialist regimes.

A seminal period

During these last few years South East Asia has been passing through a turning point in her modern history. The forces that came to power in the late 1940s

seem to have exhausted their dynamism and ability to respond to the demands of the times. In almost every country there is a search for new approaches. Constitutions are in the remaking in almost all these countries.

South East Asia seems poised for a move forward towards the more serious implementation of the socio-economic goals of its overall modern revolution. Many are attracted by the call of Mao to “stand up and walk” for power flows from the barrel of a gun.

Vietnam

The resistance of North Vietnam during many years to the attack by the United States has given a further push to the revolutionary trends in Asia. In spite of a ruthless war by the biggest world power, this small nation has demonstrated its determination to live and be itself. It has even contributed to an awakening of the conscience of the youth of the United States to the heinousness of war. The communist regime in North Vietnam has shown the world that it will not bend its knee to insolent might and will not disown the poor.

The communist leaders in Asia have been caricatured in the “free” press of the world; yet they are persons who have shown heroic dedication to their peoples over long decades of conflict and privation. Ho Chi Minh leaves us in his last will a message of dedication which has a ring of authenticity about it:

“As for myself as far as I myself am concerned, I have served my country, the revolution and the people throughout my life with all my heart and strength. Now if I must leave this world. I have nothing for which to reproach myself.

An unlimited affection to the whole people, to the party, to the young, and to the children... my ultimate wish is that the whole party and the whole people will stay closely united in the fighting for building of a peaceful, united, independent, democratic and prosperous Vietnam... and will give a worthy contribution to the world revolution.”

We who wish to understand modern Asia must open ourselves to appreciate such persons who have a deep appeal among youth in Asia and elsewhere.

The resounding victory of the people’s revolutionary forces in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos has strengthened the Asian people’s desire for socio-economic liberation. It has on the other hand induced the Asian elite and the foreign capitalist powers towards a political and military consolidation of their positions in the rest of “free enterprise Asia”.

World Revolution

Modern Asia is seeking not merely changes within the nation states, but also *a re-distribution of resources and population at a world level*. The present distribution of wealth, land and income is very unequal and unjust. It is maintained in the ultimate analysis by economic power and military force. The nation states are a force of conservation of the existing national frontiers which have no moral justification as

such. The present national frontiers bring about and protect injustices at the world level, injustices which are even greater than those within the nation states.

There is nothing absolute about the present distribution of land and resources among the peoples of the world. In fact it is largely the result of force and exploitation of the past few centuries. The march of history during the past 30 years has brought about certain significant changes such as the almost total defeat of colonialism in Asia. In the next 30 years still further changes will be brought about in Asia and the world; for the conscience of mankind or at least the sheer force of numbers will assert itself towards a more just world order. The younger generation even in the western countries is inclined to regard the national interests as not the absolute value. Thus younger Americans are profoundly critical of the giant, exploitative multi-national corporations of the military-industrial complex of the big powers of the Pentagon... The younger generation has a better world vision than many of their elders and is more prepared to subordinate national self-interest to the common good of humanity.

Asia is pushing ahead almost consciously towards a world revolution. The youth of Asia will be the main agents of such global changes in the next few decades. The world of the 21st century will be fashioned largely by them. The problem is whether this will be done peacefully or by violence, in an orderly manner or by mere force, by a better distribution of the world's resources or by Asians fighting among themselves, by international sharing or by bitter massacres within nations.

The vitalism of youthful Asia will certainly press towards major changes in the coming decades. Compared to the boredom of youth in some areas of the West, the Asian youth are more optimistic towards the movements of history and revolutionary changes at a global level.

(b) The Church in Asia

How have the churches in Asia responded to this situation during the past 30 years? Without attempting to pass judgment on individuals, we may say that the churches in large measure being irrelevant to these changes. We have generally disregarded socio-economic analysis, and been indifferent to political and economic exploitation, both internal and external. We have been implicitly on the side of the status quo and the powers that be, at least due to our *silence*. Sometimes we have been accomplices in the process of alienation of the Asian peoples and even benefited from the presence and power of the exploiters. In fact we have been on the side of practical capitalism in a rather uncritical manner, sometimes, perhaps unconsciously, helping it, propagating it, legitimizing it and even tending to consecrate it. Our churches, priestly and religious life have tended to accept the values of capitalist society and fit themselves with its framework.

The churches have also been during these past decades the backbone of an *uncritical anti-communism*. This has blocked us from seeing the positive values which Communism has espoused in Asia and placed us more squarely on the side of reaction. We have to a certain extent helped aggravate the clashes within Asian countries due to our uncompromising stand against Communism. Thus the war in Vietnam and the US involvement in it is not without reference to the position and influence of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam. The fears of the latter were partly

responsible for the intransigence of South Vietnam in the negotiations for peace in Vietnam. Our openness to Marxism developed too slow and too late to be helpful in preventing the Vietnam conflict.

The Asian church has not had an *international dimension*. It is only now that the Asian bishops are trying to meet each other in Asia. The Asian churches have been connected mainly with Rome – vertically and this has not been very helpful for an awareness building regarding Asia and its problems. Thus we accepted the status quo and fitted into the pattern of international capitalism.

The Asian churches have in fact helped create the local westernized bourgeoisie through our educational institutions and uncritical value system. We have been agents of a cultural alienation and helped in the thought-conditioning of our peoples. Even many recent development projects we run do not develop a critical attitude in the recipients of our services. Our financial dependence on the West including Roman agencies is often not conducive to a critical and independent reflection on world affairs. We have naturally to operate within the ideological framework of our mentors and benefactors, unless these too have opted for the integral liberation of the peoples of the world.

Why did the church fail to understand the Asian revolution?

High among the causes must be placed *our theology* which is imported from the West, individualistic in morality, socially uncritical, and heavily weighted on the side of the preservation of the status quo. We have a theology of essences, of a certain immobility in which the highest value has been the building and preservation of the church itself.

We do not give a positive valence to change and growth. Sanctity is conceived of more in terms of regularity and order rather than adaptation and relevance. We have done much to change certain factors such as the system of caste, and to spread the concepts of freedom and justice, but we did not go beyond them to a critique of society and a bold attempt to implement these values in the macro-structures of our societies, and much less of the world as such.

As the church was too allied to the prevailing orthodoxy she could not encourage creative reflection. The church was guaranteed her own existence at the price of silencing her critical instincts and of not questioning and challenging the status quo. Thus she remained marginal to the basic aspirations of the oppressed masses.

