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Fr. Amaladoss is a world-renowned Asian theologian from Tamil Nadu, South India. He has a Ph.D. from the Catholic Institute, Paris. He has taught theology at Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi and has been a visiting lecturer in Asia, Europe, and America. He is the author of 35 books and nearly 500 articles in theology, some of which have been translated into other languages.

Theology is our search for a better understanding of our faith in relation to our lives. It is encountering God in the way God challenges our lives and our relationships. This is affected by the historical, geographical, cultural, and religious circumstances in which we live. For those of us living in Asia, our situation will affect our experience of God and the way we speak about it. This is Asian theology. This book is an attempt to share my reflections and provoke your own thinking!

Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

JCAP BUDDHIST STUDIES & DIALOGUE GROUP

The Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP) promotes interreligious dialogue with two world religious traditions: Islam and Buddhism. Since 2010 the JCAP Buddhist Studies & Dialogue group has conducted yearly workshops in various nations in Asia to facilitate Buddhist-Christian dialogue with a holistic approach: academically, spiritually, and practically. In 2015, the group published its first anthology entitled *The Buddha & Jesus*, which comprises sixteen articles, while a second publication is scheduled for 2021, with even more articles.

The group also conducts the East Asia Theological Encounter Program (EATEP) in Chiangmai, Thailand, to offer in-depth studies in Asian Contextual Theology for young Jesuits, including a one-week intensive experience of *Vipassana* meditation, at a Buddhist temple located on a mountain. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, both the annual workshop and EATEP will be operated online in 2021. Fr. Ingun Kang SJ is the current coordinator of the group and director of EATEP, as well as director of the MAGGA Jesuit Research Center in Cambodia.



M. Amaladoss, S.J.

PEOPLES' THEOLOGY IN ASIA

MAGGA

A Publication of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP)

PEOPLES' THEOLOGY IN ASIA

Collection of the Lectures:
East Asia Theological Encounter Program (2006-2018)

Michael Amaladoss, S.J.



Published on behalf of the JCAP Buddhist Studies & Dialogue Group by
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Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific Buddhist Studies & Dialogue Group
Email: jcapbuddhist@gmail.com

ISBN: 978-9924-35-030-9

Published on behalf of the JCAP Buddhist Studies & Dialogue Group by:
MAGGA Jesuit Research Center,
Address : #376, Kouk Khleang, Sen Sok, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Email: magga.press@gmail.com

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FOREWORD

I feel greatly privileged to write a foreword to this book of Fr. Michael Amaladoss SJ, the world-renowned theologian. I am sure what I say has been the experience of many others as well, but his books have proved to be sources of great inspiration to me, on my theological journey. I met Fr. Amaladoss in person for the first time at the Asian Jesuit Identity Workshop held in New Delhi in October 2004. The conference was organized by the Jesuit Major Superiors of the Assistancies of South Asia (SA) and East Asia-and-Oceania (EAO), in order to reflect over the challenging address of Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, exhorting us to be “not merely Jesuits in Asia but genuinely Asian Jesuits.” I was invited to this conference as one of ten delegates from our EAO Assistancy (now known as the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific). At that time, I was a young priest on a mission in Cambodia who had just acquired an STL degree, and hence I was immensely excited at the prospect of meeting Fr. Amaladoss, whose theology constituted a vital section of the chapters in my thesis. I still recall that his talk at the conference profoundly touched the audience, and inspired them to continue discussing theological issues related to the cultural and religious diversity of the Asian people, even after the sessions had ended.

After this workshop, Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, who had also taken part in the conference as President of the EAO Assistancy and was later elected Superior General of the Society of Jesus, initiated a theological program for young Jesuits, in order to enable them to acquire an in-depth experience of Asian cultures and religions. Thanks to his efforts as well as the air of consensus that arose among the major superiors of the Assistancy, the East Asian Theological Encounter Program (EATEP) was launched in 2006, at the Seven Fountains Jesuit Retreat Center in the city of Chiang Mai in Thailand, from 27 July to 3 September. Fr. John Shea SJ was recruited from the New York Jesuit Province as program director, and Fr. Michael Amaladoss was invited to serve as instructor and tutor. Since then, ten to fifteen young Jesuits have participated yearly in this program, covering about four weeks. They underwent an intensive ten-day course on Asian contextual theology offered by Fr. Amaladoss; they were exposed to Buddhist sites, and they also participated in a seven-day *Vipassana* meditation session at the mountain temple. Since I was appointed director of EATEP in March 2016, I accordingly conducted the program in July 2018.

Observing the positive evaluations of the EATEP participants over the last twelve years and concerned over the advancing age of Fr. Amaladoss, I urged him to pen down his lectures in book form to benefit future

generations. Due to the sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, I could not conduct the program in 2020. Hence, Fr. Amaladoss and I felt an urgent need for this publication, and we have sought to complete it prior to our EATEP program for this year, which is scheduled to be held online in July. Fr. Amaladoss had also given these lectures to audiences in Chennai and received an enthusiastic response. Accordingly, since they too encouraged him to publish them, we now have this precious book in our hands.

As the title indicates and numerous Asian theologians have insisted, Fr. Amaladoss underscores the fact that theology is not only a 'faith seeking understanding,' but *a peoples' living experience of the liberating God in their seeking the total transformation of themselves and the world*. Therefore, the author of theology is no academic thinker or writer, but the people of God themselves. People in Asia have their own experience of God in the complex reality of socioeconomic differences and multi-cultural/religious traditions. In this book, Fr. Amaladoss aptly points out that peoples' experiential theology in Asia can be summarized as the three-fold dialogue of the Gospel with the poor, the cultures, and the religions. He confirms the fact that the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has emphasized these triple dialogues as the Church's mission in Asia for the last decades. So, in the first part, he starts with chapters concerning our mission in Asia, including new insights into ecclesiological, Christological, and soteriological interpretations. In the second part, his theological reflections delve into people's experience of God in various forms of Asian spirituality. Finally, in the third part, the chapters deal with multiple challenges Asian churches must face in the journey towards the Kingdom of God, together with other religions and all people of goodwill.

I am sure some readers will be shocked or roused by this book, as many young Jesuits had confessed after their experience in EATEP. To others, this book will provide solace via the fact that their unspoken concepts and encounters have now been voiced by a world-renowned Asian theologian. In either case, readers will agree that Fr. Amaladoss serves as an inspiration not just to Christians and Jesuits but also to people of other religions, inviting them to ponder over their faith in an Asian context. In fact, a member of my staff who was formerly a Buddhist monk confessed that he is now very much interested in Christian theology after having read this book. I believe people in Asia could be easily touched by *doing* theology in *dialogue*, just as Fr. Amaladoss recommends in this book.

May 19, 2021

On the 30th Anniversary of the Pontifical Document,
Dialogue and Proclamation.

In-gun Kang, S.J.
Phnom Penh

PREFACE

In the autumn of 2018, a group of the People of God in Chennai approached me and said that they would like to have 20 lectures on theology. They also suggested the topics that should be covered in these lectures. After some discussion the list of the topics was finalized and agreed upon. Over a period of three months the group met in various locations in the city and listened to the lectures. There was much interest and enthusiasm on the part of the listeners. The lecture series was inaugurated by His Grace, Most Rev. George Antonisamy, the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore. The last lecture was given on December 8, 2018, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. After the conclusion of the series of lectures the group suggested that they could be written out and published so that others also could profit from them.

As a matter of fact, for these lectures, I was using material that I had prepared for another course at an Asian level. From 2006 to 2018 I have been offering a ten-day lecture programme to Jesuit scholastics from East Asia. East Asia is a vast region with many countries, languages and cultures between China and the Philippines with its eastern border reaching up to Japan. The goal of this programme was to create an Asian awareness among the younger Jesuits in this area. Besides living, relaxing and sharing life together in Chiangmai, Thailand, they were introduced to the practice of Buddhist meditation in a Buddhist monastery. Sometimes they were also introduced to Islam through a couple of lectures. A major section of the programme was ten days of lectures on Asian theology. 2021 will be my last lecture in this program, planned online in July. I had been thinking of writing out these lectures too.

So I thought that I could have in mind both the audiences in writing out my lectures. India is, after all, part of Asia and much of Asian theological reflection is happening in India. So I decided to keep my focus on Asia, including India. That is why I am giving this collection of lectures the title "PEOPLES' THEOLOGY IN ASIA." Indians and people from other Asian countries, while reading this little book, can keep in mind that they are Asians too. Asian countries in general are multi-cultural and multi-religious and share similar theological issues. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, over the last forty-five years, has created a common theological atmosphere in South, South-East and East Asia. This is the area I have in mind while speaking of an 'Asian' theology. We can also speak of an Asian way of thinking as compared to the African and the Euro-American ways, as I try to show in an introductory chapter. So I think that

this book will be accessible and useful to my different Asian audiences, though they will have to apply what they read to their particular situations and their challenges. Given the nature of the text, I have kept footnotes to a minimum. I am appending a short bibliography.

I am grateful to Fr. John Shea, S.J. of New York, who launched the programme in Chiangmai, invited me to participate in it and ran it for nine years. I thank Fr. In-gun Kang, S.J. of Korea/Cambodia who is the present director of the Chiangmai programme and who has encouraged me to publish it. But above all, my thanks go to the People of God in Chennai who are enthusiastically encouraging the publication of this book.

I sincerely hope that this publication will reach out to a wider audience.

Michael Amaladoss, S.J.
Chennai, India.

INTRODUCTION

AN ASIAN THEOLOGY: WHAT? WHY? HOW?

In this introductory chapter, my aim is to explore the answers to three questions: What is Theology? Why do we need an Asian theology? In answering these questions, I am not going to engage in apologetics, seeking to justify and defend it. I am just trying to understand what it is. If we understand ‘what’ is Asian theology, that will automatically answer the question ‘why?’ Then we shall briefly explore ‘how’ we go about developing an Asian theology? What is the way or method of doing it? And other related issues.

If we look at our lives, we realize that we are linked to a community. We are born in family. Our fathers and mothers support us and educate us. Then we get a job and build up a family of our own, unless we choose to become religious – priests, brothers and sisters. Whatever be our way of life we need resources: a place to live, food to eat, clothes to wear, etc. We need money for all these, which we have to earn in some way. All these constitute an economic system. Families are not autonomous units. They live together in a village or other similar unity. This supposes some sort of organization, a division of labour, public services, governing structures, and so on. All these constitute a social and political system. It may be authoritarian or democratic. It functions at various levels: village, district, region, country, world. When people live together, they need to communicate. They speak a language. There are different ways of living and relating to others. We love and hate. We quarrel and hurt each other in various ways. We tell stories, sing and dance together, celebrate social events and community festivals. We tell stories about our past. This is the area of culture. It involves creativity. Symbolic worlds are created through art and literature. When people start to think, they start asking questions like what is the goal of life, where did the earth come from, how did they come to be on this earth, what happens after death, why are there bad and good people, what makes any thought or action good or bad. We ask ourselves why we should be good. We think of God (or gods) on whom we depend, whom we have to honour, please, and obey, who rewards or punishes us according to our good or bad behaviour. We tell stories about God’s action in the world. We have symbolic rituals, through which we seek to relate to God whom we cannot see or touch. This is the area of religion. Theology is the way we talk about God and the manner in which we relate to God. We also try to make meaning of suffering in the world. We wonder about the source of the negativities that affect our lives and relationships. This is the area of theology.

So we can see that if we think of our lives in community, there are six broad areas that we have to attend to: economics and politics, person in society, culture and religion. Each area is an object of a scientific discipline: Economics and Political science, Psychology and Anthropology/Sociology, Cultural Anthropology and Philosophy/Theology. Actually, if we have to understand the humans in the world, we need all these human and social sciences. These differ from physical sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, etc. Philosophy and Theology deal with the quest for the meaning of our lives in the world as individuals and communities. Philosophy does it from the standpoint of reason. Theology also takes into account religious faith and revelation. Revelation supposes God manifesting Godself through prophets or through other ways. When we look for meaning in our lives, we will have to look into all the six areas mentioned above, because they interact with each other, as we shall see. But theology focuses on the area of religion in our lives. The questions we will ask and try to answer will be religious questions. They also suppose a context of faith linked to life and its problems. I do not think that an atheist can be a theologian.

What is Theology?

Let us now come back to our question: What is theology? Theology used to be described as *Faith seeking understanding*. This description (or definition) is said to go back to St. Augustine (354-430 ACE). By faith we mean creeds and dogmas. In a broader sense, we can say that it stands for the teachings of the Church in the Councils, through the Popes, and also the commonly agreed beliefs of the People of God. Understanding was sought in two different ways. On the one hand, the Fathers of the Church went back to the Scriptures and sought to explain the faith affirmations from a scriptural point of view. For them theological understanding was based on scripture. But at the same time, they also used categories of Greek philosophy to understand the faith. For example, they used the terms 'person' and 'nature' to understand the Trinity and the Incarnation. The Trinity was three persons and one nature, nature being the principle of action. Jesus was two natures, divine and human, but one person (or agent). Of course, it is difficult to understand that in the one person of Jesus the humanity was obeying the divinity or that the humanity alone suffered on the cross. The Trinity has to act together as one nature. Yet we can speak of the Son being born from the Father and the Spirit proceeding from the Father through the Son. I have a feeling that it was a way of speaking, without really understanding or without misunderstanding. Over the centuries, the influence of scripture was getting reduced and the Scholastics developed and used to explain the faith, using terms like substance and accidents, efficient and final cause, etc. It was almost like Scholastic philosophy taking over theology. In the 20th century, theologians began going once again to scripture to understand the faith. The seekers were the expert theologians who had studied philosophy,

which was known as the handmaid or servant of theology. The people were satisfied with their simple catechism.

In the 20th century, besides the teachers and the scriptures a third element entered the process. The theologians of liberation in Latin America and elsewhere began asking what sort of light was faith, specially the scriptures, throwing on the living realities and questions of the people, especially their suffering and oppression. People were no longer seeking to understand abstract faith formulations in terms of philosophy, but were asking in what way their faith in a liberating God is a source of empowerment in their attempt to liberate themselves from their suffering and oppression. The seekers were no longer the experts but the people, with the experts guiding them. The people were not merely seeking understanding, but transformation. The sources of theological reflection were not merely the teachings of the Church (in terms of dogmas) and the scriptures as sources of God's saving or liberating self-revelation, but also the living experience and context of the people, which their faith sought to illuminate and transform.

Theology could then be redefined as *Living faith experience as commitment to the liberating God, and seeking transformation through understanding and empowerment*. Faith is no longer an affirmation of a dogmatic formula, but an experiential commitment that is seeking liberation and transformation. It is a tradition of ongoing struggle. Theology therefore involves an option for the poor and the suffering people who need to be saved or freed, not in another world, but already in this one. The seekers are the people, helped by the experts in scripture (theologians) and coordinated by the leaders (*the magisterium/bishops*). The context – life and its struggles – is part of the process or the situation which is being transformed. The transformers are the people. The change is both of themselves and of the world. Such a transformation also needs the empowerment of the Spirit. Theology is not simply taught; it has to be lived and then explained and understood. It could include pain – of experience and struggle -, but transcends it. Such a theology will be more of a story of what is happening in life-in-community than a discourse. God manifests Godself in the life of the people – God is not primarily heard, but experienced. The response to God is not a confession of faith, but a conversion, a change of heart and life. Theology is God-experience becoming aware of itself. Faith does not seek. People do. Theology is not a science that can be done and taught even by a non-believer, as it seems to happen sometimes in Euro-America! It belongs in the context of prayerful experience.

Why Asian Theology?

We have seen above that the context is a part of the theologising process. Some even call it a source, besides scripture and tradition. Theology done in Asia, taking the Asian context into account can only be Asian. It is a

theology from below, not from above. Every theology is contextual and living - there can be no abstract universal theology.

Since there are many contextual theologies, no theology can claim to be normative. A universal theology can only be the universalization of a particular theology, claiming to be systematic as opposed to 'pastoral' local theologies. After all, even in contemporary European terms, what can be universal in a post-modern pluralistic world? Revelation in the scriptures alone can claim to be normative. But it has to be liberated through interpretation from the personal theological orientations of the writers like Matthew, Luke, John and Paul. We also need to take into account God's continuing self-manifestation in histories and cultures. We can however say that contextual theologies are called to dialogue with each other, both in space and in time, leading to mutual enrichment, prophecy and convergence.