Our organisation and forms of leadership have been too rigid and unresponsive to the changing need of the people. Our leadership is generally old, even physically, due to the very processes of appointment; whereas the revolutionary forces are often led by younger, dynamic spirits. In many places the church leadership is foreign, or where it is local it tends to be westernized and bourgeois in mentality.

We have been too preoccupied with ourselves: with our ghetto concerns. Our social services and institutions have kept us fully occupied. Even the best of the personnel of the church hardly escaped the stranglehold of the church's institutions which often buttressed the prevailing social system rather uncritically.

We were uncritical in our stances. In fact the church often tended to silence, censor and ostracize the critical spirit within it. We used to render the questioning minds ineffective within the fold; they were occasionally placed on the 'Index' and excommunicated, We thus immunized ourselves and society against change. We were not sufficiently open to the spirit of God speaking to us through the revolutionary movements of our time. When the great revolutions actually took place we placed ourselves against them due to our sense of fear and self-preservation. It is true that in the process we salvaged certain values, but we failed to appreciate other important ones as well.

We have been disrespectful of other Asian *religions* and *cultures*. What have the Asian churches learnt in 500 years from Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism or Confucianism? We have been spiritually too self-satisfied and proud to learn of others. Even Asian Christians have been too easily blinded by western theology, the might of western power or even the sanctions of ecclesiastical discipline.

For these and many other reasons such as the irrelevance of our liturgy, the church failed to attract the more creative spirits of each generation. The "practicing" christians were often less socially committed than their revolutionary contemporaries.

(c) To evangelize and be evangelized by the Asian revolution

The mission of the church is to bear witness to the values of the gospel of Christ throughout the world and during the entire course of human history. This has to be done according to the different cultures of the peoples and the varying vicissitudes of their historical evolution.

In contemporary times, the revolutionary temper and tempo are among the chief characteristics of Asian peoples. Therefore witness to the gospel among them must include an openness to and participation in this revolutionary process. The church should not be frightened of revolution; for revolution too is part of God's providence for man. On the contrary we must try to understand these changes in terms of our thinking on a just international order which was reiterated by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical "Populorum Progressio". In it he emphasised that bold and radical transformations are urgently required for international social justice to be realized in our times. Often our Asian churches are in fact far more conservative than these teachings of the Pope.

A task of the Asian church today is the evangelising of the on going Asian revolution, in its many facets: political, cultural, socio-economic and religious. Asian countries are in the process of national revolutions and are heading towards revolutionary changes in the world. To be present to these we must first *understand them*, appreciate the values which are borne by the revolutionary forces and relate to them, thus witnessing to the relationship between these values and the gospel of Christ. This is a task of mission, of witness, of manifestation, of *Epiphania*. Evangelization does not mean merely increasing the number of baptized Christians within our church communities, it should be much more the witness to the presence of the divine, the "Christique" among us both in the day to day course of life, as well as, in the major trends of our cosmic evolution.

The process of evangelization is a process of incarnation, for that is the pedagogy of Jesus and the approach that is sufficiently respectful of the other. We cannot be present to and, “evangelize” the Asian revolution without consciously participating in it. If we continue to be marginal to it, we will be seriously failing in our witness to Christ, even though we might continue our work of individual pastoral care.

We need not only individual conversion but also group conversion; a metanoia among social classes and nations. Pope John XXIII was thus a missionary to the whole world. By his loving and simple approach to persons and issues he helped bring humankind closer to each other in our war torn world. His presence was reconciling, liberating and therefore evangelical, and his witness was enthusiastically welcomed by the world at large irrespective of nationality and ideology.

In order to participate in the Asian revolution we must courageously articulate an adequate teaching on *international social justice* as did the prophets of old concerning the society of their day. We must stand unhesitatingly for the liberation of the oppressed, for the removal of the onus on debt of the poor, for the provision of land to the landless, work to the jobless, houses for the shelterless, food for the hungry, freedom for captives and Justice to all. These constitute some of the basic urges of the modern Asian revolution, and these are also the main burden of the gospel message.

A new world is being born before our eyes, and it is a tragedy that we cannot discern its course; its momentum and values. Our task is to try to bring about these necessary changes speedily and in a peaceful manner by changing the mentalities of people and structures of our societies. Both these have to be integrated and attended to as they are closely interrelated.

Christians have to be present to the revolutionary processes in both free enterprise and socialistic countries. In the free enterprise countries and areas of the economy they must stress social justice and an equitable redistribution of wealth and incomes, for mere economic growth does not necessarily lead to justice. In socialistic countries and sectors of an economy they must champion the cause of human freedom and participation in decision making at all levels, for mere equalisation of incomes and nationalization of property are not adequate to prevent the exploitation of man by man or to provide the positive environment for integral human development and fulfillment.

Christians have thus to be *a constructive and critical force* in all countries and regimes ever bearing courageous witness to the values of the full human person, in an effort to increase the opportunities for true human happiness. They have thus to be the *permanent* revolution that goes beyond both capitalism and mere state enterprise and tends towards the new man and the new society – the New Jerusalem of Christian revolution which is also the basic aspiration of the human heart. Towards this goal Christians and the church as a body must work, combat and suffer, if need be. This is a primary task of the *macro-evangelization* of our countries.

The churches must use their enormous moral influence and widespread resources to further the liberation of the oppressed masses of Asian countries. They

must interpret the Asian revolution to their peoples and the rest of the world. This is essential for an integral action of evangelization in Asia in the modern world.

Be evangelized by the Asian revolution

A second aspect of the relationship between the church and the Asian revolution is that the Christians and the churches in Asia must be *open to be evangelized* by the values and processes of the revolution of our times. The churches have no monopoly of the powers of evangelization i.e. of realizing the values of the gospel on earth and bearing witness to them. The very processes of growth in the world are a word from God to us; the churches have to rediscover the meaning and application of the gospel message in and through the events of each historical stage. The churches have thus to be evangelised by the presence of the divine in the heart of the human ('secular') reality. The cosmic Christ is present and at work among the Asians too, and this 2/3rd of humankind can also manifest Christ even to Christians.

Our churches must therefore *learn* from the positive values of the Asian Revolution. They must continually purify themselves reforming themselves specially in the light of the noble aspirations and values of this revolution. They must be prepared for a fundamental *REPENTANCE*, for they are often a counter witness to the values of justice, brotherhood, equality and freedom. We must have the courage to repent, individually and collectively.