A context has two elements. The first is the reality in which we live. The FABC described evangelization as the dialogue of the Gospel with the realities of Asia, which it characterized as the many poor people, the rich cultures and the living religions. I will take this into account in later chapters. The second element is that Asia has a particular way of looking at the world, expressing it and talking about it, determined by language, culture and tradition. I shall focus on this a little later in the chapter. Before that, I would like to show that contextual theologies existed in the beginning of the Church. An imposed unity in the Latin Church is a later development.

Contextual Theologies in the Early Centuries

The Church historian Justo Gonzalves speaks of three schools of theology in the early Church in Greece, Asia Minor and in Rome. A Judeo-Christian, East Syrian tradition was there, but was later dominated by the Greek school and eventually disappeared after the 7th century, probably under the impact of Islam.

The Three Types of Ancient Theology ¹

	A	B	C
<i>Three Areas</i>	Carthage	Alexandria	Asia Minor and Syria
<i>Three Theologians</i>	Tertullian	Origen	Irenaeus
<i>Main Interest</i>	Moral	Metaphysical	Pastoral
<i>Main Category</i>	Law	Truth	History

¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Christian Thought Revisited. Three Types of Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 76.

<i>Philosophical Orientation</i>	Stoic	Platonic	None in particular
<i>Forerunners</i>	Clement of Rome Hermas Second Clement	Philo (Justin) Clement of Alexandria	Ignatius Polycarp Theophilus
<i>God</i>	Lawgiver Judge	Ineffable One Transcendent	Shepherd Father
<i>Creation</i>	Complete	Originally spiritual-Double	Begun
<i>Sin</i>	Breaking the law	Not contemplating the One	Anticipatory disobedience
<i>Original Sin</i>	Inherited	Individual	One sinned for all (Human solidarity)
<i>Human predicament</i>	Moral debt	Forgetfulness Obfuscation	Subjection
<i>Work of Christ</i>	Expiation Forgiveness New Law	Example Teaching Illumination	Victory Liberation Opening the future
<i>Sacraments</i>	Washing Merit	Reminders Symbols	Grafting Nutrition
<i>Final Consummation</i>	Kingdom of law and order	Contemplation Return	Kingdom of freedom and growth
<i>Scriptural Interpretation</i>	Moral code Prophecy	Allegory	Typology Prophecy

Asia is a vast continent with many cultures and religions. So there should be, strictly speaking, many Asian theologies. While the differences cannot be denied, there is also an overarching unity, when it is compared with other continents like Africa, Europe and Latin America. One speaks of the 'mystic' religions of Asia as compared to the 'prophetic religions' of the West, though the majority of the Muslims are in Asia. We can discern three broad cultural units in Asia, though with their own internal diversities and external interactions: the Chinese, the Malay and the Indian. The North and North-East Asia have been influenced by the Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. South Asia is India, with its influence extending to Sri Lanka, the Malay peninsula and Indonesia. There is a smaller Malay group that includes Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern Philippines. India itself is between the East and the West. One of its major languages,

Sanskrit, from which many of the North Indian languages were born, is Indo-European. The South Indian culture, also influencing the Tribal cultures in the North is Dravidian. But there has been a sort of integration. Buddhism and Yoga have an influence in many Asian countries. Islam has an important presence in South and East Asia. The majority of the world's Muslims are there (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Southern Philippines). Is Asia still Asia in a globalizing world? We need to distinguish between modernity and western culture and between the instrumental and categorical aspects of cultures. Asians are ready and open to the use of science and technology. But they remain attached to their way of looking at the world, relating to the others and living as a community. They are also attached to their languages, though English is becoming a language of communication at an international level.

For the Christians, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), without overlooking the diversity, has also promoted the unity through many seminars and documents over the past 50 years. But it leaves out West Asia. So, speaking about Asian theology, I am also focusing on North, East and South Asia. I think that the unity must be celebrated without forgetting the diversity. Asia's contact with Christianity goes back to the 7th century when a group of Syrian Christians, following the traders, established Christian communities in the north of China and even translated some texts in Chinese. But, after about a century they were persecuted and destroyed. The Christian contact starts again with the Portuguese colonizers. Thanks to Mateo Ricci (1552-1610) in China, Roberto de Nobili in India (1577-1656) and Alexandre de Rhodes in Vietnam (1591-1660) it became accepted practice that one could become Christian in religion, while remaining Chinese, Indian, or Vietnamese, culturally. While they were positive to local culture, they were critical of the Asian religions. I shall come back to this point later when we speak of 'Gospel and culture.'

From 1974 onwards, the FABC provided a forum for the Asian Churches to reflect together in the context of their common mission in Asia. The Bishops themselves met every four years in a general assembly and produced documents on various themes. They had many commissions on theology, women's issues, social problems, laity, etc. With regard to theology there was a 'Theological Advisory Committee,' which later became an 'Office of Theological Concerns.' Over the years it has produced many theological documents: Inter-religious Dialogue (1987), Local Church and Inculturation (1991), Church and Politics (1994), Harmony (1996), The Spirit of God (1998), Methodology in Theology (2000), Religious Freedom (2004), Respect for Life in the Context of Asia (n.d.), On Being Human in the Changing Realities of Asia (2010), Towards Responsible Leadership of Creation: An Asian Perspective (2015).²

² These and other FABC papers (157) are available on the internet. http://www.fabc.org/offices/csec/ocsec_fabc_papers.html.

The other Churches also have a project for “Doing Theology from Asian Resources.” A good account of the development and production of Asian theologies covering all the Churches in Asia is available in *Asian Christian Theologies* edited by J.C. England and others.³

An Asian Way of Thinking?

Is there an Asian way of thinking? People who are familiar with the East and the West think so. The Asian Christians educated in English medium schools and theologians largely operating in English may not be sensitive to this difference. But a look back on their own local languages and literature may make them sensitive to the differences. I am offering here a list of differences, hoping that it may be useful. (I will be using the words ‘West’ and ‘East’ as a kind of shorthand).

In the West, people are mostly left-brain oriented, focused on reason and looking for clear, logical, scientific knowledge. They look for the denotative meaning of words. They tend to abstract thinking. In the East, people are mostly right-brain oriented. They use their imagination and emotion besides reason. One speaks of ‘emotional intelligence.’ There is a tendency to artistic expression, looking for connotative meanings. An enriching pluralism is appreciated. One looks for symbols and intuitive experience focused more on wisdom rather than mere knowledge.

In the West, traditional-scholastic (philosophically) and post-modern, truth is adequation between reality and intellect. It is said to be out there, unique, exclusive, ‘objective,’ absolute. In the East, we do not know reality out there as it is. Our perception of it is conditioned by personal, historical and cultural circumstances. What we know is true, but that truth is limited; it is relational, but not relative; it is ‘subjective’ because it is conditioned by the subject, but it is not created by the subject, because it depends on and relates to reality. So it is ‘objective’ too, absolute-in-the-relative. In relation to the Absolute it may be apophatic: *neti, neti* – not this, not this.

In the West, identity is exclusive: one is not the other. One talks of the principle of non-contradiction. There are a lot of dichotomies and separations: nature-supernature, human-divine, natural-human, body-spirit, secular-sacred, world-church, lay-clergy, etc. In the East, identity is inclusive and positive. One speaks also of ‘both-and.’

In the West, analogy is similarity-in-dissimilarity. Pluralism has to be reduced to hierarchical or instrumental order. Our approach to reality is dualistic and comparative, sometimes dialectical. In the East, it is identity-in-difference. One seeks the depth dimension in which different poles are in tension. It is unity-in-duality: *advaita* – not-two, neither one. Reality is

³ J.C. England, et al., eds., *Asian Christian Theologies*, 3 vols. (Manila: Claretian Publication, 2002-4).

dialogical, holistic and harmonious. We encounter an enriching pluralism of contextual, interpretative, open narratives.

In the West, one holds on to right belief, ideas and correct formulations. One is extrovert. History is factual. In the East, one clings to truth which is reality, which is out there, not in the mind. One seeks to experience reality through silent concentration. Truth is performative and can become dynamic ritual. Life is play and dance. History is the symbol of mystery.

In the West, the way of knowing has been challenged in various ways. The moderns said that that our knowledge starts with sense impressions from which we abstract concepts. We cannot really know what is beyond our senses. Emmanuel Kant proposed a turn to the subject: our mental framework determines what we know. The post-moderns have proclaimed the death of metaphysics. Contemporary philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion have moved away from reason to experience and its interpretation as the way of knowing. Paul Ricoeur said that symbols lead to thought. In the East, I think that we need not get involved in these Western philosophical disputes. We focus on living experience that finds expression in symbol. Experience reaches out to Reality that is beyond our rational framework. It evokes symbols that we need to interpret. But all this happens in the midst of experience, that is life. Life is therefore primary. Praxis is more important than theory. Praxis nourishes theory and sometimes challenges it.

If we want an experience of God, we have to silence our inner self and wait for God. If God manifests Godself we try to share our experience through a variety of symbols. It is not concepts like nature and person, procession and generation that will enlighten us, but prayer and silent attention.

An Asian – Syrian – tradition has disappeared from the public sphere. It was Aramaic in its roots. Its main theologian, St. Ephrem was a poet. They imagined God as Mother in their poems. They suggested that God's infinite love and mercy will overcome all sorts of human resistance and finally all will reach God. There was not much focus on suffering and punishment. God's fullness will overcome our limits. God's mystery will trump our limited history.

My aim in this course is not to present to you a synthesis of Asian theology, which does not exist. I am not attempting to offer you a history either. It is not useful and I am not competent. We shall try to do Asian theology within a broad Asian context starting with the three-fold dialogue of the Gospel with the poor, the cultures and the religions, following the direction of our bishops. It will certainly lead us to reflect on life in all its fullness.

PART I

OUR MISSION IN ASIA

CHAPTER 1

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The term 'Laity' is often used in the Church to refer to the people, as distinguished from the 'Clergy,' which refers to the priests and bishops. Even the Second Vatican Council uses the term. I think the term is mildly derogatory and should be avoided. We should rather speak about the 'People of God' as distinguished from the 'Ministers' at their service in the Church. The terms 'Clergy and Laity' belong to an earlier period, that we should stop using. When there is a group of any professionals, say engineers or scientists, and there is someone there who is not so qualified, he is considered 'lay.' A 'lay' person is someone who is not knowledgeable and who does not fit into an expert group. He may have other talents. But in a specific group he is 'lay' – a non-expert. So the term has no positive connotation. In French the term 'laïque' also means non-religious, even atheist. The Council itself, in its document on the Church, after an introductory section on the mystery of the Church, speaks about the 'People of God.' In one sense, it is an inclusive term referring to all the members of the Church. On the other hand, it does use the term to refer to the people as different from the ministers. In the same way the term 'priest' is frequently used to refer to the 'ministers' in the Church. But the people of God are also priests, belonging to the royal priesthood of which Peter speaks in his first letter: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... who in times past were not a people, but now are the People of God." (1 Pet. 2:9-10). The Council also calls them the 'messianic people,' though it talks about the 'laity' in chapter 4 of its document on the Church. We can ascribe this to a force of habit. I would suggest, therefore, that we no longer think and speak of the 'laity,' but of the 'People of God.'

The People in the Documents of Vatican II

The document on the Church of the Second Vatican Council describes how the Father, the Son and the Spirit are active in the Church and concludes: "The universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'" (No. 4).⁴ The Church is a messianic people sent into the whole world as a "communion of life, love and truth" and "instrument for the salvation of all; as the light of the world and the salt of the earth." (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). They have "the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple. Its law

⁴ Hereafter, numbers within brackets refer to the document on the Church of the Second Vatican Council.

is the commandment to love as Christ loved us. (cf. Jn. 13:34). Its destiny is the Kingdom of God.” (LG 9). The document goes on to describe the priestly and prophetic character of this People.

The People as Priests

“Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men (cf. Heb. 5:1-5), made the new people “a kingdom of priests to God, his Father.” (Apoc. 1:6; cf. 5:9-10). They are called to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God. The document goes on to offer a precision: “Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.” (10). Christ is the high priest interceding before God for us. (cf. Heb. 9). All the People of God share in this priesthood of Christ. But among the People there are two groups: the people and those whom we normally call ‘priests.’ The priests are said to be different, not only in degree, but in essence. (10). What does this difference mean really? I do not think that we have any clear ideas on this matter. But some clarity is necessary if we want to understand the true dignity of the People.

Whenever the priest prays publicly, in the course of the Eucharistic celebration for example, he always prays with and in the name of the community. He invites everyone to pray with him saying “Let us pray.” This is true of the most central prayer in the Eucharist, namely the Eucharistic prayer. The priest may be facing the people. But the people are praying with him. He is leading the prayer. He has a leadership role. Does it give him any special power? Here there is a basic difference between the Eastern (Greek) and the Western (Latin) Church. Both would agree that it is God who transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. But the Easterners think that their prayer is intercessory and they pray to the Spirit of God to effect the transformation and the Spirit does it in the sacramental setting. The Westerners also pray to the Spirit. But they think that the moment of the transformation is when the priest is repeating the words of Jesus at the last supper. But all would agree that what is important is God’s (the Spirit’s) action in response to our prayer. Does the leadership role of the priest, designated for this by the Church, make him more of a priest or a different kind of priest? I think what is important is the faith of the community (the Church) and the action of the Spirit. The transformation takes place, even if the priest is a sinner, as the theologians say. The Eastern Church is more sensitive to the role of the Spirit, while the Western Church focuses on the ‘power’ of the priest. In celebrating baptism, for instance, the Eastern minister immerses the person into the water and says ‘May the Father, the Son and the Spirit baptize you!’ The Western minister rather says: ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ After the Second Vatican Council a slight change can be noticed. When

giving absolution in the sacrament of penance the priest now says: "Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins, etc." The priest is simply passing on the pardon of the Lord, though he tries to give himself a role in doing so. The sacrament of reconciliation had its origin in the West, in the community expelling someone for being a notorious sinner, and readmitting him/her when s/he repented and made amendments. Then the leader of the community would reconcile the sinner in the name of the community (and of God).

Talking of forgiveness, let us recall what we pray in the 'Our Father': "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." So not only God and the priest in the name of God, we too can forgive those who offend us. Sometimes I tell people that if they have offended someone they should seek that person's forgiveness and reconciliation than rush to a priest for forgiveness. Jesus said in the sermon on the mount: "When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt. 5:23-24). This is more realistic and helpful in building community and practicing the new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you," than approaching the sacrament of reconciliation as it is celebrated today. So each one of us and the community, for what concerns the community, can forgive as much as, and more effectively, than the priest. Has not Jesus said: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven?" (Mt. 5:44-45).

Community and Hierarchy

In the Acts of the Apostles and even in the Gospels, there is an effort to give the 'Twelve' (Apostles) a special role. But a more communitarian vision does come through now and then. After the ascension and before the Pentecost the Acts report a crowd of 120 people praying together. (Acts 1:15). They must have come for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the paschal season. The Holy Thursday meal was a paschal meal, participated in by the whole family. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus alone with the 12 apostles was having this meal. After the passion, the women were the first to rush to the tomb and to come back and report that Jesus was risen. The risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalen and to the other women, whereas Peter and John saw only the empty tomb. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Jn. 20:23); the gift was given to the disciples, not to the apostles alone. Similarly, at Pentecost, all the 120 in the upper room received the Spirit, though only Peter spoke up. So the attempt to separate the Apostles (priests) from the People must have been a later effort.

The Latin Church has developed a strong hierarchical system of power that may reflect more the Roman legal system than the spirit of the Gospel. The Pope is an absolute (infallible) monarch and under him come the bishops and the priests. The Second Vatican Council introduces the principle of collegiality among the bishops. This has not yet taken strong roots. (The only leader that the Latin Church elects is the Pope). Now Pope Francis is trying to introduce the synodal system in which the People also have a role. In a new Apostolic Constitution (September 15, 2018), Pope Francis insists that the People should be consulted at the preparatory phase of the Synods of Bishops. Some may be invited as observers, not as voting members, since the Synod is one of Bishops. (As a matter of fact, superior generals of male – not female - religious congregations also have the vote). In the Eastern Churches the People are full members, since it is the Synod of the Church, not only of the Bishops. The Council suggests a certain autonomy for the People. “The faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.” (LG 31). – a certain autonomy!

So the idea that the priesthood of the people is different from that of the priests both in degree and in essence, and the authoritative structures based on that, have to be rethought in the Latin Church. Let us come back to the idea that the priestly People of God are capable, not only of offering spiritual sacrifices, but also the Eucharistic sacrifice, under the leadership of a priest representing our communion with the Church. This perspective has to be kept in mind, whenever we come across such a tension between the priests and the people. My intention here is to strengthen the identity of the People of God, and release it from an overbearing hierarchical structure that is not true to the Gospel.

The People as Prophets

We are usually told that the Pope is infallible – that is, cannot go wrong, when speaking authoritatively on matters of faith. The Ecumenical councils also, of course with the Pope at its head, are infallible. But the Council also says:

“The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful’ they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals... The People unfaithfully adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.” (12). “The Church is strengthened by God’s grace... so that she may never waver from perfect fidelity.” (LG 9).

When the Pope proclaimed the dogmas of the immaculate conception of Mary and her assumption, he did not claim a special revelation from God, but proclaimed what had been believed and celebrated by the People in the course of centuries.

The document tries to soften this autonomy of the People by bringing in the authority and guidance of the Pope and the Bishops. On the contrary the Pope and the Bishops also should listen to the people. As a matter of fact, it goes on to assert that the Holy Spirit “also distributes (according as he wills: cf. 1 Cor. 12:11) special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and the building up of the Church.” (12). The Church also “fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples.” (13).

The document, in chapter 4, talks about the ‘Laity.’ (Please remember what I have said about this word above). “By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will.” (31). Today we would rather speak of the secular world, rather than merely about ‘temporal affairs.’ A concern for creation will be of particular interest. Phenomena like a spirituality without religion, secularization, and globalization, cannot be ignored today.

The Universal Call to Holiness

There may be a tendency in the Church to limit holiness to the Religious. It is in this context that we must set the document’s universal call to holiness. “All in the Church, whether they belong to the hierarchy or are cared for by it, are called to holiness, according to the apostle’s saying: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thess. 4:3; cf. Eph. 1:4). (39). This means, in practice, loving God in the other. (42).

Talking about the secular world, one cannot avoid the need for the people to dialogue with members of other religions, and with those having no religion. We should also evoke the problems and the challenges that the families, women, and children, face today. They need particular attention.

The document goes on to assert the basic equality of all. “Although by Christ’s will some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others, there remains, nevertheless, a true equality between all, with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ.” (32).

The different apostolates of the People of God are described more elaborately in another document of the Council, the ‘Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People.’ It spells out the mission of the laity.

The laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole people of God. In the concrete, their apostolate is exercised when they work at the evangelization and sanctification of men; it is exercised too when they endeavour to have the Gospel spirit permeate and improve the temporal order, going about in a way that bears clear witness of Christ and helps forward the salvation of men. (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, 2).

The People are in mission to spread the good news of Christ in the world and to help in building up the Kingdom of God as a community of freedom, fellowship and justice. Identifying the ‘temporal’ as opposed to the ‘spiritual’ order seems quite artificial and ideological, as separating the People from their ministers. Even now, the people can and do animate prayer sessions and retreats, conduct meetings of the Basic Christian Communities, etc. Some people are professors of theology in universities.

Conclusion

It is in this context, that I would like to conclude this brief presentation on the ‘People of God’ with a final important remark. There may be a tendency in the Church to limit the responsibility of the People to the temporal and the secular sphere. The People of God must be as much involved in the life and administration of the Church as in that of the world. After all they are the Church who are helped by ministers – i.e. servants. Similarly, the sacred must not be separated from the secular. The life of the Church today is dominated mostly by the clergy. Parish and diocesan councils, if they exist, may not be functional. They may look at the secular affairs of the Church and not at the religious and spiritual dimension of the life of the People. There is a need therefore to review the role of the People in the Church and in the world, and make it more holistic.

The responsibility of the People is spelt out: “Gathered together in the People of God and established in the one Body of Christ under one head, the laity – no matter who they are – have, as living members, the vocation of applying to the building up of the Church and to its continual sanctification all the powers which they have received from the goodness of the Creator and from the grace of the Redeemer.” (LG 33) – The ‘one head’ is Christ! Of course, we can add the power of the Spirit of God! With regard to the leadership in the Church we should explore models like animation and guidance rather than power relations.

The mission of the Church (and of the People) is further spelt out in the document on “The Church in the Modern World.” Themes like the family, culture, economics, politics, and peace-making will concern the People!

CHAPTER 2

THE CHURCH IN MISSION

The term 'Church' can stand both for a building and the institution. It is the biggest religious institution in the world. As a matter of fact, there are many Churches in the world. Here we are talking about the biggest of them, the Catholic Church. We are interested in its institutional aspects: the hierarchy, the pope and the bishops, the parishes, etc. We want to focus on the community. It is primarily a community of people, whom we have called the People of God in the previous chapter. Its story goes back to creation itself. St. Augustine suggests that it starts with Abel, the son of Adam who was killed by Cain. According to the Bible, God creates the world and then creates humans in God's image, male and female. Scientists today speak of the 'big bang' as the moment of creation and the process of evolution through which the planet earth cools down enough to have water and produce the first living beings. Over billions of years the human beings emerge with intelligence and freedom. The Bible tells us that the first humans did not obey God and so were expelled from the earthly paradise. But God tells the serpent, the tempter: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel." (Gen. 3:15). The Church has taken this as referring to Mary and Jesus.

But before Mary and Jesus, there is the story of humanity through Noah, Abraham, Judah and Joseph. God prepares the chosen people Israel. Through many prophets, before and after the exile of the Jews to Babylon, God foretells the coming of the Messiah. The Jews are waiting for a political Messiah, who will come and liberate them from slavery and establish an independent Jewish kingdom. But Jesus comes and inaugurates, not an earthly kingdom, but God's kingdom on earth. Mark reports in his gospel: "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." (Mk. 1:14-15). He goes round preaching and doing miracles.

The Good News of Jesus

But Jesus' own self-awareness is not that of an earthly king. In the synagogue at Nazareth he proclaims: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Lk 4:18-19). When John

the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he is the Messiah, he gives them a demonstration of his healing activity and tells them to report back to John what they had seen. (Lk 7:22). “Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind.” (Lk 7:21). He is basically freeing people not from their political oppression, but from physical and mental illnesses. His ‘sermon on the mount’ (Mt. 5:1-7:28) can be seen as his manifesto. He calls blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful and pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted for righteousness’ sake – “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:3-10). He speaks of being salt and light, of loving and forgiveness even of one’s enemies, of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. (Mt. 5:13 – 6:18). He is very clear: “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth.” This, obviously, is not the manifesto of an earthly king.

On the last day of his life he gives an example, not of power, but of humility. He washes the feet of his disciples and then tells them: “You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” (Jn. 13:13-15). Then he gives his new commandment. “This is my new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn. 15:12-13). Saying this, he has affirmed that his death is not a punishment for anyone’s sins, but a gift of love inaugurating a new community of love and life after his resurrection.

The Beginnings of the Church as a Community

Jesus carefully avoids any political gesture, though finally he will be put away by the Jewish leaders for political reasons, since they feel that their own power is threatened. They seek to convince Pilate that the power of Rome too is threatened, because of the people who crowd round him. But with his resurrection, he is not immediately upsetting the existing political order, but is starting a silent revolution. This is the beginning of the Church and also of the Kingdom of which the Church is the symbol and servant. The early Christians started a revolution which still continues, though it is difficult to realize it fully, given the opposing forces. But the Church is constantly trying. The Acts give us a picture.

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47).

We have a picture here of what the Church should be: a community of love and sharing united in prayer, witnessing to God's goodness to us and attracting others to join it. This is the life and mission of the Church. A variety of charisms were given to the community.

But unfortunately, in the course of history, the institutional hierarchy developed. Ministers became masters. Bishops and the Pope himself became temporal rulers. The Pope is still king of a small state with ambassadors all around the world. Whether this structure helps the Church's mission is questionable. Power becomes more important than charism. It is to counter this that the Basic Christian Community movement started. Whether this helps the Christians to experience true community is worth exploring, since institutional structures have ways of controlling charismatic movements in the name of order and discipline. The religious congregations, for instance, start as charismatic movements, but get slowly institutionalized.

The Gifts of the Spirit

St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, recognizes the gifts of the Spirit given to the community. Some are prophets and discern spirits; others are miracle workers and healers. Some speak in tongues, but others interpret them. (1 Cor. 12:8-11).

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

There must have been tensions in the community, some feeling superior to the others in terms of the charisms they have. St. Paul exhorts them to unity by evoking the model of the body, which has many members with different functions, more or less important; but all of them constitute one body. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Cor. 12:27). Then follows Paul's beautiful hymn to love. What are important are not the gifts, though they are necessary for the functioning of the community; but love that unites them all.

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

An excellent code of conduct! We only have to stop to ask ourselves whether this reflects the way we – the Church – live as a community. Our communities, even communities of religious, are held together by rules and structures and power plays. Such communities are not the communities of the Kingdom that Jesus wanted. They will not be able to witness to the values of Jesus. Can we call them Churches of Christ?

What is the Kingdom of God?

I have said earlier that the Church is the symbol and the servant of the Kingdom. What is the Kingdom? I am going to give you a long quotation from a famous Indian scholar of the Scriptures, George Soares-Prabhu, who passed to the Lord some years ago. It is a rich and beautiful summary.

The core message of Jesus contains an *indicative* which epitomizes all Christian theology and an *imperative* which sums up all Christian ethics. It's indicative is the proclamation of the kingdom, that is, the revelation of God's unconditional love. It's imperative is a call to repentance, that is, the demand that we open our hearts to this love and respond to it by loving God in the neighbour...

When the revelation of God's love (the Kingdom) meets its appropriate response in man's trusting acceptance of this love (repentance), there begins a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings *freedom* inasmuch as it liberates each individual from the inadequacies and obsessions that shackle him. It fosters *fellowship*, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community. And it leads onto justice, because it impels every true community to adopt the just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible...

The vision of Jesus is theological, not sociological. It spells out the values of the new society (freedom, fellowship, justice), not the concrete social structures through which these values are realized and protected. To elaborate these is our never-to-be-ended task – for no “perfect” society is possible in history. One cannot fully actualise the vision of Jesus: one can merely approach it asymptotically! Ultimately, then, the vision of Jesus indicates not the goal but the way. It does not present us with a static pre-fabricated model to be imitated, but invites us to a continual refashioning of societal structures in an attempt to realize as completely as possible in our times the values of the Kingdom. The vision of Jesus summons us, then, to a ceaseless struggle against the demonic structures of unfreedom (psychological and sociological) erected by mammon; and to a ceaseless creativity that will produce in every age new blueprints for a society ever more consonant with the Gospel vision of man. Lying on the horizons of human history and yet part of it, offered to us as a gift yet confronting us as a challenge, Jesus' vision of a new society stands before us as an unfinished task, summoning us to permanent revolution.⁵

The Mission of the Church

To promote such a permanent revolution is the mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council shows us that the mission of the Church has its roots in God's own mission. Its *Decree on Mission* describes it in the following way.

⁵ George Soares-Prabhu, “The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society,” in *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, ed. D. S. Amalorpavadass (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981), pp. 600, 601, 607.

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from ‘fountain-like love,’ the love of God the Father. As the principle without principle from whom the Son is generated and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, God in his great and merciful kindness freely creates us and moreover, graciously calls us to share in his life and glory. He generously pours out and never ceases to pour out his divine goodness, so that he who is creator of all things might at last become ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28), thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our happiness. It pleased God to call men to share in his life and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together. (cf. Jn. 11:12). (2).

“The Church, endowed with the gift of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom.” (Document on the ‘Church.’ 5).

Our Mission Today

Our mission, therefore, is a participation in God’s mission. So we have to discern how God is active in a particular place, time, and community, and collaborate with it. We have to read the ‘signs of the times.’ (cf. Document on ‘The Church in the Modern World.’ 4). The problem is that the Church has equated itself with the kingdom and has often imposed itself with economic and political power (especially in the colonial period) – sometimes, media power – and has not recognized and accepted God’s ongoing activity among people outside the Church in other religions and cultures. The Church in Asia, after a colonial period, not only political but also religious (?), is particularly sensitive to the reality of Asia. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences spelt out the mission of the Church in Asia as the building up of a local Church through a dialogue of the Gospel with its many poor, the rich cultures and the living religions – and it is not understood by the centre (of the Church in Rome)!

The Council in its document on the ‘Church in the Modern World’ spells out more in detail our mission in building up the kingdom community of equality and justice in the world today. It speaks of some urgent problems: Marriage and Family, Culture (secularism and atheism), Economic and Social life (injustice and exploitation), Political life (inequalities), Peace-making (violence), and the International community. We can say that these are special, though continuing, challenges for the People of God today. These could be explored further in groups in particular contexts.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIANITY – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

When we think of theology, we may tend to assume that it is something that does not change. We think of the Creed and the dogmas defined by the Ecumenical Councils that seem unchangeable and permanent. But a look at history shows us that the Church's vision of itself and its mission have been changing in the course of history. Once we begin to be aware of this, we can start asking ourselves: What should be the Church and its mission today?

Theology: Contextual and Changing

Today, theology itself is seen as contextual. It is not simply an explanation of timeless dogmas. It is an ongoing dialogue between the Gospel and the realities of the world in which we are living. While the basic truths of the faith may remain the same, they may need to be interpreted and applied to the present life situation. As our living context is changing, our understanding of the basic truths and their interpretation and application also may change. We believe in God, the Creator of heaven and earth. For many centuries we believed that, according to the story in the book of Genesis in the Bible, the world was created by God in six days. Objects and living beings became real at a word from God: God said 'Be' and they were. But in the last two centuries research by scientists has shown that the universe itself, the earth and the living beings on it have evolved over billions of years. This new understanding does not question God and God's creativity. But it explains how creation actually took place. Some people may pretend that the world evolved by itself. But reason tells us that something cannot come out of nothing. Our belief in a God Creator remains. But our understanding of how the world came to be through evolution changes. God creates through animating the evolutionary process. Today we are also realizing that the world that God has created can be destroyed by humans, who are also God's creatures. God has created humans as free. They can abuse their freedom in misusing and eventually destroying creation. As theology seeks to address these issues, theology also changes.

We have seen in the last chapter that Jesus Christ launched the Church as a community of people who are called to love and share. But looking round the world we also see that people's egoism and selfishness make the building up of such communities a difficult challenge. In the present chapter I have a very limited aim. In the previous chapter we saw that the Church is on a mission to build up the Kingdom of God. We had the fiery words of George Soares-Prabhu to inspire and challenge us. In this chapter I shall

try to show how in the course of history the self-understanding and the action of the Church in mission have been changing. A realization of this will embolden us to rethink the nature and action of the Church today. This history also shows us how our vision of Jesus Christ also keeps changing in the course of time.

The Time of Jesus

Jesus starts his public ministry by “proclaiming the good news of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” (Mk. 1:14-15). He went about healing people of their physical, mental and spiritual illnesses. He spoke about love and forgiveness, even of one’s enemies. The people, suffering under the Roman occupation and encouraged, perhaps, by the prophetic words of John the Baptist, were looking for a political messiah. We can hear an echo of it in the words of the two disciples walking towards Emmaus after the death of Jesus: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” (Lk. 24:21). But Jesus did not engage in any kind of political activity. His words in the synagogue at Nazareth were not a political manifesto. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Lk. 4:18-19). By evoking the jubilee year, he is moving away from politics. John the Baptist himself may have been confused, and he sent his disciples for an explanation: “Are you the one to come?” (Lk. 7:20). Jesus cures a number of people and then answers the question. “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.” (Lk. 7:22-23). These are not political activities. Anyway, the messianic dreams were put to rest with the crucifixion of Jesus, and, after his resurrection, his kingdom takes the form of loving and sharing communities (Acts 2:44-47), strengthened by the gift of the Spirit. (Acts 2:1-13). At his ascension Jesus broadens the scope of his mission both in space and time. He tells his disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... I am with you always.” (Mt. 28:19-20).

The Disciples

How did the Evangelists look at Jesus since the title ‘Messiah’ was not available to them? Without being too elaborate, I can say that for Matthew, mission is seen as disciple-making through teaching and *Jesus is seen as a Teacher*. Matthew gathers together the teachings of Jesus in his sermon on the mount. (Mt. 5-7). He brings together the parables of Jesus in chapter 13, though there are two more parables in chapter 18. He explains the meaning of the parables to the disciples. (Mt. 13:36-43). When he sends the disciples on mission before his ascension he tells them again to make disciples of all

nations, “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:20).