When we see the fundamental irrelevance of the churches to the Asian peoples and their needs and aspirations we cannot help coming to the conclusion that the churches themselves need radical and revolutionary changes in order to respond to the call of Christ through the revolutionary urges of our peoples. The churches must change their mentalities, and structures radically and rapidly. Her role in society must be more prophetic and less the maintenance of a status quo; more motivational and less institutionalized; more in favour of human freedom and less dominating. The life style of her ministers, religious and believers must be altered radically to be a credible witness to the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.

A grace for Christianity

Enlightened and courageous involvement in the on going Asian revolution can be a significant grace for the Asian Christians and churches. In the process they can rediscover the gospel; come to know who Christ is; get back a fundamental seriousness of purpose and a disinterestedness in service; become dynamic and youthful, revitalize the liturgy and catechesis and revamp her pastoral structures. The ready response to the challenge of the revolution can make Christianity purer, simpler, poorer, more just, more honest, more incarnate, more courageous and all in all more credible and lovable and hence more divine. The pity is that as persons and groups we are afraid to let ourselves be converted by the positive values of our revolutions. We are often the obstacle to the church becoming really the church as Christ wanted it to be.

If the church participates in the revolution as an on going process, it may not have to pack its bags and withdraw when a revolution succeeds in a given country. If it has shared in the travail of the revolutionary struggles on the side of the poor, it can

merit a share in the building up of our societies even after revolutionary transfers to power. The church in socialistic Vietnam is gradually opening to this phase now.

It is sad to see that Christians in Asia are so slow to understand and reluctant to appreciate the positive values of the revolutionary situation in which many of our countries are. In Asia today we are still like the church in the Ancient Regime prior to the French Revolution of 1789, the Orthodox Church in Russia prior to 1917, and the Christian mission in China prior to 1949. We are sitting on the top of a volcano that is in the process of erupting and we can hardly persuade ourselves to take serious note of it.

The church took nearly a 100 years to appreciate the French Revolution, over 50 years to see the meaning of the Russian Revolution. She has not yet seriously opened her eyes to the values of the Chinese revolution and the ongoing revolution in many Asian countries.

Let us open ourselves to the stirrings of the spirit manifested to us by the aspirations of our peoples and let us have the openness and humility to learn from them too. In hereby we can discover the contemporary and future dimensions of *Christ* who suffered and died for man's liberation and whose height and depth, length and breadth we must continually seek.

But the Christians who honestly try to relate the church meaningfully to the Asian revolution must – given the position today in many countries – *be prepared to suffer much*. They will suffer misunderstanding from even opposing sides. For if, we want to interpret the church to Asia and Asia to the church and the world we need a new dynamic, incarnational theology that helps us analyse the interplay of forces and powers in our societies and inserts us on the side of the oppressed masses in their struggle for integral liberation. We need a liturgy that is vital, vibrant and liberating, we need new pastoral approaches that relate to the revolutionary struggles, new life styles that rid us of the almost criminal complacency of many of our consecrated positions and postures.

Christ too suffered a similar fate, may we have the vision to understand the signs of our times, to discern the divine in the heart of the human and in our revolutionary processes. May we have the grace to go forward together hand in hand with all others in Asia and with our hands in the hands of the Man from Galilee in order to strive together with our peoples to build anew Asia in a new world.

Chapter 6

JESUS CHRIST – LIBERATOR OF THE OPPRESSED PEOPLES

During the past four to five centuries the colonized peoples have formed the majority of humankind. This is true not only within countries but also in international relations. The period since the fall of Constantinople to the West, and voyages of “discovery” of Vasco da Gama eastwards and of Christopher Columbus eastwardstowards, saw the Europeans extend their military power, colonial domination and economic stranglehold over the major part of the earth’s peoples. The Western powers reshaped the world to satisfy their needs and their greed. In the process whole peoples were exterminated in the greatest genocide of human history, specially in the Americas and in Australia and New Zealand. It is estimated that about a hundred million men, women and children were taken away as slaves from Africa mainly to the Americas. Of these about a third are said to have perished on the journey. The religions and cultures of the non-European peoples were persecuted, despised and marginalized for centuries. The treasures and natural resources of the peoples of the East, Africa and the Americas were systematically despoiled to benefit Europeans. Their industries were killed by force or the processes of “peaceful competition” of a ruthless capitalist expansion. Thus we have the present position of the majority of humankind being rendered dependent on the “developed” countries mainly of Europe and North America.

All during this period the Christian religion was associated with the colonizing, imperialist powers. Even though the religious men and women were its ministering angels, they did not fundamentally question the right of the White races to conquer and colonize others. On the contrary they thought this situation a God given opportunity for the spread of the Christian message and mission. Thus by a close alliance with the dominant powers and the forces they gave Western colonial enterprise a legitimation of a non-material nature also. Hence the reigning monarchs of Europe and later rulers of Europe and America encouraged the missionaries with their strong support and blessings.

What is significant in this situation is not to lay blame on persons of the past but rather to ask ourselves about the meaning and value of their legacy to contemporary Christianity specially among the oppressed peoples. Westerners and present day missionaries are very sensitive on this point and even tend to think us ungrateful for reverting to these reflections. But the very process of our own rediscovery of ourselves and of the basic message of the gospel of Jesus Christ requires our consciousness of these events and of the theological conditioning involved in them. Our sensitivity to the feelings of our present co-workers may prevent both us and them from understanding our historical task. (The same is true of the reflection on the running of fee levying private schools by religious men and Women in our countries, specially where the State provides universal free education).

We have to note that during these centuries it was not likely that the Christian missions in Africa, Asia and Latin America would reflect on Jesus Christ as from the point of view of the oppressed masses. Even in the European countries which were keen on spreading Christianity the accent was not on Jesus as a liberator. On the contrary the emphasis was on the Church as a means of salvation. Salvation was in

eternal life after death. Hence even slaves were to be grateful for the chance of reaching heaven after death through baptism, even if the Church personnel did not seriously contest the heinousness of slavery itself. By a sociological approach to the evolution of Christian theology we can see why a teaching relevant to the suffering and exploitation of the peoples of the colonized regions did not evolve in the Christian churches of the West. The Churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America and among the oppressed peoples of North America too could not develop such a theology till they had a consciousness of their own authentic position and heritage. The attack on the traditional religions and cultures of these countries also helped the process of *a theological imperialism*. Even the working classes of Europe, America and the rest of the world have not yet articulated their theological reflections from their own dominated positions.