Luke’s attitude to Jesus and his mission comes out more clearly in the Acts. Of course, in the Gospel we have the famous declaration of his mission to the poor by Jesus in Nazareth (Lk. 4:18-19). He also gives us the well-known parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:37) and the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). In the Acts he shows us how the Spirit guides the apostles to go towards the gentiles. (Acts 10-11). He reports the conversion of Paul and his activities in Antioch and elsewhere outside Palestine. His gospel and the Acts are structured to show the globalization of the Church in mission. During his lifetime, Jesus moves from Galilee to Jerusalem. But after his resurrection the disciples, especially Paul, move away from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. We can say that *the image of Jesus in Luke is that of a cosmic pilgrim and the Church too is a pilgrim.*

This cosmic dimension transcends space and time, so to speak, in the Prologue of John, in which Jesus is identified with the Word of God. Everything is created in and through the Word (Jn. 1:3), who also enlightens every human coming into the world (Jn. 1:9). Jesus not only claims “The Father and I are one.” (Jn. 10:30). He extends this identity/communion to the disciples by praying: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.” (Jn. 17:21). The community is built up through love, sharing and self-gift. (Jn. 15). He also insists in his letters that we love God in the other. (1 Jn. 4:7-21). *Jesus in the Word of God, who is also love and life. The Church is a fellowship united in love and mutual service.*

For St. Paul, *Jesus is the Cosmic Lord*, reconciling all things in heaven and on earth. (Eph. 1:1-10; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Cor. 15:28) The whole creation becomes his body. The mission calls us to empty ourselves so that God may be all in all, animating the *Church as a cosmic communion.* (Phil. 2:6-11). Once again the cosmic dimension of salvation is emphasized.

In the Course of History

We can see different stages in the course of history. At the first stage, the Church spreads across the Roman empire, from Palestine and Egypt through Greece and Asia Minor to Rome, southern Europe and north Africa. It confronts the divinized Roman emperor and establishes itself as a *spiritual empire. Jesus is the heavenly Lord.*

This period is followed by a time of consolidation. The Edict of Milan (313 CE) legitimizes Christianity and it becomes a state religion with the emperor Theodosius (380 CE). There are mass conversions following the principle, *cujus regio, ejus religio*: that is, the people follow the religion of the king. Christianization therefore becomes state policy and a means of political unification. In the Church itself, this is the time of the great Fathers of the Church and the great Councils which spell out the Creed and the

Trinitarian and Christological dogmas. The Church itself gets inculturated in Greek philosophical culture and Roman socio-legal structures. When the Church becomes a mass organization and less fervent, there is the emergence of hermits, monks, and groups of virgins trying to follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in a world becoming less Christian. Christianization is seen as a civilizing force in north and east Europe.

Islam rises in the East in the 7th century. The Christian community has to defend and consolidate itself. The Pope has a role of leadership in the Christian community and starts to play also a secular role. Universities emerge. Urbanization and commerce develop. Latin becomes the common language of the Christian community, though local languages start to emerge. It is the golden age of scholastic philosophy and theology. There are also the crusades against the power of Islam. *Jesus is the King of Kings. The Church is seen as a heavenly-earthly kingdom.*

In the East, Islam is on the rise. The Church is in a withdrawal mode. Its links and contacts with the Western Church are broken at the beginning of the second millennium. From being a movement, it tries to survive. The focus is less on a prophetic message and more on doctrine. It thinks more of the past than of the future. Its stress is more on celebrating the divine mysteries in the liturgy than on trying to make history. Jesus is experienced and prayed to *as the heavenly High Priest. The Church is the Sacrament of the Mystery.*

The Modern Times

With the modern times we come to the period of colonization. With the Spanish and the Portuguese, especially, there is an alliance between the State and the Church. Missionaries follow the armies. The new Churches are also seen through colonial eyes. The Church with its theological, liturgical and administrative structures is imposed on the mostly poor people. There were some who protested like the Jesuits who formed the ‘Reductions,’ which were almost like local republics, or some enlightened missionaries like Bartolomeo de las Casas. The colonists thought they were doing the people a favour by making salvation available to the poor natives. But the native peoples followed a mixture of Christian and native rituals.

In the East, however, the missionaries encountered resistance from the culturally and religiously more developed Chinese and Indian peoples. Mateo Ricci in China and Roberto de Nobili in India tried to adapt themselves to the local cultures. While they dialogued with the local people in their local languages, they could not avoid importing the Latin Church with its liturgy, theology, and administrative structures. The Catechism was translated much before the Bible. Rome established a special Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which controlled operations in the ‘missions.’ The

acceptance of other cultures did not extend to other religions, which were still looked upon negatively as pagan, if not devilish. The image of mission was transplantation. The image of *Jesus would be that of a conqueror. The Church would have thought of itself as a spiritual crusader.*

In the meantime, the Reformers in Europe emphasised the Word of God – *sola scriptura* – *scripture alone*. In their Churches there was a sense of election and individual piety. Mission was an individual or group effort, though organization came later. The Bible was translated into the local languages. Local leadership also more easily and quickly emerged. Accompanying the colonialists, mission was also seen as civilizing. There were also certain fundamentalist currents opposed to the free-thinking Enlightenment. *The image of Jesus was that of a Teacher. The Church was seen as a Bearer of Truth.*

Then we come to, what can be called, the ‘age of the missions’ in the late 18th and 19th centuries. After the French revolution there was an anti-Christian – even anti-religious – spirit in Europe. The attention of the fervent Christians turned to the ‘mission countries’ in Africa and Asia, where the true religion could be propagated and promoted. There was a progressive distinction between the Church and the State in Europe. Missionary congregations were founded in Europe. Women missionaries began streaming out. Rapid industrialisation in Europe led to a lot of poverty in Europe. So many religious congregations engaged in helping and educating the poor, looking after the sick and the old. Schools and social work organizations were founded. The missionaries who came to Asia and Africa were looking out for subaltern groups like the Dalits and Tribals, who were more open to listen to the missionaries. The efforts at inculturation of Ricci and De Nobili, however, had their impact. *The image of Jesus was that of Pastor and Healer. The Church became a Care-giver.*

The 20th century saw the emergence of movements for independence. There was also a resurgence of cultures and religions. By the 1950s, after the Second World War, most countries became independent. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) there was also an openness to and a more positive view of other religions. There was talk about dialogue with other religions and Churches. Mission became dialogical. For example, at a pan-Asian meeting in 1974, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, at their first general assembly spoke of the need to build the local Churches, and affirmed that the way of doing this was to dialogue with the many poor, the rich cultures and the living religions of Asia. The Church itself was said to be marching towards the Kingdom of God in the company of other religions. Mission became dialogical. *The image of Jesus was that of a Guru. The Church was seen as a pilgrim towards the Kingdom of God.*

In the poorer countries of the Third World, there was an increasing concern for the poor, the marginalized, the people oppressed by structures

like the caste system, the refugees, the minorities, etc. In such contexts, the Gospel became an inspiration for liberation. So different theologies of liberation emerged in the 1990s. *Jesus was then seen as a Liberator and the Church was perceived as a Prophet.*

We have seen in the last chapter that not only we and the Church, but Godself is in mission. So today we speak of the mission of God. The document on Mission of the Second Vatican Council, in its Decree on Mission, said: “The Church by its very nature is missionary, since according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (1). The goal of mission is not the Church, but the Kingdom of God. The Church is therefore seen as the symbol and servant of the Kingdom. Jesus then becomes the Symbol of God and the Church is the Servant.

Conclusion

The various images of mission, of the Church and of Jesus that we have seen in this chapter, have shown us that theology is not a monolith, but has been changing in the course of history and it can change again. That would be a sufficient lesson that we have learnt, besides the various images of Jesus and of the Church that we have come across.

CHAPTER 4

THE OTHER RELIGIONS

Do They Facilitate Salvation?

In the past, the motive for mission was not only the fact that Jesus Christ is the only saviour of humankind, but also that the Church is necessary for salvation. This approach implied that the other religions cannot facilitate salvation. India is a land of religions, having given birth to major world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism and having been hospitable to other religions like Christianity and Islam. So this chapter on how we understand the role of other religions in the process of salvation is important in determining our approach to the mission of the Church. The Church, in recent years, has been saying a lot about this topic. So I have preferred to let the texts speak rather than try to put it in my own words, and send you to the texts in footnotes, because these may not be easily accessible to the people for whom this book is written.

The Problem

The phrase “No salvation outside the Church” goes back to St. Cyprian (AD 200-258). It is still being affirmed by some in the Church. A recent document of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith – *Dominus Iesus (The Lord Jesus)* – puts the phrase positively saying that the Church is necessary for salvation and has the fullness of the means of salvation, whereas the other religions are inadequate and that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. I have always felt uncomfortable with such statements. It means that the majority of humanity, in the course of history and today, will find salvation difficult or impossible. My (our) experience shows that there are a lot of good people in the world who do not belong to the Church. I hesitate to accept a God who either seems partial to a chosen few or incompetent to achieve God’s goal of saving everyone. In practice, we can be positive about our experience of God; we should be very careful in judging others. Saying that the Church facilitates salvation is okay. It is not okay to talk about other religions without an experiential knowledge of them. A priori comparative statements must be avoided. People who have a positive experience of Jesus and the Church tend to exaggerate. They should not be taken seriously.

In the Bible

Jean Danielou, a French Cardinal, wrote a book long ago on the ‘Holy Pagans of the Old Testament’ like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Melchizedek,

Cyrus (Is. 44:28ff). The God of the Wisdom books is an inclusive God. (cf. Proverbs 8:24-32; Sirach 24; Wis. 6-13). This vision obviously goes back to creation when God made everything. (Gen. 1:1-31).

Jesus reaches out to the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4), the pagan Centurion (Mt. 8:10), and the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:28) and praises their faith. Paul says:

“God will reward every person according to what he has done. Some men keep on doing good, and seek glory, honour and immortal life; to them God will give eternal life. Other men are selfish and reject what is right, to follow what is wrong; on them God will pour his wrath and anger. There will be suffering and pain for all men who do what is evil, for the Jews first and also for the Gentiles. But God will give glory, honour, and peace to all who do what is good, to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles. God judges every one by the same standard.” (Rom. 2:6-11).

John, in the Prologue to his Gospel says: “All things came into being through him... what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it... The true light, which enlightens every one, was coming to the world.” (Jn. 1:3-5, 9).

Paul reaches out to the gentiles in his preaching at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), and at Athens (Acts 17:22-31). Paul writes to Timothy:

“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone... This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:1, 3-6).

A History

Following Cyprian, the provincial council of Carthage (418) – at the time of St. Augustine - held that unbaptized infants too went to hell, because of ‘original sin.’ The term ‘hell’ was later softened to ‘limbo’ (a dark place). This has now been officially abolished! The First Lateran Council (1215) said: “There is one universal Church of the faithful outside which no one at all will be saved.” Pope Boniface VIII in *Unam Sanctam* (1302) said: “There is one Catholic Church outside of whom there is neither salvation nor remission of sins... Furthermore we declare, state and define that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of all human beings that they submit to the Roman Pontiff.” Pope Clement VI (1351) and the 5th Lateran council (1516) approved this. Besides pagans, the council of Florence (1442) included among those lost, also Jews, heretics and schismatics.

The tone starts to soften a bit with the council of Trent (1545-1563) which spoke of a 'baptism of desire' – people who wanted baptism or would have asked for it if they felt that it was necessary. Pius IX (1854) speaks of 'invincible ignorance' as a possible excuse. Pius XII speaks of "some unconscious desire and longing." (1943). The Holy Office condemns an American Jesuit Leonard Feeney (1949) for teaching seriously that there is no salvation outside the Church.⁶

The attitude starts changing with the Second Vatican Council. In its document on the Church it says:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictate of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation. (16).⁷

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World affirms that salvation is being made available to all in ways known to God alone.

For, by his incarnation, he, the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man... In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another... All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. (LG 16). For since Christ dies for all (cf. Rom. 8:32), and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery. (22).

Other documents of the Council support this view. The document on other religions says: "His providence and evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men." (1). The document on the Word of God affirms: "He has never ceased to take care of the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well-doing." (3). The Decree on Religious Liberty suggests: "The right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person... all, bearing personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth... in a manner appropriate to their social nature. (2-3).

The well-known German theologian Karl Rahner argues that if God does reach out to people who are not Christians, he does so in and through the religions that they practice, not in spite of them.

In view of the social nature of man and the previously even more radical social solidarity of men, however, it is quite unthinkable that man, being what he is, could actually achieve this relationship to God in an absolutely private interior reality and this outside of the actual religious bodies which offer themselves to

⁶ For the history and detailed references, see Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York, Paulist, 1992).

⁷ The Council speaks of conscience as the voice of God also in the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, 3 and in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 16.

him in the environment in which he lives... If man can always have a positive, saving relationship to God, then he has always had it within *that* religion which in practice was at his disposal by being a factor in his sphere of existence.⁸

The Asian Bishops

The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, at their first General Assembly in 1974, in Taipei, Taiwan, speaking of evangelization, said:

In Asia especially this (evangelization) involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our peoples. In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations. How then can we not give them reverence and honour? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?

At their second General Assembly in Kolkata on Prayer in 1978, they said:

Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situations) will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvellous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father.

The Office of Theological Concerns of the FABC said in their *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue*:

Its experience of the other religions has led the Church in Asia to this positive appreciation of their role in the divine economy of salvation. This appreciation is based on the fruits of the Spirit perceived in the lives of the other religions' believers: a sense of the sacred, a commitment to the pursuit of fullness, a thirst for self-realization, a taste for prayer and commitment, a desire for renunciation, a struggle for justice, an urge to basic human goodness, an involvement in service, a total surrender of the self to God, and an attachment to the transcendent in their symbols, rituals and life itself, though human weakness and sin are not absent. (2).

St. John Paul II

In October 1986, John Paul II invited the leaders of other religions to come together at Assisi to pray for world peace. Commenting on its significance, Marcello Zago, the main organizer of the event, wrote:

At Assisi, the welcome given to the religious representatives and people being present at the prayer offered by various religions, were in some way a

⁸ *Theological Investigations*, Vol. V, p. 128.

recognition of these religions and of prayer in particular, a recognition that these religions and prayer not only have a social role but are also effective before God.

St. John Paul II himself, in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer* (1990) said:

The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time (DEV 53)... The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions... Thus the Spirit, who "blows where he wills" (cf. Jn. 3:8), who "was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified" (AG 4), and who "has filled the world,... holds all things together (and) knows what is said (Wis. 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place (DEV 53)... The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: "Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man". (29)... Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour (cf. AG 3, 9, 11). (DP 29). Dialogue is demanded by a deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. (56).

He reflects further:

Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all. But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, *does not make them formally part of the Church* but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. (10).

Pope Francis

In an interview with an Italian journalist, a declared atheist, Pope Francis said: "The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us... not just Catholics... Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists... We must meet one another doing good. 'But, I don't believe, Father, I am atheist!' 'But do good; we will meet one another there.'" Addressing the journalists in Bolivia (July 2015) and asking for their prayers, he said: "And if anyone of you can't pray, with all respect I ask you to think of me and to send me good vibes." In his encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*, he said:

Non-Christians, by God's gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live "justified by the grace of God", and thus be "associated

to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.” But due to the sacramental dimension of sanctifying grace, God’s working in them tends to produce signs and rites, sacred expressions which in turn brings others to a communitarian experience of journeying towards God... The same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony. As Christians, we can also benefit from these treasures built up over many centuries, which can help us to better to live our own beliefs. (254).

In his encyclical *Praise be to you*, at the end, he gives a prayer for the protection of creation, to be used as prayer with people of all religions. (246).

The Indian Bishops

The Indian bishops, in their response to the preparatory document for the Asian Synod said:

As God’s Spirit called the Churches of the East to conversion and mission witness (see Rev. 2-3), we too hear this same Spirit bidding us to be truly catholic, open and collaborating with the Word who is actively present in the great religious traditions of Asia today. Confident trust and discernment, not anxiety and over-caution, must regulate our relations with these many brothers and sisters. For together with them we form one community, stemming from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth. We share with them a common destiny and providence. Walking together we are called to travel the same paschal pilgrimage with Christ to the one Father of us all (see Lk. 24:13ff, NA 1, and GS 22).⁹

Conclusion

We can conclude with a clear affirmation of a document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, published jointly by the Vatican Congregation for Evangelization and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Concretely it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour.¹⁰

Theologians speak of religions as ‘ways of salvation.’ I think that we should avoid such language. It is always God – the Father, Son and the Spirit - who saves. Jesus is the Way and the only Way. The religions can only facilitate divine-human encounter. This is true even of the Sacramental celebrations of the Church.

⁹ Cf. Peter Phan, ed., *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (New York: Orbis, 2002), p.21.

¹⁰ No. 29.

CHAPTER 5

A VISION OF MISSION AS DIALOGUE

Mission as Dialogue

Theological development after the Second Vatican Council led to a new vision of mission as dialogue. This was the result of a twofold movement. One was a new realization of the place of other religions in the plan of God for the world. We have explored this in the previous chapter. The other religions are now seen, not as enemies to overcome, but as partners in mission in the context of God's own mission. The other movement was a new understanding of the vision of mission itself. This can be seen as a deepening, a widening and a sharpening of mission. We shall explore this movement in the present chapter. We will go back to the same texts that we have seen earlier, but look at them from a new point of view.

Deepening, Broadening and Sharpening

We are accustomed to think of mission as our mission to go out and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel and help build the Kingdom of God. This mission is seen as being given to us by God through the Church. The new insight of the Council was that mission is primarily God's mission. The term mission comes from the words *missio* (noun) and *mittere* (verb), which means 'to send.' The Council tells us, in its document on mission (*Ad Gentes*),¹¹ that the first persons whom God *sends* are the Son and the Spirit. The missionary Church is said to have its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The source is the 'fountain-like love' of the Father who freely creates us, through the Son and the Spirit, to share in his life and glory. (2). A second mission is the sending of the Son. "To establish a relationship of peace and communion with himself, and in order to bring about brotherly union among men," he sends "his own Son in human flesh." (3). "Christ sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to exercise inwardly his saving influence, and to promote the spread of the Church." (4). So the mission of the Church and our mission have their roots and beginning in the mission of the Son and the Spirit. As the document on the 'Church in the Modern World' says: "Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery." (22). This is the deepening of mission.

¹¹ Cf. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*. The numbers within brackets in this paragraph refer to this document.

The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, at their first general assembly in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1974 described mission as the building up of local Churches in Asia through a dialogue with the many poor, the rich cultures and the living religions of Asia. This is the broadening of mission as a three-fold dialogue.

Theologians reflecting on this dialogue suggested that not any kind of dialogue is mission. First of all, the three-fold dialogue mentioned above must be mutually involving. Secondly, a missionary dialogue should be focused and prophetic, challenging the socio-economic, cultural and religious structures to change in the context of the Kingdom of God, as a community of freedom, fellowship and justice, proclaimed by the Gospel. This is the sharpening of mission as prophecy. Mission is always a call to conversion.

A New Paradigm

When the new theologies of mission and of other religions encounter each other, new paradigms of mission emerge. The first paradigm is "preparation – fulfilment." God's revelation is progressive from creation onwards. Jesus is the ultimate revelation – the Word itself become flesh. The other religions find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ and Christianity. Jesus is the criterion to read and judge other revelations.

The second paradigm is more wholistic. Creation itself is a self-communication of God, who is reaching out to all peoples through the Word and the Spirit in various ways, at various times, and through the different religions. This ongoing divine-human encounter is salvific. However, God's plan is not merely to save individual souls, but to gather together all things in heaven and on earth. God is working out this plan in history through various sages and prophets at various stages. First of all, there is the mission of God in history, also in other religions, through the Word and the Spirit. This is followed by the mission of Jesus, who 'visibilizes' and humanizes the presence and action of God in history. It is a kenotic manifestation of the Word as a servant. (cf. Phil 2:6-13). We can note the temptations that Jesus was subject to. They must have been present all through his public life. But in the context of a world in conflict between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, Jesus opts preferentially for the poor and the oppressed, and challenges the rich and the powerful to convert and change. His struggles lead to his death. But his resurrection stresses his and God's absolute commitment to humanity whose liberation will be worked out in history in the end-time. The mission of Jesus is continued by the mission of the Church, as a community of witnesses at the service of the cosmic reconciliation as planned by God, manifested definitively and started in Jesus Christ. The Church becomes the symbol and servant of the Kingdom of God. In this context we can say that Baptism is not a passport to salvation, but a call to mission.

St. John Paul II

St. John Paul II spells out this vision in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer* (MR). Let us have a long quotation from him.

God is the Creator and Father of all people; he cares and provides for them, extending his blessing to all (cf. Gen. 12:3); he has established a covenant with all of them (cf. Gen. 9:1-17). (MR, 12).

The Kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness. (MR, 15).

The Church serves the Kingdom by spreading throughout the world the "Gospel values" which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan. It is true that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live "Gospel values" and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills. (cf. Jn. 3:8).

The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in mankind's journey toward the eschatological Kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of Gospel values. (Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, 39). The Church contributes to mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children. (MR, 20).

Mission in Dialogue

The goal of mission is therefore two-fold: the promotion of the Kingdom and of the Church as its symbol and servant (sacrament). The mission is ongoing and everywhere. There is always a tension between the already and the not yet, because it is historical and progressive. It is not Church-centred, but Kingdom-centred.

The real 'enemies' of the Kingdom are not other religions, but Satan and Mammon, personal and social principles of evil. The religions are not objects or targets of our mission, but partners in dialogue and collaborators in our mission to the world. Dialogue between religions becomes mutual prophecy. There is also a mission internal to the Church, when we speak of re-evangelization.

Proclamation and dialogue are two sides of one coin, if we take the freedom of God and the freedom of the humans seriously. Therefore mission is dialogue – *mission in dialogue*. We witness to and proclaim Jesus and welcome people who wish to become his disciples and collaborators.

But our motivation is not that otherwise salvation is not available or more difficult for them – “to whom more is given, more will be required.”

Our mission is not limited to making disciples – it also promotes ‘gospel values’ helping to transform cultures and religions from within through dialogue. We also may be transformed in the process.

The mission of God embraces and transcends all other missions to which God calls people. We are invited to contemplate it and collaborate with it. All other missions are at the service of God’s mission. In life we encounter other believers who also feel called to mission – to proclaim their vision and convictions. All we can and should do is to dialogue. – What do we do?

Learning from Others

What can the Church learn from her dialogue with other Asian religions and the knowledge obtained? The Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, have made an effort to spell it out. It is encouraging and interesting.

From Muslims, the Church can learn about prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

From Hindus, the Church can learn about meditation and contemplation.

From Buddhists, the Church can learn about detachment from material goods and respect for life.

From Confucianism, the Church can learn about filial piety and respect for elders.

From Taoism, the Church can learn about simplicity and humility.

From Animists, the Church can learn about the reverence and respect for nature and gratitude for harvests.

The Church can learn from the rich symbolism and rites existing in their diversity of worship.

The Church can, like the Asian religions, learn to be more open, receptive, sensitive, tolerant, and forgiving in the midst of plurality of religions.¹²

Conclusion

When we encounter other believers, we should respect them and not ‘recuperate’ them as ‘anonymous Christians.’ We can witness to and proclaim Jesus. But we should also listen to them and learn from them. Sometimes they may also challenge us. Proclamation and dialogue go together. Dialogue supposes that we respect the freedom of God and the freedom of the others.

¹² Cf. James Kroeger, *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod & Ecclesia in Asia* (Bangalore, India: Claretian Publications, 2002), p. 14.

CHAPTER 6

JESUS CHRIST AMIDST THE RELIGIONS

An Asian View

The question before us in this chapter is the following: We believe that all salvation is in and through Jesus Christ, the Saviour. We also believe, as we saw in the last two chapters, that people are saved, not only in the Church, but also in other religions, which have other saviour figures, like Rama and Krishna. How do we reconcile these two statements? Just as we claim that Jesus is the only saviour, all religions make similar claims. For example, Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita: “Even those who in faith worship other gods, because of their love they worship me, although not in the right way.” (9:23).

Dialogue does not mean that we/others give up our/their faith convictions and reach a common vision. We have to understand how Jesus, whom the vast majority of humans do not encounter in explicit faith, reaches out to everyone, in ways unknown to us, but known to God. This means we have to make space for other religions within our faith-context.

We should also be clear that the uniqueness of Christ does (need) not imply the uniqueness of the Church. We do not think that the Church, as a visible community, is necessarily involved in the process of Jesus Christ reaching out to everyone. Some people may hold that the Church is linked in “some mysterious way.” This is an a priori affirmation about the “the Church as mystery” that is not very helpful in practice. We do not exclude the fact that the Church being in dialogue may influence other religions in some cases. But this is obviously not universal. The Church therefore is one among the many religions.

If we look on Jesus as one among the many saviours, then there is no problem to discuss. People like John Hick and Paul Knitter distinguish between *Theocentrism* and *Christocentrism*. There is no *Theocentrism* against *Christocentrism*, because for us, Jesus Christ is divine. Theocentrism is meaningful only if Jesus is merely human. Traditionally, however, explicit faith in Jesus Christ is not required for salvation. An implicit faith or desire is sufficient.

How does Jesus Save?

Basically, there are four theories in tradition. The Greeks said that by becoming human the Word unites itself with ‘humanity’ or ‘human nature,’

in which all humans share. By divinizing it, it saves every one. The question, however, is whether the Word becomes 'man as such' or just one man among many, however important. The Latins are less metaphysical and more legal. They said that Jesus saves us by paying back the punishment due to our sins by his passion and death. Being divine his sufferings have infinite value. Even people who do not know about this can share in this process virtually by being honest to their conscience. There are some modern correctives to this theory. One speaks of solidarity rather than substitution – that is, Jesus suffering in solidarity with us and not substituting himself for us. The other corrective is that one replaces punishment and expiation by love and obedience. But the earlier perspective is still found in the prayers in our missals.

The third theory presents the process of salvation as a battle between good and evil, Jesus and Satan. Jesus wins, of course. This theory was proposed by theologians from Asia Minor like Irenaeus. Some modern authors propose Jesus as an exemplary cause. Jesus has shown us the way by his loving obedience unto death. We too must love and obey as Jesus did. This seems to minimize the role of Jesus. It is true of any saint or 'Bodhisattva.'

A New Vision

The problem is that salvation is seen in purely individual terms as saving 'souls' from hell. The early Church rooted in Jewish culture interpreted Jesus' death as a sacrifice of expiation that they were accustomed to, in their own temple tradition. But the Scriptures portray salvation as a cosmic process, of God gathering all things together with Christ as head. Paul tells the Ephesians that God's plan is "to gather up all things in him." (Eph. 1:10). The vision that he presents to the Colossians is even grander. "He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created... In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." (Col. 1:16, 19-20). To the Corinthians, Paul evokes the image of God being "all in all." (1 Cor. 15:28). Jesus prays for his disciples on his last day on earth: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us." (Jn. 17:21). Jesus was killed by the Jews and the Romans. He offered his life in defence of the values that he lived for. He illustrates his own statement: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn. 15:13). God acknowledges his love and self-gift and gives him back his life in the resurrection so that he can share it with the whole universe. The Fathers of the Church and theologians have suggested that the Word of God would have become human to share God's life with us, even if our first parents had not sinned. Salvation is a quest for individual, social, and cosmic harmony.

The whole of history, not only human, but cosmic, starting from the ‘big bang,’ is salvation history. Jesus’ only demand is “Love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn. 15:12). We are called to build a cosmic community of love and self-gift. If we have to give up anything, it is always in order to share – not to deprive oneself (in penance).

This plan to bring all things together is God’s plan, not ours. God, the Word and the Spirit are working through various manifestations and mediations to achieve this in the course of history. God makes a decisive intervention through the incarnate Word. But God does not do away with other interventions. In Jesus, God adopts a human, historical way – a way of dialogue and collaboration – precisely in view of bringing all things together. He has also called us to collaborate with him and with all people of good will in realizing this universal plan of God. It is always God – Father, Word, Spirit - who saves through many mediations and interventions in history. The interventions have a structure, because God’s plan is one. With the advance in communications international networking and collaboration is possible.

Jesus as Saviour

The early Church, experiencing Jesus as saviour, recognizes him as divine: John sees him as the Word (Jn 1:1-18) and Paul sees him as the ‘Cosmic Christ.’ (Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:3-10; 1 Cor. 15:28). The Church accepts today that people can collaborate with the saving action of Jesus – that is love, forgive and share – even without knowing or acknowledging him as the savior, by working through their own religious traditions. In recent times the Church says that God may be reaching to the people of other religions through the Spirit, who is however known to us as the Spirit of Christ. Already St. Irenaeus said:

From the beginning the Son, present to the creatures whom he has formed, reveals the Father to all those to whom the Father wills, and at the time and in the way he wills; and therefore in all things and through all things there is one God and Father, and one Word, his Son, and one Spirit, and one salvation to all who believe in him.¹³

The Second Vatican Council said, as we have seen already:

For, by his incarnation, he, the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man... In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another... All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. (LG 16). For since Christ dies for all (cf. Rom. 8:32), and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.¹⁴

¹³ St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV, 20, 6-7.

¹⁴ The Church in the Modern World, 22.

The Two Natures in Christ

Some theologians, however, instead of ‘shifting the responsibility’ from Jesus Christ to the Holy Spirit, focus on the two natures in Christ – the divine and the human – to understand how Christ can be seen as the only saviour. In simple terms we can say this. The outreach of Jesus is limited to people who have explicit faith in him. To the others he may reach out, not only through the Spirit, but also as the Word. The Word and Jesus, the Word incarnate, are not separated but distinguished, though related. Those who stress the unity of the person in Christ (like Pope Benedict XVI) do not accept this distinction. But those who stress the distinction of the two natures see this as a possible way of understanding the mystery. We believe that Jesus is divine and human. The tendency is to emphasize the one or other dimension: to stress the divine is totalizing; to stress the human is relativizing. The Council of Chalcedon holds both dimensions in tension, neither confusing nor separating.

We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather, the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved, as they came together in one person and one hypostasis. (467).

The Third Council of Constantinople confirms and specifies the distinction by speaking of two wills or principles of action.

We likewise proclaim in him, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, two natural volitions or wills and two natural actions, without division, without change, without separation, without confusion. The two natural wills are not – by no means – opposed to each other as the impious heretics assert; but his human will is compliant, it does not resist or oppose but rather submits to his divine and almighty will. (150).

What does this distinction mean in the way we understand Jesus? Jesus is human, kenotic, limited. Jesus is the historical, human presence of the Word. But the Word’s presence and action transcend the humanity of Jesus in space, time and history. Does the resurrection make a difference? – Jesus’ risen humanity remains human, does not become divine! When we speak of Jesus Christ, we refer to both dimensions, rather indiscriminately. But when there is a concrete question should we be more precise? For example, the Word (God) suffers and dies in his human nature. That is, the human Jesus dies, not the Word. Some theologians like Raimon Panikkar – also others – use the term ‘Christ’ to refer to the Word. So he says, for example, “Jesus is the Christ; but Christ is more than Jesus.” We Christians relate in faith to Jesus Christ. The members of other religions do not relate in faith to Jesus. But, in so far as they relate to God, they relate to the Word, since God is Father, Word and Spirit. So God/Word, is active in them, though they do not recognize that Word/God as Jesus. So we can say that Christ

is the savior of all the humans, though he is encountered as Jesus (Christ) only by the Christians. This is, of course, a theological point. But I explain it here because it is a matter of dispute between some Indian theologians (like myself) and the Vatican. In a way, it marks Indian Christology today. Some years ago, the Indian theologians, discussing this issue, said the following.