An Adult, Male, Western Clerical Capitalist Theology

The history of Christian theology has been very largely dominated by the Western peoples. This may be due to their creativity, or the neglect of Eastern theologies of the Orthodox tradition, or even the subject position of other Churches. The women's movements for liberation are making us conscious how males have largely dominated the elaborations of theology even up to today. This is closely related to the male monopoly of clerical positions and ecclesiastical power. The long years of clerical training, coupled among Catholics, with Aristotelian rationalization, have helped confine theologians to a self-perpetuating elitist clique of professional specialists bred in seminaries, universities and libraries mainly of the Western ecclesiastical establishment. The theologians are dependent on the Church authorities, and these have been historically linked to the political powers in the Western countries.

The very *method of theologizing* has tended to make theology elitist, restrictive and rather unrelated to life. As mentioned in earlier chapters theology has been made so dependent on Western history that a person cannot begin to theologize in accepted and "respectable" circles except after a long sojourn into Western Church history including theological wrangles and ecclesiastical conflicts. The teaching of theology in Universities and seminaries became so much a matter of abstruse speculation or irrelevant history that it did not face the life situations of the peoples of the world, specially from the oppressed races, classes and sex. Even the theological conflicts of the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Christian era were regarded as more pertinent to modern theology than a reflection of Western imperialism, capitalism, totalitarianism and the under-development of peoples.

That is why a renewal of theology needs a different method in which Christian witness is more significant than speculative elaborations or a foreign historical investigation. The first act of theology is the effort to live the gospel message of love and sharing in the contemporary conflictive situation. From this a theology and spirituality can flow. This perspective represents an approach or method (epistemology) that is quite contrary of the traditional scholastic method that was highly deductive from defined dogmas or inductive from the past history of theology. Naturally it is those who are actively engaged in the transformation of persons and societies who would have the keys to such a theological approach. The mere "detached" academic theologian would tend to find himself out of his depths when confronted with issues such as a Christian option in the face of the Angolan or

Namibian struggle for liberation. When such a method of theologizing is adopted ordinary women and men, workers and peasants, youth and the aged can make a valuable contribution to theology and spirituality based on their experience of trying to live the message of Jesus Christ in real life situations.

Theology has not only been adult, male, clerical and Western, it has also in the process become implicitly capitalistic. This is naturally understandable within the Euro-American context of dominant capitalism. The theologians of feudalism are long dead since the Middle Ages. The theologians of socialistic societies are still very few and far between. In fact the general impression among many persons is that socialism has still to find acceptance and justification within Christian Churches, whereas capitalism is taken for granted as not contrary to Christianity. This too causes a serious problem for theologizing within the so-called Third World countries. For, as Julius Nyerere the President of Tanzania has said, it is the Western capitalist peoples and system that have exploited and continue to exploit Africa. It is not the socialist countries of Eastern Europe or China who are an impediment to Tanzania's search for integral liberation. We have to face this reality that the vast bulk of European Christian theologizing is still within the framework of Capitalism and the world built by the expansion of Europeans to the other continents.

The theologically inarticulate Oppressed Peoples

The suppressed, repressed and oppressed masses of the world have not yet made a significant contribution to Christian thinking. This is not a matter merely of having some admission of Afro-Asian music, arts and religious texts into Christian usage. Such adaptation is often only symbolic. Nor is it enough to have Black, Brown or Yellow religious leaders to replace their White predecessors, without a change in mentalities. Very often the Third World Bishops can be equally Western oriented – and sometimes even more than the former European or American missionary bishops. Such an indigenization of the Churches can be only skin deep. What is required is a profound reflection of the peoples of the Third World on both their religio-cultural traditions and their dominated position in the world (non-) community.

The masses of Christians among the Third World, be they Chinese, Filipinos, Indonesians, Maoris, Indians, Africans or the indigenous populations of America have not yet articulated their theological reflections from the receiving end of history. Christianity has been preached to them in a prefabricated form made in a Western colonial mould. Now politically free they are beginning to articulate their own thinking as oppressed peoples. Hence we can expect a new contribution to theology; and this may be different from what has come from the modern Euro-American metropolises of Christian Churches.

It is an experience of theologians from the Third World countries that their voices are seldom heard or listened to at theological conferences in which the Western Europeans and North Americans participate. First of all there is the burden of the claim of different Western centres such as Rome, Geneva, London, Moscow and New York to be the guardians of orthodoxy. They have also the financial resources to organize conferences, publish books and disseminate ideas. The media of communication in the Christian World are very much in the hands of the First World churches. Recently some of them have espoused radical publications, but these are a minority. At conferences, consultations and Synods even if the Third World

theologians are invited to participate, they do not generally determine the conclusions and decisions. Power is with the Western Churches; and power has a big say even inside Churches. Further the very concept of a theologian, and criteria of validity of theological elaborations is determined by them.

At the 2nd Vatican Council the Bishops and theologians of the Third World were relatively silent. At the beginning in 1962, they were almost completely reticent. By 1964 and 1965 a few of them were rather articulate. But the issues raised by them were not fundamental in the socio-economic field. Thus the entire dependent position of the Third World countries and the national liberation struggles were not their serious concern. In 1968 at Medellin the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, along with their theologians, took a great step forward in the analysis of their social situation from the standpoint of poor countries subjected to a new kind of colonialism. The Conference provided guidelines for the transformation of the Church in terms of its presence in a Continent of misery and injustice. Yet even here the official follow up of Medellin has been slow, piecemeal and not without setbacks.

In Asia the Bishops' Conferences of our countries have not yet seriously analysed their socio economic situations with a deep search for the basic contradictions in our societies. Hence the orientation of the action of the official Church agencies is still largely within the framework of a dominant capitalism. Few, if any, Bishops of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore have denounced the continuing neo-colonial exploitation of our peoples by the foreign companies and countries, or the linkage of the local elite with them in an exploiting alliance. Extremely few Bishops, priests and religious in these countries have become even the spokesmen for the oppressed masses. The situation has changed considerably in the Philippines and in South Korea in the last few years. Thus Jesus Christ as the liberator of the oppressed is not presented to our peoples. Nor are the accredited leaders of the Churches speaking clearly on behalf of their oppressed spiritual followers to the oppressors who are largely Christians from the rich countries. Our governments, while they are not without their faults and compromises, have identified themselves more with this cause of liberation from domination at least from external sources. They are clearly on the side of the national liberation movements of Asia and Africa. In this situation how far can the church leaders claim to be the moral guides of our peoples?