We gratefully acknowledge that it is our experience of the incarnate Jesus that leads us to the discovery of the cosmic dimensions of the presence and action of the Word. We realise that we can “neither confuse nor separate” these different manifestations of the Word in history, and in various cultures and religions. We joyfully proclaim our own experience of the Word in Jesus, on the one hand, and on the other we also seek to relate in an open and positive way to the other manifestations of the Word as they are part of one divine mystery.¹⁵

However, it is not without support from others. Let me quote just two among many Euro-American theologians. Karl Rahner says:

The human nature of Jesus is a created, conscious and free reality to which there belongs a created “subjectivity” at least in the sense of a created will, a created *energeia*. This created subjectivity is distinct from the subjectivity of the Logos and faces God at a created distance in freedom, in obedience and in prayer, and it is not omniscient.¹⁶

Avery Dulles, an American theologian, who died as a Cardinal, has said:

It need not be denied that the eternal Logos could manifest itself to other peoples through other religious symbols... In continuity with a long Christian tradition of Logos-theology that goes back as far as Justin martyr... it may be held that the divine person who appears in Jesus is not exhausted by that historical appearance. The symbols and myths of other religions may point to the one whom Christians recognize as the Christ.¹⁷

Conclusion

Ultimately what matters is that the whole universe is moving towards harmony. We are happy to play the role we have been called to play as the disciples of Jesus, witnessing to the Kingdom of God. We claim no exclusivity, nor special authority in human, historical terms. Is the language of uniqueness a language of power? Should we respect the freedom of the Spirit and the freedom of the others? Should we simply present Jesus, by our lives more than by our words, rather than get lost in making special claims? Of course, if people feel attracted by Jesus and his values and want to become his disciples, we are happy and ready to welcome them to join

¹⁵ E. D’Lima and M. Gonsalves, eds., *What Does Jesus Christ Mean? The meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India* (Bangalore: Indian Theological Association, 1999), p.182.

¹⁶ K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p.287. See also pp. 290-91.

¹⁷ A. Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 190.

us. But we must also realize that, in India, we have people who claim to be disciples of Jesus, but do not want, for whatever reason, to join the Church and become 'Christian.'

CHAPTER 7

THE ASIAN JESUS

The fact that Jesus was God and man was difficult for the first Christians to understand, as also the fact that Jesus was one person in God who is Three-in-one. So time was spent in understating the metaphysics of the divine Being, especially in the East. While the East thought of salvation as divinization, the West focused on Jesus hanging on the cross making satisfaction for our sins. The Christian life was set in a sacerdotal-sacramental complex. In the last chapter, for example, we were trying to explain the uniqueness of Christ as saviour and we were talking about natures and persons in God. We were protesting about the divinization of the humanity of Jesus. In this chapter we want to explore how Jesus is meaningful in our lives and religious experience, not what he is in himself. We are not worried so much about what is salvation from, but about what is salvation for – healing, wholeness and harmony.

The images we have of Jesus depend on the context of our lives. In the early centuries Jesus was seen as a Shepherd. A shepherd guides, but also protects and feeds the sheep. When the Christians were persecuted, they identified themselves with Jesus on the cross. When the Church itself became a kingdom, Jesus became a King. When religion became something personal and relational, God's love for us in Christ was experienced in the image of the Sacred Heart. In recent times the focus seems to be on the mercy of Jesus. The Sacred Heart seems to be the preferred image of Jesus among the members of other religions.

I was wondering what kind of images we can use for Jesus in an Asian cultural and religious context, to be an inspiration for our lives. In a book of mine – *The Asian Jesus* – I have highlighted 9 images: sage, way, guru, avatar, satyagrahi, servant, the compassionate, dancer and pilgrim. I shall try to evoke those images here. Other images, of course, are possible.

Jesus, the Sage

In the East, in China and India, guides of the community were considered sages. Confucius in China was a sage. Buddha in India was a sage. Thiruvalluvar in Tamilnadu will also be considered a sage. The Bible has many Wisdom books that tell us how to live and relate to God, to each other and to the world. But we do not know much about the authors. A sage knows the order and functioning of the cosmos including the humans, individually and as communities. Jesus himself was seen as a sage. That is

why John called him the Word or Logos in Greek. It enlightens every one coming into the world, says John. (Jn. 1:9). Jesus manifests his wisdom in his main discourses like the sermon on the mount (Mt. 5-6), the parables (e.g. Mt. 10) and his other teachings. His wisdom can be summarized in a few words: Love one another, even your enemies (cf., Mt. 5:43-48) and show that love in forgiving, serving, sharing and self-gift. (Jn. 13 – 15).

Reflecting on Jesus as a sage from a Chinese, Confucian point of view, Jonathan Tan, a Malaysian theologian, answering Jesus' question 'Who do you say that I am?' concludes:

You are the sage, the son of the Lord of Heaven who embodies perfect humanity and divinity, discerning and proclaiming to us the nearness of the way of the Lord of Heaven, showing us by your life, suffering and death on the cross what this Way of the Lord of Heaven entails, and inviting us to imitate you and your preferential option for the poor and marginalized by joining you in embracing and walking along this Way from its beginning to its end.¹⁸

Jesus, the Way

Jesus said to him (Thomas): "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"... Whoever has seen me has seen the Father... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do. (Jn. 14:6-7, 9, 11-12).

Raymond Brown comments:

He (Jesus) is the way to the Father. He is the way because he is the truth or revelation of the Father, so that when men know him they know the Father (Jn. 14:7) and when men see him they see the Father (Jn. 14:8). He is the way because he is the life - since he lives in the Father and the Father lives in him (Jn. 14:10-11), he is the channel through which the Father's life comes to men.¹⁹

Jesus is not saying "I am showing you a way that you have to follow." He is not presenting himself as a moral guide who prescribes the way that they ought to behave. He is not a law-giver. He is not offering himself as a model that they have to imitate. He is rather the mediation. People who see him see the Father. Though Jesus does not say "I am the *only* way," it seems to be implied, precisely because of his special relationship to the Father. This is not said in a comparative setting where he is the only true way among many other ways that people may talk about. Rather, wherever there is a way to the Father (God) Jesus would be there in some known or unknown manner, because he is the Word that enlightens every human coming into the world. (cf. Jn. 1:9).

¹⁸ Jonathan Tan Yun-Ka, "Jesus, the Crucified and Risen Sage: Constructing a Contemporary Confucian Christology," in *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, ed. Roman Malek, S.V.D., vol. 3b (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1513.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 628.

Jesus is the way to the Father. But the way is also the goal, because to see Jesus is to see the Father. Jesus had said earlier: “The Father and I are one.” (Jn. 10:30). He is in the Father and the Father is in him. This communion of life is shown in the fact that he does the works of his Father. (Jn. 14:11). He had made a similar affirmation earlier also. “The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me.” (Jn. 10:25). Focusing only on the works, the unity between the Father and Jesus may seem to be merely functional. But it is deeper than that. “No one has ever seen God. It is God’s only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” (Jn. 1:18). We hear an echo in St. Mathew: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Mt. 11:27; cf. Lk. 10:22). God’s self-communication through Jesus is more than mere knowledge. “Just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (Jn. 5:26). But this life is not something that he will keep to himself. It is to be given to others. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (Jn. 10:10).²⁰

The Chinese speak about the *TAO*, the Way of the universe, with which we must conform. We can say that the *Logos* is the *Tao*.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has coming into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. (Jn. 1:1-4).

This can be taken as a description of the manner in which the *Tao* – the Way functions, confirmed by the claims of Jesus himself, quoted above. The functioning of the *Tao* also evokes for us the role of the Spirit as the cosmic energy. We shall reflect on this aspect in the chapter on ‘Energy/Spirit’ below.

A Japanese theologian, John K. Kadowaki, concludes his book on Jesus as the Way with the following words:

The Way, as an internal sustaining power, continues to wander, as a companion of our journey, and to vivify our actions. The majestic and vivifying activity of the Way, working as the foundation, which penetrates the universe, develops vertically and horizontally, fills every being and reveals the fullness of the Father’s love. This activity is a powerful drama of the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; it is a hymn of love, a majestic symphony, filling heaven and earth. The life-work of Jesus, revealing the love which lays down life for his friends, covers the universe and embraces the whole of human history. In consequence, all the members of humanity and all beings of the universe enter into communion with one another. Grace to the vertical, life-giving activity of Love, this totality becomes the ascending flame of a hymn of love and,

²⁰ The last two paragraphs are a quote from a paper of mine “I am the Way” in *The Way, the Truth and the Life*, ed. Gerard Hughes et al. (Nairobi: Jesuit Historical Institute in Africa, 2017), p.21.

penetrating heaven and earth and history, echoes through the infinitely expanding super-cosmos.²¹

The Way, therefore, indicates the cosmic activity of Jesus. We can say that the Way, the Tao, is the Word incarnate in Jesus animating the ongoing action of the universe.

Jesus, the Guru

The Guru, in the Indian tradition is the master, the guide, because he has gone before us along the path of self-realization. The goal is the Kingdom of God. Jesus was a political revolutionary that the Jews were expecting their Messiah to be. He did not come to overthrow the Roman domination. He came to build communities that can live under any political dispensation. He was the leader of a social movement. We have seen in a previous chapter the kind of communities that early Christians built. (cf. Acts: 2:44-47). His dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (cf. Jn. 4:1-42) is a model. She may have been a much-married prostitute in the eyes of the others who marginalized her, so that she had to come to take water when no one else would be there. But Jesus discerns in her a person who is searching for something in life, and not finding it. Her remark about the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem or on a local mountain, shows that she is knowledgeable. Jesus discerns in her a person who is open and ready to recognize the Messiah, and manifests to her his true nature. The woman believes and brings the whole village, so to speak, to him. Led by the Guru, she becomes a guru in her turn, sharing her experience with the others – the first apostle of Jesus, though we do not recognise her as such. I think that she must have become one of the women who were following Jesus, who were the first to discover the empty tomb, and were in the upper room waiting to receive the Spirit. She must have continued to be an apostle like Prisca, Aquila, and Mary, of whom Paul speaks in his letter to the Romans. (cf. Rom. 16:3, 6).

Jesus, the Satyagrahi

The term ‘Satyagrahi’ was coined by Mahatma Gandhi. Satya means truth. Gandhi saw God as Truth and was clinging (graha) to Him. His pursuit of Truth took the form of struggling for a community of freedom, equality, and justice. He was a prophet who engaged in a non-violent struggle for Truth, ready to suffer for it rather than impose suffering on others. As a matter of fact, Jesus was a model for Gandhi. Jesus on the cross was one of the images which he preferred to contemplate. Jesus struggled to establish himself as the Truth that he was, and he was ready to pay for it. His suffering was not a punishment from God for our sins, as we often like to imagine, but a manifestation of his commitment to his struggle even unto death. He

²¹ John K. Kadowaki, *Michi no keijijogaku*, trans. Peter Nemeshegyi (Tokyo: Ivanami shoten, 1995), pp. 310-11.

invites us too to join him in his struggle for personal, social, and cosmic freedom. Gandhi chose to follow him. Do we?

Jesus, the Avatar

In the Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism, Vishnu is supposed to take ten avatars. The final one – Kalki – is still awaited. That will be the ultimate triumph of Good over evil. Among the remaining nine avatars, Rama and Krishna are well known. Theologically, the Hindus suggest that while becoming an avatar, Vishnu remains what he is, but puts on another form. The Christians believe that the Word of God did not merely put on humanity, but became really human. I think that these are theological subtleties. If we look at Krishna in the Mahabharata, his humanity is not just a costume. Anyway, in Indian languages we use the word Avatar to indicate incarnation. Jesus is an Avatar for us of the Word or Son of God. In him we touch and experience God. He is God-with-us, Emmanuel, but as a human being. The important thing to understand is that God became human in Jesus in order to divinize us. The Greek tradition speaks of salvation as a divinization. As a matter of fact, they only echo Jesus himself. He told us that he is sharing God's life with us in the Eucharist. (cf. Jn. 6:35-40, 48-51). He prayed to the Father on the last day of his life: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us." (Jn. 17:21). This is divinization. If God can become man, Man can become divine. This is the significance of Avatar.

Jesus, the Servant

It is Paul who evokes this image. He tells the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8).

But this is not the end of the story.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, in the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11).

The lesson is clear. The more we empty our ego, the more we realize the divine in us. In a different religious context, this is also the Buddhist and Hindu perspective. Achieving total egolessness – emptiness – is the goal of Buddhism. Total emptiness at the phenomenal level is fullness at the real level. Nirvana is not nothingness, but the fullness of being. The advaita ideal of Hinduism is also the same. God and the world are not two: the world will not exist without God. When you empty yourself of your ego, you become

one with the Absolute. The ego does not disappear, does not simply merge with the Absolute. Reality is not-two, neither pluralism nor unity. Given the pluralism of 'egos' what we have is community-in-the-Absolute, a non-dual Oneness without duality or pluralism.

Jesus, the Compassionate

In the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism we have the ideal of a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva is someone who has achieved Buddhahood or Nirvana, but instead of rushing to enjoy his/her liberation carries a little to help the striving others. Such Bodhisattvas are honoured, especially in a feminine form, in China and Japan. Much of Jesus' life was spent in healing the physical, psychological and spiritual illnesses of people. He even feeds the hungry thousands. The needy people crowd round him wherever he goes. Mark tells us that Jesus was actually looking for a quiet place so that his apostles, back from a missionary trip, could rest a little. But the people followed him. "As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." (Mk. 6:34). He not only teaches them, but feeds them (5000 men, not counting women and children). Sometimes he seems to reject requests for healing. But eventually he yields, as in the case of the Syrophenician woman. (Mk 7:24-30). Jesus indeed is a compassionate Bodhisattva!

Jesus, the Dancer

Dancing is an experience and expression of integration and wholeness, of community, of joy and freedom. The tribal people, whether in Africa or India, express their joy in group dancing. India is probably unique in having a dancing God – *Nataraja* or King of dancers. Siva is dancing creation into being – a never-ending dance. There are also images of the dancing Krishna. Dancing is also a celebration of victory. Dancing is *lila* – play - that is, purposeless action. A person who is dancing is not doing anything. She or he is just enjoying. We can very well imagine God dancing creation into being. The universe too is dancing, from the dancing of the particles in the atoms, to the dancing of the stars and planets as they dance round each other in the cosmos. The risen Jesus is portrayed as dancing by Indian artists like Jyoti Sahi. I do not know if the Jews were given to dancing. But the resurrection of Jesus and his apparition to the disciples are perfect occasions for dancing. It is, after all, an occasion for joy and celebration. Unfortunately, the predominant image of Jesus in the West is that of him hanging on the cross. Even in statues of the Sacred Heart we note a crown of thorns on top of the heart, and the heart itself is pierced. Dance is also an expression of harmony. Our spirituality today is disembodied. We overemphasize silence and meditation. Dancing is left to the common people in the villages during festivals. But, even there, the priests tend to ask the people to march quietly in prayer. I am happy to see the Charismatic

groups singing, clapping hands and even dancing. This may be the moment to promote images of the dancing Jesus.

Jesus, a Pilgrim

India is land full of sacred shrines. Many of them promote pilgrimages. The goal of the pilgrimage is to get the *darshan* of the Lord at the end. In the Gospel of Luke the life of Jesus is portrayed as a pilgrimage from Galilee to Jerusalem. After the resurrection, the Apostles start their pilgrimage from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. St. Thomas must have been adventurous to come to India with the help of trading groups. It is customary to say that the Church is a pilgrim towards the Kingdom. Asian bishops even say that the Church is in a common pilgrimage together with other religions, towards the Kingdom of God. At the head of the Church, Jesus too is on a pilgrimage with us and with the whole world, towards the Kingdom of God, dancing with us along the way.

Other Names

In the Chinese tradition the honouring of ancestors was very important. It was the duty of the eldest son, who in turn became the ancestor when he passed away. At the time of Mateo Ricci, this ritual was forbidden for the Catholics, though Ricci presented it as a cultural and not a religious ritual. Finally in the 1930s the Vatican allowed it as a cultural ritual. Peter Phan, a Vietnamese-American theologian however suggests that it has religious connotations. He suggests that Jesus can be considered the eldest son who honours the ancestors (on our behalf), who then becomes in his turn the ancestor, whom we honour.²²

In countries like Korea and the Philippines, where the poor and the oppressed are struggling for their liberation, they tend to identify with the suffering Jesus who is struggling on their side, with the hope that as the risen Christ he will liberate them. The Koreans call him the *Minjung*, the suffering people. Such identification does not prevent the Filipino people from celebrating the *Santo Nino*, the Child Jesus, as their liberator and saviour. Choan-Seng Song of Taiwan affirms that the cross of Christ is human, not divine violence. Jesus is on the cross in solidarity with the suffering and oppressed poor – the ‘crucified people’ of Asia. The liberation he brings is symbolized by the Eucharistic table in which all the people can participate, cutting across all that divides people: economic status, race, gender, even religion.²³

²² Cf. Peter Phan, “The Christ of Asia: an essay on Jesus as the eldest son and ancestor,” *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 26-55.

²³ Choan-Seng Song, *The Cross in the Lotus World* (New York: Crossroad, 1990). See also his *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984).