The representatives of the Holy See, the Papal *Apostolic Nuncios* and Delegates to our countries have also not generally spoken to *us* a message of liberation in Jesus Christ in our Third World situation. It is necessary to ask in what way they represent Jesus to the oppressed peoples, and the latter to the universal church? How far are they representatives of the Pope as head of the universal Church, or as ruler of the Vatican State? Why should so many of them be Italians and Europeans? Are there any apostolic delegates chosen from among the people of Asia and Africa. Why have they to be bishops and clerics? In many countries their manner of presence and way of life is with the extremely elitist diplomatic enclave, and hence quite divorced from the oppressed masses. These are just a few questions touching on this issue. The whole role and function of such legates need to be rethought if they are to have any significant meaning for the oppressed peoples.

This is all the more important since they have such a vital role in the choice of the bishops for our countries. How can the spiritual leaders of our oppressed peoples be chosen by persons who spend so short a time within our countries and who have hardly ever lived experience of the situations of the colonized, exploited masses? Are not their views and choices bound to be coloured by their privileged position and their belonging to the dominant race and Western alliance? To some it may seem sacrilegious to raise such questions; but in so far as the Church is made up of human beings we have to face this problem. When the bishops of the whole Third World are chosen by persons from Italy or Western Europe, is the Christian religious leadership of our countries normally likely to represent our peoples in their oppressed situation and struggles?

This leads to the question of *the role of the Vatican State* itself in the present world situation. It is noteworthy that the Vatican was present on the Helsinki Conference of European powers in a rather prominent role. This was a conference for peace in Europe between Western and Eastern countries. But the Vatican is not represented at the Non-Aligned Conferences or the Group of 77. It does not clearly express itself against the colonial policies of its Western neighbours and allies. Here too a profound reevaluation of what it means to be the Vicar of Jesus Christ in this last quarter of the 20th century is necessary. To respond to the needs of the oppressed peoples of today we have to get beyond the juridical definition of direct, immediate, absolute, universal, spiritual sovereignty proclaimed a century ago in the first Vatican Council. The chief shepherd has to take the form of the sheep if he is to effectively represent Jesus Christ to them, and them to fellow Christians. Fleeting visits to our countries are useful, but woefully inadequate to understand the problems of the majority of humanity who live in the Third World. If the spiritual head of Catholic Christianity continues to live surrounded by the whole paraphernalia of a medieval, temporal ruler, he is very unlikely to make an option for the liberation of the masses from the incubus of Western capitalistic domination.

The Chinese People

The Christian Churches have not yet reconciled themselves to the Chinese Revolution which is perhaps the most important event in Asia in modern times. The revolutionary leaders too may still have their suspicions about the Churches. Yet for the Chinese masses their liberation led by Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Communist Party has meant a most radical transformation of their lives. From having been oppressed, despised peoples subject to large scale hunger, poverty, disease and natural disasters like floods and pestilence they have now become the masters of their destiny. They have a sense of national identity and human dignity. The country is able to support nearly 300 million more people at a higher and better shared standard of living. They have experienced a process of real liberation during nearly three decades.

The rest of the world is now belatedly recognizing this achievement. Not even the blockade by the Western powers led by the U.S.A. or the later withdrawal of Soviet assistance deterred the Chinese revolutionary leaders from their chosen path of liberation through national self-reliance. The needs of business and the dynamics of power have induced even political enemies such as the U. S. A. to come to terms with China. The intellectual world is now largely appreciative of China's realization at a cost which seems less than that of building capitalism. The process of the accumulation of capital in the Western countries and the growth of their colonial

empires cost immensely more in terms of human lives than the Chinese revolution of our times. By actual historical standards, China has adopted a relatively humane approach in which the accent has been on the change of people's mentalities through re-education and persuasion, rather than on the liquidation of opponents and the use of brute force.

What is relevant for our present purpose is that the Christian Churches have as yet failed to appreciate the immense value of this revolution for the vast masses of China who had been oppressed for thousands of years. A new humanity of self-reliant women and men has been engendered among this one fifth of the human race. Yet the accredited representatives of Jesus Christ, liberator of the oppressed, are loathe to acknowledge this. True, Chinese Communism is atheistic in theory; but then Western Capitalism is even more materialistic in practice. This a great tragedy for the witness to Jesus Christ. For it means that the Churches have so enveloped the message of Jesus in their own limited value scales and historical experience as to be unable to understand sympathetically the liberative struggle of long-suffering peoples.

The *Vietnamese*, *Cambodian* and *Laotian* peoples have gone through similar experiences of oppression and victory in a war of liberation. While the rest of Asia is largely contented with the victory in Indo-China after nearly 30 years of war, the world churches have mainly adopted a sullen attitude. Inside Vietnam the Christians are to a certain extent joining hands with the revolutionary regimes to build a United Socialist country. But the reaction of the Churches outside has been hesitant and slow. The democratic Peoples Republic of *North Korea* has had an even more unhappy reception after the liberation led by Kim Il Sung.

The World Churches must realize that these peoples under Marxist-inspired regimes represent nearly half of Asia. For many Asians their options embody a direction of hope for liberation from the evils of feudalism and local and foreign capitalism that dominate the lives of many in the rest of Asia. If the Churches are to understand the Asian aspirations they must radically rethink their own stances towards these revolutions. Pope John XXIII made some openings in this direction by his personal friendly attitude and by his distinction between Marxism as a philosophy or doctrine and the historical realizations of revolutionary regimes led by Marxists. However since then the central leadership of the Catholic Church has not pursued this policy with any marked enthusiasm. Can we be so sure that Jesus Christ would be opposed to these revolutionary changes? Or that the God of Israel who led his people away from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea and the long march over the desert would not be sympathetic to these arduous efforts of long-exploited peoples? It would seem that there is something profoundly lacking in the Churches that they should be so insensitive to these human struggles, victories and achievements against immense odds.

In Africa too the Catholic Church has been unable to understand the revolutionary tide in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. Till their victory in armed conflict, the official leadership of the Churches in Rome seemed to side with the imperialist powers in the West. Even now the liberation movements in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe do not get the support of the Churches. The World Council of Churches Program to Combat Racism and the Christian Peace Conference

centred in Prague are exceptions in their support for the liberation of the Blacks. Many Christian leaders in Southern Africa are however in the thick of the struggle.

All these show how the Churches in their central direction are still far from supporting the cause of the liberation of the oppressed peoples. This also demonstrates to what an extent the Churches are conditioned by their alliance with Western Capitalism even in 1975 and 1976. The centres of authority and power in the Churches being located in the West means quite a different sensitivity to the problems of the peoples of the Third World. As the number of Christians is increasing in Africa, Latin America and Asia both absolutely and in proportion to those in Western Europe and North America, should there not be an improvement in the understanding of the meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in today's world? Even within Italy the growth of the Communist Party must cause a profound rethinking within the Church and specially in the Vatican. The spread of socialistic thinking in Southern Europe—in Italy, France, Portugal and Spain, must further induce the Churches to question their traditional alliances with Western European Capitalism.

Understanding Socialism

Today most oppressed peoples in the world see the way out of capitalist domination in some form of Socialism. In spite of all its drawbacks the Russian Revolution of 1917 is seen as a triumph for the workers and peasants of that country; it is also acknowledged as a positive help to the liberation of many peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The socialist revolutions in China, North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos and now in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa indicate its way out different from the neo-colonialism of many independent Third World countries which are open to the economic and cultural penetration of Capitalism.

Correspondingly socialist thinking has grown among the Churches of Eastern Europe and the Third World. The Latin American Theology of Liberation goes even further in largely incorporating a Marxistic analysis of society within their theological interpretations. The Christians for Socialism groups are growing in numbers and conviction despite their being persecuted by pro-capitalist dictatorial rulers in most of Latin America. In many Asian countries the governments themselves foster socialistic thinking. In Sri Lanka all the major political parties have opted for Socialism as their goal. Burma has a government pledged to a Buddhist Socialist programme. In Africa Tanzania is following its own path to a Socialism with self reliant *Ujamaa* villages as their bulwark along with the public ownership of all land and major industrial and commercial enterprises. Different African countries have modes of Socialism as in Libya, Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia.

One of the problems for the Churches in this situation is that they have been so allied with modern Western Capitalism as to have taught in the 19th century and till the 1950s that Socialism is opposed to Christianity. Socialism was regarded as materialistic and therefore against religion. Since Socialism is so closely linked to Marxism, the condemnations of Marxism have been also levelled at Socialism. Further there is a long tradition of a right wing Christian leadership at both diocesan and international levels. Of course this right wing option often presents itself as a negative apolitical approach. The Church is said to be neutral to politics; this really

results in it being pro status quo. But churchmen are often not so neutral as to support both sides of a conflict, or to foster a socialistic cause.

In the present situation Socialism is one of the important avenues of liberation of the oppressed masses; even though Socialism too has its own problems to be resolved. But the major contradiction today in the free enterprise countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America is between the masses of impoverished peasants and workers and the privileged westernized local elite supported by the foreign powers and their exploitative transnational corporations. In this context there is little hope of escape from this vicious system without the public ownership and management of the main means of production, distribution and exchange. Thus Socialism is largely wanted, not because of some materialistic philosophy, but as the only feasible vehicle of liberation and means of escape from feudalism and capitalism. The Churches should therefore try to understand the Socialism of the underdeveloped Third World as a vindication of the rights of the oppressed through the use of State power. For local private enterprise cannot compete with or escape the octopus of the giant multinational corporations and their indigenous allies.

Understanding Socialism is not merely a theoretical question but a change in the whole way of life of the Churches. For these have been built around the capitalistic world vision and ethic. The theology, the pastorate, the understanding of priestly and religious life, the concepts of spirituality and even the teaching on the commandments of God have been profoundly conditioned by Capitalism during many centuries. Thus the school system run by the Churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been evolved according to the values of an individualistic capitalism. The sources of finance of the Churches are based on the capitalistic system. The seminary training and the formation of religious is attuned to fit into the social order of free enterprise, with its widespread inequalities in society and in the world.

Therefore the challenge faced by Christianity today is that of a whole *civilizational crisis*. It is similar to what it had to face in confronting the Roman Empire, in the collapse of that empire, the growth of feudalism, and in the expansion of the Western world at the dawn of the modern era. We are going towards a totally new and different period in human history. The oppressed peoples of the world are awakening and increasingly determined to undo the capitalistic world system built by Western power. The Third World demand for a New International Economic Order is one sign of this unrest and upsurge. At present the Churches are far from this radical and universal revolutionary thrust towards new relationships of justice and freedom. The churches have much to learn from the onward push of human history towards a more desirable future. The Churches need to be evangelized by the world; for the world can reveal to the Churches some of the wider meanings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which the Church has forgotten or not discovered so far. This is a source of profound humility to the churches, which have laid much store on their right to be humanity's teachers on matters of good and evil.

The Liberation of the Church

From the above reflections it will be seen that the Churches are largely captive bodies held within the confines of the Western individualistic capitalistic system. Western Christianity has long been subjected to a sort of Babylonian Captivity under the prevailing socio-economic system. Its liberation has to come partly in opening

itself to the values and aspirations of the rest of the world, specially the oppressed masses everywhere. A return to a profounder understanding of Jesus Christ as liberator of the oppressed can also help the Churches to liberate themselves in order to be truly the messengers of the Gospel and a community of universal love and sharing.

This however is no easy task, for so deeply embedded is the Church in the Western civilization, which in turn is so thoroughly influenced by Capitalism and the principle of aggressive profit maximization. The Churches in the Third World and in the Socialist countries can make a valuable contribution to this process. For this these Churches themselves must be liberated from subservience either to Capitalism or to a socialistic bureaucracy. Much of the unrest in the Churches in their social concerns is due to this contradiction between the needs of humanity at large, and the enslavement of the Christian Churches within capitalism. Fortunately in Western Europe and North America too there are trends towards the liberation of the Church. What is required of the Churches is that they be more a witness to Jesus Christ as liberator of the oppressed peoples.