Aloysius Pieris suggests that an Asian Christology will emerge only when the Christians undergo a two-fold baptism in the waters of Asian religiousness and poverty. They must succeed in fusing “politics with asceticism, involvement with introspection, class analysis with self-analysis, the Marxist *laborare* with the monastic *orare*, a militant repudiation of Mammon with a mystic relationship with Abba their Father.”²⁴

Briefly presenting the theology of Hyun Kyung Chung, a Korean woman theologian,²⁵ Peter Phan refers to the feminine representations of Jesus as mother, woman and shaman.

In the image of Christ as mother, Asian women see Jesus as a compassionate one who feels the suffering humanity deeply, weeps and suffers with them. Jesus as the female figure is seen as the woman Messiah who liberates the oppressed. As Shaman Jesus is accepted by Korean women as a priestess who helps them release the *han*, that is, the resentment, indignation, the sense of helplessness and total abandonment which have accumulated over years, and even centuries of oppression suffered by the *minjung* or ‘people.’²⁶

²⁴ A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), p. 64.

²⁵ Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990).

²⁶ Peter C. Phan, “Jesus Christ with an Asian Face,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 423. See this paper for summary presentations of the three authors referred to above, Aloysius Pieris, Choan-Seng Song and Hyun Kyung Chung, besides the Korean theologian Jung Young Lee. See also Jung Young Lee, *The Theology of Change. A Christian Concept of God from an Eastern Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979).

PART II

GOD WITH US

CHAPTER 8

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Creative and Dynamic

The Bible speaks of the presence and action of the Spirit of God on many occasions. At the creation of the world the book of Genesis tells us that “a wind or spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:2). In the second story of creation, it is said: “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Gen. 2:7). This breath of life is seen as the Spirit. The prophet Ezekiel sees the breath of life (or the spirit) given to dry bones, and bringing them back to life. (Ezek. 37:10).

The Spirit in the Gospels

In the New Testament, when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.” (Lk. 1:35). The Spirit animates the incarnation, as She animated creation. The Spirit also initiates Jesus’ public ministry. When Jesus was baptized by John, “the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (Lk. 3:22). The Spirit “drove him out into the wilderness” (Mk. 1:12), for forty days, where Jesus was to be tempted and prepared for his ministry. At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus claims: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” (Lk. 4:18).

Jesus tells Nicodemus: “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” (Jn. 3:5). Usually this passage is understood as referring to baptism. Similarly, later in the temple, Jesus speaks of living waters flowing out of the believer’s heart. John himself comments that he said this about the Spirit. (Jn. 7:38-39). On the last day of his life, Jesus promises the disciples: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.” (Jn. 15:26). Again, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” (Jn. 16:13).

The Experience of the Spirit after the Resurrection

Jesus’s promise of the Spirit was realized after his resurrection. Jesus appears to the disciples in the evening, and after showing them his hands and his

side – that is, the sign of the wounds - “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” (Jn. 20:22-23). Let us note that the Spirit and the power to forgive are given to all the disciples. There were 120 of them, according to the Acts. (Acts 1:15). They were waiting in the upper room praying (cf. Acts 1:14), when, following a violent wind, “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:3-4). The facility to speak in other languages is certainly a sign that the Good News has to be proclaimed throughout the whole universe, to all peoples, not only the Jews. The Spirit herself will lead the disciples to understand this.

The Spirit in St. Paul

The Acts indicates to the disciples on two occasions this universal gift of the Spirit. First of all, Peter is led to the centurion Cornelius. He is already prepared by a vision of many animals and told that nothing of God’s creation is unclean. Then when he goes to the house of Cornelius, at his request, and starts talking about Jesus Christ, even while he was still talking, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word.” Peter takes the hint and baptizes them. (Acts 10). In the meantime, Paul has been converted and Barnabas searches him out in Tarsus to take him to Antioch and to get him involved in proclaiming the Gospel to the ‘gentiles’ – that is, non-Jews. “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” (Acts 13:2). This is how Paul becomes the special apostle to proclaim the Good News to the non-Jews. He will have to go to the Council of Jerusalem, where the leaders of the Church – the apostles and elders – will accept and approve Paul’s ministry with a letter to the gentile believers. (cf. Acts 15).

St. Paul tells the Corinthians that the Spirit gives them various charisms like prophecy, speaking in tongues and interpreting, working miracles, discernment, etc. He assures them that these are all gifts from the same Spirit and are meant for various services for the community. (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11). In his letter to the Romans, he contrasts the Spirit to the flesh and assures them that they have the Spirit giving them the life of Christ. “When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:15-17). In his letter to the Galatians, he lists the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23). I think the presence of these fruits in members of other religions can be an indication that the Spirit is present and active in them.

St. John tells us that the presence of the Spirit in us is manifested when we love one another and God lives in us and gifts us his Spirit. (1 John 4:12-13).

The Second Vatican Council

After seeing briefly what the Bible says about the Spirit of God, let us now look at the documents of the Church and of the Popes. Since this is not a scholarly book, but rather notes of lectures, I prefer to introduce you to the texts rather than paraphrase them in my own words. Obviously, the texts have greater authority.

The document on the *Church in the Modern World* evokes the Spirit's presence, not only in us, but also in the members of other religions.

Christ is now at work in the hearts of men by the power of his Spirit... The gifts of the Spirit are manifold... But of all the Spirit makes free men, who are ready to put aside love of self and integrate earthly resources into human life, in order to reach out to that future day when mankind itself will become an offering accepted by God. (38).

The encyclical letter of John Paul II, *The Redeemer of Man* (*Redemptor Hominis*) also mentions the operation of the Holy Spirit in the followers of other religions.

Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions - a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body - can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness? (6).

St. John Paul II: The Spirit in Mission

The presence and action of the Spirit is also often evoked in the context of mission. Let us recall that the first proclamation of the Kingdom of God and Christ by Peter took place precisely after the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The disciples who had locked themselves up in the upper room out of fear of the Jews, now come out boldly, not only to proclaim Jesus Christ, but also to take them to task for causing his death on the cross. In such a missionary context, St. John Paul II, in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer*, meant to relaunch the movement of mission across the world, is forced to recognize the presence and action of the Spirit also in the members of other religions.

The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time (DEV 53)... The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions... Thus

the Spirit, who “blows where he wills” (cf. Jn. 3:8), who “was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (AG 4), and who “has filled the world,... holds all things together (and) knows what is said (Wis. 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place (DEV 53)... The Church’s relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: “Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.” (28).

St. John Paul II has to acknowledge that the Spirit of God, though she is present in the Church in a special way is also active outside the Church, not only in individuals, but also in the cultures and religions to which they belong.

The Asian Bishops and the Spirit

The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences bears witness to this presence of the Spirit outside the Church, from their own personal experiences.

On the face of the Spirit, coming fresh upon us today, we recognize the power with which generations of our foremothers and fathers have been familiar during the millennial history of this continent. It is especially the life and experience of the poor and the marginalized peoples of Asia that has been much attuned to the world of the Spirit as we find in their many religio-cultural beliefs, rites and expressions. The Spirit binds us in a marvellous way with all those who have left the indelible imprint of their spirit, heart and mind in innumerable forms on our cultures and on our traditions. It is the same Spirit of God that Asia wants to rely on in shaping its future destiny...

The more we follow the leading of the Spirit, the deeper and closer will also be our understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ. It also helps us to relate in a harmonious and integral way the universal plan of God manifested in Jesus Christ with our Asian history and experiences.²⁷ To be open to the Spirit (especially in others) is to be open to the possibility that we can learn from others in whom we recognize the Spirit, without making the (historical) Jesus the ultimate criterion of everything – the “unique Christ!” The Indian Bishops, preparing for the Special Synod for Asia, say that the recognition of the Spirit in others leads us to dialogue with them.

It is an accepted principle that we cannot comprehend a mystery; before it, our attitude needs to be one of reverent acceptance and humble openness. God’s dialogue with Asian peoples through their religious experiences is a great mystery. We as Church enter into this mystery by dialogue through sharing and listening to the Spirit in others. Dialogue, then, becomes an experience of God’s Kingdom.²⁸

²⁷ *FABC Papers* 81 (Hongkong, 1987), pp. 1-2.

²⁸ Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), pp.20-21.

Understanding the Spirit in Asia

If we look around Asian cultures and religions for symbols to understand the Spirit, we find three of them. The first is *Prana*, the breath in man linked to the cosmic energy. It is called *Chi* in Chinese and Japanese. In Yoga, the *prana*, not only helps self-integration, but also the integration of the self with the universe and with God. The *prana* is also experienced as a healing force. Today's alternate healing systems like *Reiki* (Japan), *Pranic Healing* (Philippines), and *Touch-on healing* (USA), now spread all over the world, are based on activating the energy field by directing the energy flow by gestures like impositions of hands. I think that some of the gestures of the healers in the Charismatic movement, like imposition of hands, are related to such directing of healing energy.

A second symbol that we find in India is *Shakthi* or power in its various forms. The divine power of Shakthi is indicated in the phrase "Shiva without Shakthi is Sava." 'Sava' means corpse. The power of the God Shiva resides in his Shakti. As a matter of fact, Shakti is honoured as an independent goddess in Bengal. Kali is one of her forms. It is this perspective that leads some theologians to think and speak of the Spirit as feminine – a She. In Indian Shaivism we have the image of the *Ardhanarisvara*, with a body that is half feminine and half masculine.

The Chinese tradition offers us the image of the dynamic *Tao* – the cosmic energy – in constant movement through its negative or passive pole (*yin*) and its active or positive pole (*yang*). All movement, life and change in the universe are understood through the interplay of the *yin* and the *yang*.

The Absolute in Asia, therefore, is not a static *Being*, but a constant *Becoming*.

Aloysius Pieris

Buddhism encourages self-discipline and morality, but does not talk about God. Pieris, a Sri Lankan theologian, speaks of it as 'religious atheism.' He says:

The three features of cosmic religions – sacredness of Nature, the communal living as well as the celebration of life's vicissitudes – are an invitation to recover our biblical faith in the Spirit who is redemptively active in the whole of *creation*, in human *communities* and in the celebration of *life* in its ups and downs... Asian mystics even today bear the characteristics of that freedom, which Paul calls the *fruits of the Spirit* (Gal. 5:22), and it is from these fruits that we are advised to recognize their authenticity. (Mt. 7:16-20). Theistic acknowledgement is not a condition of salvation for the 'nations'; authentic humanism is. (Mt. 25:31-45). What saves is love lived out in life, and not necessarily the knowledge of Who that Love is. But for Christians, the love for one's neighbour is the sacred context of their witness to their faith in the true God. Love is self-abasing and humble, for, it is not jealous, not boastful, not

interested in oneself but endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4-5) and *that* very love is the Spirit poured into our hearts (2 Cor. 1:22; Rom. 5:5), the Spirit of the true God. Hence Asia's religious atheism confirms Yahweh's humble nature while the ethics of selflessness and detachment, which the Asian religions advocate, accord with God's loving Spirit, which is salvific Love.²⁹

Theologians suggest that the 'Western' Church, focused on Jesus, tends to be hierarchical, authoritarian and legal, whereas the 'Eastern' Church, focused more on the Spirit, tends to be more democratic, makes place for 'economy' besides law and respects the mysterious action of the Spirit more than its own 'power.' The Spirit makes it easier for Asian theologians to make place for other religions in the divine economy. While Jesus makes us look towards the past tradition, the Spirit inspires us to look creatively to the future. The Word and the Spirit are two missions of God. St Irenaeus called them the "two hands of God," with which God holds up the universe. We have to note in the Bible the priority and independence of the Spirit with reference to Jesus. It is in this context that we have to understand the dispute between the East and the West. The Western Church says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son. The Eastern Church feels that this subordinates the Spirit to the Son. So, it says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. The Father alone is the Origin from whom everything else flows.

²⁹ I have lost the reference to this quote and am not in a position to try to trace it now. Please excuse me.

CHAPTER 9

EXPERIENCING GOD IN ASIA

The book, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* by Stephen Hawking, a well-known scientist was published posthumously recently.³⁰ His answer about God is: “There is no God. No one directs the universe.” A scientist believes what he can see, touch, measure, weigh, etc. - the objects in the universe. The particles are interactive and the universe evolves according to the laws that the scientists can discover by analysing the phenomena of nature. Everything is interdependent. There is no need of an outside cause at the same material level. We agree that God is not such a material cause.

But our question is, while reality as we experience it is self-explanatory, how did this reality come to be? One speaks of a ‘Big Bang’ at the start of the universe. Where did the tiny particle that banged come from? Hawking asks this question, but does not convincingly answer it. Instead he goes on talking about negative and positive energies.

We hear of many miracles that take place in Lourdes, for example. Many of them are miracles of healing. There is a body of scientists and doctors who certify, after a rigorous examination of the situation of the person before and after the miracle, that the cure is not explainable by science. So it is attributed to divine intervention. Besides miracles, we also have the witness of saints and mystics in all religions who speak about their experience of God. We have no reason to disbelieve them. As a matter of fact we do distinguish between true mystics and people who make false claims. Our belief in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and through them in God, depends on experience, either personal or reliably reported by others. We accept that the existence and experience of God cannot be demonstrated by science, which deals only with what we can see, touch and measure. God experience is of another order. Scientists can talk about what they can demonstrate. We need not take their word for what they cannot study by scientific methods.

Different Manifestations of God

At a popular level, people believe in one God, but also in many divine beings. There is a feeling that God is beyond our normal experience. But God does manifest Godself to us through many mediators, who are not only heavenly beings, but also, more often, saintly people who have experienced God in

³⁰ Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (London: John Murray, 2018).

their own lives. As we know a tree from its fruit, we evaluate people through our experience.

Different religions have different experiences and images of God communicated through their scriptures and other holy books. When we accept the legitimacy of other religions to facilitate salvific divine-human encounter, we also accept the many images and symbols through which they experience God. This does not mean that these are universal symbols accessible to everyone. They belong to a particular historical and cultural tradition. We need not also exclude God's intervention to different people, in different ways, in different places and circumstances. We judge peoples' experiences by their fruits. Let us not go into the matter further. It is not our job to justify the legitimacy of other religions in a practical way. We respect the freedom of God and the freedom of others. St. John Paul II has said: "The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: 'Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.'"³¹

God in East Asia

Tribal Societies or Indigenous People have a world of Spirits. There are Nature Spirits that control nature's realities like the sun, moon and the stars, also water, fire, air, etc. One's own ancestors also become spirits. All these look after the people. They have to be recognized and honoured particularly at key moments of the cycles of nature, like the various seasons, and also of the cycles of life like birth, puberty and death. These belong to the level of cosmic religiosity. Nature and the humans with their spirits make up the universe and make the world function through their interaction. The rituals of life and natural cycles acknowledge and celebrate the network to which the humans too belong. People seek to live in harmony with this network.

The Chinese Tradition

The Chinese tradition seeks to rise beyond this to a meta-cosmic level. Confucius imagines a universe at three levels: the underworld with its evil spirits, the earth with the humans, and heaven with the good divine spirits. He speaks of 'Heaven' as being above all. It is called in Chinese *Tien*. The way he describes it, 'Heaven' seems to be a personal force. The king is called the son of 'Heaven' and offers sacrifice to 'IT'. Confucius himself felt directed by it.

The Master was put in fear in Kuang. He said, "After the death of King Wen, was not the cause of truth lodged here in me? If Heaven had wished to let this cause of truth perish, then I, a future mortal, should not have got such a

³¹ *The Mission of the Redeemer*, 29.

relation to that cause. While Heaven does not let the cause of truth perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" (IX, v and VII, xxii).³²

The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right." (II, iv).

The other great Chinese sage is Laotzu who preached Taoism. The *Tao* is the Way of the universe. It is a continuing movement that is animated by the complementary forces of the *Yang*, which is the positive active force and *Yin*, which is the receptive force. They are moving dynamically in a cyclic pattern animating all action in the universe. The image of the *Tao* can be seen on the Korean national flag. We are called to live in harmony with this dynamic movement.