Jesus Christ – Liberator and Christian Life

If we accept that the central focus of the life of Jesus was his liberative mission, and liberation is from all forms of personal and social oppression, then there has necessarily to be a radical reorientation of Christian life which has so long been linked to a position of domination and even justified various forms of racial, class, sex, caste and age oppression. The main concern of believers in Christ would then be the growth of the human community in justice, love and fellowship into the family of God, the Kingdom of God. The Churches would be in the service of this liberative process. The personnel serving the churches would have to be more consecrated to this task of building genuine communities of sharing among all human beings. Within Churches the bonds of togetherness must be based on love and respect for each other in the participation in human endeavours, and not merely or juridical discipline based on an orthodoxy and law made once and for all time and spreading out from Western Europe.

De Colonizing Theology

Theology has to be liberated from its implicit and explicit relationship to Western domination over humanity. This requires a thorough re-examination of all the teachings of a juridical and social nature. Thus the teaching and the exercise of public authority within the Churches has been related to the patterns of colonial power. How far is the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff in the Catholic Church related to the power of Imperial Rome? Or why did the Churches in Constantinople, Northern Europe and Britain break away from Latin dominance? Was it merely due to theological reasons or also due to a reflection of power politics and socio-economic and cultural interests? Why are the Churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America built according to the cultural traits of former colonial rulers?

This is a very profound issue that has its impact on every aspect of Church life. Thus Canon Law Reform has to be rethought in terms of the emerging world situation. How much of *Canon Law* is a reflection of the Roman and capitalistic teaching on private property, of the custom of male dominance, of the system of imperial power, of the feudal way of parish life, of a concept of the Church as the one

and sole means of salvation, of the ignorance and prejudices concerning other religions. of a preoccupation with sex and the 6th and 9th commandments, of a neglect of social justice and the 5th, 7th, 8th and 10th commandments, of the lack of concern for youth and the personal rights of human beings including women? There are many valuable aspects of Canon Law such as the obligation to consultations within the Church. However by and large the Canon Law still prevailing reflects an earlier society that is now fast dying in the world at large, and had little relevance to African and Asian ways of life. Hence it is understandable that- even 13 years after Pope John XXIII appointed a Commission to Reform Canon Law, the reform has not been carried through. In fact it will be extremely difficult now to bring the whole Catholic fold under one strict, rigid and universal Canon Law.

The content of Theology and Catechesis must be revamped to exclude unnecessarily long discourses on age old controversies of past centuries. On the contrary the contemporary concerns of human beings must be a central focus of theological reflection on: God as Father of all human beings, the universe and its meaning, the planet earth and its ecology, the meaning of human life, the rights of all human beings to the means to live and grow to fulfillment, the rights and responsibilities of each person endowed with freedom and a personal conscience, the use and abuse of power in society, the liberating nature of true religion, authenticity in interpersonal relationships etc.

This change in accents is very essential in the world's *Seminaries*, for within them the formation of the future Catholic clergy is still largely traditional and implicitly Aristotelian and Scholastic. Unfortunately the Seminary teachers are often persons formed in an earlier theology within seminaries and Catholic universities. They do not often have experience of participation in the liberative struggles of peoples. They are then incapable of even conceiving another method of forming the clergy than within the traditional limits of safe orthodoxy. If theology is to relate to human beings in their deepest concerns, the evolution of such theology must be in an experiential contact with real life situations. This is how the seminaries which have opened themselves to the issues of war and peace, food and hunger, race and class have found a newness of meaning and relationship to persons. However the Catholic Church has still further difficulty in the renewal of seminaries as the questions of interpersonal relations including marriage of the clergy are still regulated more by Canon Law and Western European Church history than by the customs of the different peoples in the world or even the example of Jesus and the Apostles in early Christian times. The almost universal crisis in the seminaries and the rapid decrease in the numbers of the clergy are an indication that the entire role of the priesthood has to be rethought in the Churches. If this is not done early enough, the very decrease in numbers of clerics will compel the churches to declericalize themselves and their theologies.

In the *Catechesis* within the Churches we have to rethink the centrality of Jesus far beyond what the catechetical revival in Europe has done. This movement did advance considerably since the 1950s. The "German" and "Dutch" Catechisms were an immense improvement on the earlier penny Catechisms of the period after the 1st Vatican Council. Vatican II helped give a more person-centered teaching concerning both God and the human person. Yet this did not relate adequately to the role of Jesus Christ as liberator of the oppressed and to the problems of the oppressed peoples

themselves. If Christians are to relate their doctrine to the emerging one world situation and the struggles of the masses of the people, the whole content of catechesis must change. Christianity should be presented critically from within the perspective of world history and the relationships of peoples.

The method of catechesis should change to become action oriented and related to live issues. It will have to be mainly an adult catechesis with an active impact on the problems that communities face at the local, national and world levels. The relationships of teacher and disciple will have to change to that of common searchers and participants in the ongoing human struggle. The consequences of such a catechesis would be that Christians will be engaged in the actual tasks of liberation in different areas and levels, and not merely passive spectators and much less legitimizers of oppression. These insights are now present in the better approaches of Catechesis; they need to be extended to the Churches as a whole, widened to include national and international issues and deepened to relate to personal liberation. Catechesis would then be a current of real life within the believing communities, transforming them into active agents of human liberation.

The *liturgy and worship* of the Churches has also to be dynamized by the centrality of the liberative message and role of Jesus Christ. At present the liturgical feasts celebrated by Catholics concerning Jesus Christ have not adequately focussed on this aspect of his work. There are many celebrations such as the Birth and Baptism of Jesus; his family and public life, his passion, death, resurrection and ascension; his precious blood, Sacred Heart and universal kingship. But these have been very largely domesticated within the capitalistic system. They do not have much of a liberative connotation in relation to society. Hence the liturgy itself seldom has vital impact on a community towards deep and lasting participation in the human struggles for liberation – specially when the going is tough. Thus there are liturgies for the celebration of the peoples independence and victories, but much less for the period of the struggle when those engaged in them are in opposition in different forms.

The existing liturgy must therefore be renewed by the criterion of its relationship to Jesus liberator of the oppressed. This cannot be done merely by going back to the history of the liturgy during the feudal Middle Ages or even to the fourth and fifth centuries after the Church had been converted to the Roman Empire. We must seek new insights from the real personal and societal searches and movements of our times also for giving new life to worship. This demands a great openness on the part of those who lead the liturgy. The very decrease in the number of clergy will soon compel non-ordained persons to have an increasing role in the gathering of Christians for worship. Since the laity do not have the heavy encumbrance of years of theological (de-)formation, they may be able to lead the congregations to a more realistic and active relationship to events and issues involving human needs and aspirations. The reduction in the numbers of clergy, which we cannot prevent, may also be a providential sign to the Churches to be less rigid, authoritarian and “other worldly” and more concerned with the meaning of prayer and worship to genuine love and sharing here on earth.

The Liberation of Spirituality

Theology, Catechesis, liturgy, the pastorate and administration in the Churches are also linked to the views on spirituality prevailing at a time. The social

conditioning of spirituality is quite pronounced in modern centuries. While Western “Christian” nations were building their empires throughout the world, and when their working classes were being ruthlessly exploited by the rulers and capitalistic elite, the Churches presented a spirituality that considered ritual, regularity in observance of the discipline, obedience and social service as the ingredients of saintliness. To conform to the existing order was to fulfill God’s will and hence to grow in holiness. The “passive” virtues of silence, patience, forbearance and awaiting the heavenly reward were in high honour. Whereas questioning the system, critical evaluation, contestation and revolt were all considered signs of insubordination to the divine will expressed in the prevailing social power relations. A high spiritual value was ascribed to not disturbing the established order. To challenge the dominant powers was considered a lack of obedience, humility, prudence, and religious neutrality.

Since Jesus is the liberator of the oppressed the following of Jesus must have other emphases in spirituality. The systemic analysis of societies and of religious institutions has to be part of the process of discerning the human quest for liberation and discovering God’s will in a given situation. Prophetic witness, a relevant Catechesis, a socially live liturgy and a participation by the Christian community in the process of human liberation can also be training grounds of holiness and union with Christ. Sanctity would then not be so exclusively linked to the sanctuary, the monk’s cowl and complacent non-participation in public life. Then we can look forward to a new flowering of faith in the Master, crucified because of his unflinching loyalty to the values of justice, love, freedom, truth and peace. Hope in the realization of these values within human communities will grow, and love would expand to a more genuine level of commitment to persons and groups including justice and liberation. New prophets, martyrs, and servants of human liberation will arise among the Christians. Fortunately this is already taking place in many countries of the world.

The Religious Life within the congregations and orders is said to be a witness to the eschatological values of the Kingdom. Religious life is officially called a state of progressing towards holiness. Yet we can understand the life style, spirituality and activities of religious also as related the prevailing social relations of domination and dependence. Thus the orders and congregations were given to social services such as education and the care of the sick, handicapped, orphans, prostitutes, slaves etc. These are worthy causes to which hundred of thousands of women and men dedicated themselves most zealously and generously over centuries. Yet these did not contest the growing capitalism and expanding imperialism. Thus the spiritual motivation of religious, their celibate consecration, the strength of their community life and sense of discipline all helped to bolster the capitalist, colonial system, be it even only indirectly and unconsciously. This shows the great need of evaluating the unintended effects of our goodwill and generosity of course throughout the period there were others at the receiving end who were not so happy with the results of such activities – e.g. the revolutionaries who expelled priests and religious from schools in Europe, the Marxists later on; and the critics of colonialism in the exploited countries.

If religious life is remodelled in the service of the peoples following the example of Jesus the liberator of the oppressed the presence, life style and witness of religions would be quite different. They would then see the grave inadequacy and even positive indirect harm of many of their options and institutions which have been handed down to them during succeeding decades and centuries. They would more

readily relate to religion as a personal relationship to God than the observance of a mere set of rules and regulations. They would participate in the peoples movements for justice and liberation more wholeheartedly and effectively. Their presence in the liberation struggles would give enormous moral strength to the cause. Their dedication would find fulfillment in reducing the causes of human misery at a more radical level. They will find fulfillment in their consecrated lives both as individuals and communities. Of course they will not reach these goals except through the excruciating road of personal abnegation and community renewal, giving up inessentials and profitable compromises; and serving the masses generously and decidedly.

In so far as the Christian *priesthood* is a participation in the task of Jesus Christ the unique high priest of the Christian dispensation, the priest's role in the Church must be redefined in relationship to the liberative role of Jesus himself. The priest has to be less a functionary of a power establishment and more the witness to the meaning of the Word of God in our time; less an administrator of things including ritual and property and more a dedicated participant in the search for human liberation and fulfillment. He will regard himself not as the possessor of the keys to heaven, but as the servant of a people on the march through the desert. He will be more identified with Jesus as prophet and victim, rather than consider himself a ruler of his people in matters spiritual, and sometimes even temporal.

Likewise and in more pronounced manner the *Bishops* will be one with Jesus who gave his life for the cause of integral human liberation and salvation. They will not be lords and princes but rather humble searchers, dedicated participants and hence inspired guides of the people on their way to justice, love and peace.

The movements among the laity too must rigorously examine their orientation and activities in the light of the above criteria. Most of them have originated in Western countries and relate to a position of dominance, unless they have gone through a process of thorough renewal. Thus the Society of *St. Vincent de Paul* (S.V.P) has for over 300 years cared for the poor. But have they been seriously concerned with the cure of the causes of poverty? While they distributed alms to the poor, their countrymen in France and the rest of Europe dominated and exploited the rest of the world, causing more misery and poverty. The *Legion of Mary* begun in Ireland, looks after individuals in spiritual need, but largely neglects social analysis and the deeper social causes of sin. It has hostels for prostitutes, but seldom fights the causes which induce persons towards prostitution. The *Young Christian Workers* (Y.C.W.) begun in Belgium related to the problems of young workers in Belgium admirably well, but were till recently not active against Belgian imperialism in Africa. The *Catholic student* and *intellectual movements* (Pax Romana, and Y.C.S.) are concerned with the student milieu but for many decades neglected the position that they were part of the exploiting elite all over the world. The more recent *Cursillo Movement* originating in Spanish countries too does not yet show indication of social concern in an effective manner.

The most recent of the religious movements to sweep the free enterprise countries are the *Charismatics*. Originating in 1967 in the United States of America they gather together millions for prayer and spiritual renewal each week. They too need to ask themselves whether they escape the danger of being an offshoot of the

complacent American middle class, bourgeois spirituality; for they do not contest American economic and military imperialism and the culture spread by Capitalism. How far do they neglect the liberation struggles of the people, and thereby help the social establishment to perpetuate itself? How does the Holy Spirit relate to Jesus Christ liberator of oppressed peoples?

These aspects are referred to very briefly here. Some of them have been discussed in the other booklets published by us.