Tao is phenomenologically 'nothing.' We cannot point to it as something out there. It is the Way of things. It is Transcendent wholeness. It is 'nothing' from which arise everything. It is emptiness - nothing that we can know or say - but as origin embraces everything. This vision goes beyond the 'creator-creature' paradigm. The Creator is not an-other being, though infinite. It is more than a 'first cause' in an order or network of causes. You can let the Tao live in you, by 'dying' to yourself, the ego that clings to things. It is the Way of emptiness, of self-giving, the feminine way of non-violence. It does not dominate, but stoops to conquer. It integrates cosmic life with the spirit, the body and the cosmos. Evil and disorder are what we do to reality by our egoism. We can let the Tao live in us, by 'dying' to ourselves, the ego that clings to things. It is the way of non-action: *wu-wei*. It is not absence of action, but acting without artificiality, without attachment to the action itself, without desire. It is to be natural, simple, free. It may be interesting to compare it with the *Nishkamakarma* or desireless action of Hinduism, though the Hindus have not developed it in this way. Laotzu says:

Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water.
Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better; It has no equal. (78).

I do my utmost to attain emptiness; I hold firmly to stillness.
Returning to one's roots is known as stillness. This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny. Returning to one's destiny is known as the constant.

But should one act from knowledge of the constant
One's action will lead to impartiality,
Impartiality to kingliness, Kingliness to heaven, Heaven to the way, The way to perpetuity, And to the end of one's days one will meet with no danger. (16).³³

³² The references here are to the *Analects of Confucius*.

³³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (1963), accessed May 7, 2021, <https://www.scribd.com/document/7544193/Tao-Te-Ching-D-C-Lau>.

The Hindu and Buddhist Traditions

The Hindus have a pantheon of gods. Of these Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are considered primary as the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Of these Vishnu and Shiva are the dominant ones. Vishnu takes on human and animal forms to save people from their distress. He has so far had nine avatars and the tenth one will be the final one. Among these nine, Rama the warrior and Krishna the preceptor are popular. The *Bhagavat Gita*, which is almost treated as our Gospel by the Hindus, is a discourse by Krishna on the battlefield, elaborating the struggle between good and evil and demanding our Bhakti or self-surrendering devotion as the way to salvation and freedom. Shiva, with his consort Shakthi or power, is equally popular. Both Krishna and Shiva/Shakti have evoked a large amount of devotional poems in all the Indian languages. As a matter of fact the consorts of these three Gods are as popular as the Gods themselves, as the Goddesses of knowledge (*Saraswati*), wealth (*Lakshmi*) and power (*Parvati*), also known as *Kali*.

But at another level, the divine is perceived as an Absolute beyond name and form, about which all that one can say is *neti, neti*, 'It is not this, It is not that.' The Absolute is not a Creator outside creation. He is rather one with it. But it is not a oneness of identity; that could be pantheistic. It is non-dual or not-two: *Advaita*. We humans are not normally aware of such non-dual oneness. To experience it is the goal of all *sadhana* or spiritual effort. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says:

The Spirit is not this, is not this. He is incomprehensible, for he cannot be comprehended. He is imperishable, for he cannot pass away. He has no bonds of attachment, for he is free; and free from all bonds he is beyond suffering and fear.

A man who knows this is not moved by grief or exultation on account of the evil or good he has done. He goes beyond both. What is done or left undone grieves him not... Who knows this and has found peace, he is the lord of himself, his is a calm endurance, and calm concentration. In himself he sees the Spirit, and he sees the Spirit as all.³⁴

Buddhism does not talk about God at all. The goal of its spiritual effort is to attain Nirvana or Emptiness. This emptiness is not 'nothing,' but is the negation of all phenomena, seen as limited. It is fullness beyond name and form. One can experience it, but one cannot imagine it or speak about it. To speak about anything is to limit it to our mental framework.

One God in Three Persons

We, Christians, believe in one God. The monotheism of the Old Testament did not rule out good and evil spirits, but they were not given divine status.

³⁴ See Juan Mascaro trans., *The Upanishads* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 142-143. *The Upanishads* are Hindu philosophical texts that may go back to three centuries before the Common Era.

Today some people have started questioning whether these beings are necessary. I do not go into the question here. The early Christians began to experience Jesus as divine. St. Paul calls him Lord (Phil. 2:11), the image of God in whom all the fullness of was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:15, 19), the Son of God who can call God, his Father (Rom. 8:17). John is even more explicit in the Prologue to his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... And the Word became flesh and lived among us." (Jn. 1:1-3, 14). Jesus worked miracles and forgave sins. (Mt. 9:2-8). John reports Jesus saying: "The Father and I are One." (Jn. 10:30). We also see the early Christians praying to Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:22): "Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20).

The early Christians also experienced the Spirit as a gift from God (Acts 2:1-4), also through Jesus (Jn. 20:22-23; Rom. 8:1-17). The Spirit is experienced as directing their ministry.

As time goes by, the early Church has to come to terms with their belief in one God, who is also experienced in Jesus Christ and the Spirit. The Jews were probably comfortable with God whom they also experienced through his Word and the Spirit. They may have been seen as God's ways of reaching out to them. But the Greeks were more rational in their approach. Some of them thought that Jesus was a human being specially chosen by God to manifest Godself and lead people to God – a holy man, a prophet, etc. If Jesus and the Spirit become mediators to God in this way, then the uniqueness of God is also protected. But somehow, such a rational vision did not correspond to the experience of people. They experienced Jesus Christ and the Spirit also as divine. They sought a way of expressing this. So they used the terms 'nature' and 'person.' These terms may not have had as clear meanings as they thought to give them. We can say that they, in a way, defined them to suit their needs. The Creed worked out in the council of Nicea (325 CE), which we recite every Sunday, reads:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father...

The most important word in this passage is 'consubstantial' – of the same substance. This affirmation was against Arius who asserted that the Son was made in time, though he also was divine.

The uniqueness of God was strongly affirmed. So God was said to have one 'Nature' or 'Substance' But our experience indicates three ways in which God relates to us. We experience God as Creator. We experience God as Saviour in Jesus Christ. We also experience God as Sanctifier in the

Holy Spirit. We call them ‘Persons.’ Jesus is considered the Son who is born of, or generated by the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Nature is the principle of action. Whatever God does, all the three Persons do – together, if one can say so. Actually there is one action. But we attribute it to one or other person. For example, it is God – Father, Son and the Spirit - who creates. But we attribute the action to the Father. We pray to the Father, to the Son or to the Spirit. But it is always to God that we pray. We also speak of relations within the Trinity: the Son is generated by the Father, but the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. To the outside, God presents Godself as One. But within Godself it is a network of relations. The important thing is to hold that there are not three gods, but only one God. But in practice we pray: “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” I do not think we will ever understand this mystery with our limited reason. We could be careful when we encounter the Hindu image of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva and not cry about polytheism. We could also understand when Buddha did not want to talk about God at all – though he did not deny God.

One Son with Two Natures

In a parallel manner, Jesus Christ was said to be God and Man – one Person and two Natures: one agent to whom we relate, but two principles of action. The one person can act either through his divine Nature or his human Nature or conjointly with both Natures. We have seen this distinction in the chapter above on Jesus Christ. Jesus as God is active everywhere and always. But as Man, he interacts with those who recognize and relate to his human nature. So, as we have seen, when we speak of Christ as the only Saviour we refer to the divine Nature – the God in him. But some, like Cardinal Ratzinger, stress the unity of the Person, and do not accept the implications of the diversity of Natures. In popular language it is also usual to indicate the humanity of the Second Person by the name Jesus, and the divinity by the name Christ.

The Council of Ephesus (431 CE) stressed the divinity of Jesus against Nestorius, who insisted that Jesus was only human. It underlined the divine nature of Jesus by calling Mary, the mother of God, because she was the mother, not merely of the human nature of Jesus, but also of the divine person who became human in Jesus. The Council of Chalcedon clarified that Jesus Christ was one person with two natures:

We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished

by their union, but rather, the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved, as they came together in one person and one hypostasis.³⁵

But an insistence on the divinity of Jesus risked de-emphasizing the humanity of Jesus. Some people affirmed that he had only one will, the divine. So the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) clarified that Jesus Christ had two wills:

We likewise proclaim in him, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, two natural volitions or wills and two natural actions, without division, without change, without separation, without confusion. The two natural wills are not – by no means – opposed to each other as the impious heretics assert; but his human will is compliant, it does not resist or oppose but rather submits to his divine and almighty will.³⁶

It is rather difficult to imagine an ongoing dialogue between the divine and human Natures within the one Person. Jesus Christ as God must have known things that he did not know as a human being – concerning the future, for example. When Jesus was praying in Gethsemane was he also praying to his own divine Nature? Similarly, in the Trinity, if God is one and God's action outside Godself is one, it is difficult to imagine the inner relations between the three persons, unless generation and procession are terms without much meaning. Maybe we should accept the mystery and avoid such speculations!

There is one interesting consequence of Jesus Christ being one Person in two Natures. St. Thomas Aquinas, asking whether there is only one incarnation or there can be many, answers that many incarnations are possible. An incarnation is a limited, non-exhaustive manifestation of the infinite God, the Son. So other incarnations cannot be excluded. He says: "The Uncreated cannot be exhausted by the created... We must hold then beside the human nature actually assumed a divine person could take up another numerically distinct."³⁷

He does not say, there are, but there can be – perhaps in other planets, if there are other intelligent beings like us in other planets.

Conclusion

Unlike the other chapters, this has been a bit technical. Some of the specifications in the way we think of and speak about God have been clarifications of the faith to counter heresies which somehow did not square with what people believed and lived, and gave a wrong image of God. What is important is orthopraxis, not orthodoxy – right behaviour, not right

³⁵ Josef Neuner, S.J. ed., *The Christian Faith in the doctrinal documents of the catholic church*, rev. Jacques Dupuis, S.J., 7th ed. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001), No. 615, p. 228.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 635, p. 246.

³⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 48 (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1976), III: 3, 7.

doctrine. But right doctrine keeps us from wrong ways of approaching and relating to God. Theological reasoning can help us to clarify and sometime correct what we live. It cannot direct our life. If we are close to God, the Spirit of God will guide us. A search for too much intellectual clarity may eventually lead us astray. If we find God in creation and in the poor (cf. Mt. 25), God will lead us deeper into God's own life.

CHAPTER 10

THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

Let us start with a basic principle. God is beyond all name and form. But in so far as we relate to God we tend to call God by various names. These names may come from our own experience and imagination. They may also come from the various manifestations of God in our life and in history. The Feminists today accuse traditional theology as being patriarchal. One of the biblical images for God that they evoke is Sophia or Wisdom which is feminine in form. But tradition associates the term Sophia with the Word (*Logos*) and so with Christ.

Creative Wisdom and the Word

We read in the book of Proverbs the discourse of Wisdom. She says:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago... When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, there I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. (Prov. 8:22, 27-31).

We can compare this with the briefer story in the gospel of John. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” (Jn. 1:1-3). It is clear that John equates the role of the Word with the role of Wisdom, though the Word is divine, while Wisdom is only a creature, though the first one. Further, when he says, “The Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn. 1:14) referring to Jesus, it becomes masculine. Genesis simply repeats “God said...” (Gen. 1: 3, 6, 9, 14, 20 24) to indicate the act of creation. This can be assimilated to the Word. But feminist theologians like to assert the role of the feminine Wisdom in creation. There seems to be a balance when the story of creation says: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27). God is both male and female.

Two Sets of Images

When we speak about God, there is always a tension between two sets of images. On the one hand, we speak of God as Creator, Lord, King, Judge and

Warrior. The male image seems to be dominant here. On the other hand, we also speak about God as the Generator, Lover, Caretaker, Healer and Saviour. The feminine image seems to be dominant here. The first group of words speak about the fatherhood of God. It is more structural. The universe, including the humans is a kingdom, a community. The second group of words speak more about the motherhood of God. The universe is more a family.

In the Old Testament, God has no image in the temple. God's manifestations are accompanied by cosmic phenomena like clouds, lightening, thunder on the mountain, a pillar of cloud or fire. These seem to be images of power and control. But then there is a contrast. The Lord tells the prophet Elijah:

“Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him... (I Kings 19:11-13).

The Lord speaks, not in power, but from silence, manifesting the Lord's concern for the Lord's people.

The Motherhood of God

The prophets experience the motherhood of God. God speaks to Hosea as a mother. “Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I who took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” (Hosea 11:3-4). Again, with reference to their enemies, the Lord says: “Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and tear them asunder.” (Hosea 13:8).

In the book of Deuteronomy, God is described as a mother eagle: “Like the eagle that stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young, God spreads wings to catch you, and carries you on pinions.” (32:11). And again, God gives birth: “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.” (Deut. 32:18).

God also speaks to the prophet Isaiah as a mother. “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (Is. 66:13). Again, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Is 49:15). And again, “For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept myself still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant.” (Is 42:14).

Jesus always calls God as his Father or ‘Father in heaven.’ Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to God as “Our Father who art in heaven!” But a Father too can be loving and provident! But Jesus also says: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” – This refers both to himself and to God! (Mt. 23:37).

The Church

Very early in the western Church, in the first centuries, the image of God is fixed as the Trinity – One God in Three Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is obviously a male, the incarnate manifestation of the Son. The image of God as Father is fixed in official rituals and in theology. But the situation is complex in devotion. All three persons have also been seen as mother figures. In the eastern Church the Odes of Solomon (3rd to 4th century) sings:

A cup of milk was offered to me,
And I drank in the sweetness of delight in the Lord.
The Son is the cup.
The Father is He who is milked.
The Holy Spirit is She who milked Him,
And gives it to the generations ... (*Ode 19*)³⁸

As the wings of doves over their nestlings,
And the beaks of their nestlings over their beaks
So too are the wings of the Spirit over my heart ... (*Ode 28*).³⁹

The Mystics, even in the West, speak about the ‘Motherhood’ of God. Meister Eckhart says: “What does God do all day long? God gives birth. From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth.” Juliana of Norwich refers to Jesus as Mother. There is a tendency among theologians today to project the Holy Spirit in the Trinity as feminine – as creator and energiser she can only be a Mother.

The motherhood of Mary seems to substitute the motherhood of God in Catholic experience and devotion, though she remains human. Within four centuries, Mary, the mother of Jesus, emerges as the Mother of God and our Mother. Jesus on the cross telling John, a disciple: “Behold your mother!” (Jn. 19:26-27), is taken as applying to all people.

³⁸ Bernard Kilroy ed., *Psalmic Odes from Apostolic Times*, trans. Francis Acharya Oco, (Bengaluru: ATC Publishers, 2018), p. 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Pope John Paul I said: “God is our Father; even more God is our mother. God does not want to hurt us, but only to do good for us. If children are ill, they have additional claim to be loved by their mother. And we too, if by chance we are sick with badness and are on the wrong track, have yet another claim to be loved by the Lord.”⁴⁰

Other Religions

Hinduism has many local goddesses, including the three consorts of Brahma-Saraswati, Vishnu-Lakshmi and Shiva-Parvati or Shakti. Shakti is a prominent goddess having her own group of worshippers on the North East. A phrase underlining the power of Shakti goes: ‘Shiva without Shakti is sava (corpse)? We have images of *Ardhanariswara* – the male-female deity with one body, half male and half female, in Shaivism. In Tamilnadu God is often called *Ammaiyappa* – Mother-Father! The Tamil poet Bharathi, in his *Kannan Pattu* (Song of Krishna), also praises *Kannamma* – the female form of Krishna and finishes his song with *Kannamma* as *Kula Deivam* – the ancestral deity.

The Mahayana Buddhists have their Bodhisattvas, that is people who have realized their Buddhahood, but still remain in the world to help the other suffering people. Some Bodhisattvas have female forms as *Kwan-Yin*, popular in China and Japan. Here is a prayer-poem:

Beloved Kwan Yin, I invoke Thy sovereign Light,
The Divine Jewel of the Sacred Lotus,
Dwell in my Heart, Divine Goddess of Love.

Shine Thy Divine light on my way,
Illumine my steps, oh Beloved Mother of Mercy.

Mother, Holy Messenger of Divine Compassion,
Awaken Your Divine Light in my heart,
Transform my world with your Divine Blessings.

Have mercy on me Divine Mother, Jewel of the Divine Lotus,
Make me an instrument of Thy Compassion.
May your Divine Mercy enlighten in my heart today and always.

Divine Mother Kwan Yin, I revere Thy Divine Compassion
That flows in my heart as your Heavenly and Eternal Song:
OM MANI PADME HUM. OM, OM, OM!⁴¹

⁴⁰ Pope John Paul I, *Angelus Address*, Sunday, September 10, 1978, accessed May 18, 2021, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-i/en/angelus/documents/hf_jp-i_ang_10091978.html.

⁴¹ “Kuan Yin Prayers and Invocations,” *Humanity Healing*, accessed May 10, 2021, <http://humanityhealing.net/2012/10/kuan-yin-prayer/>.

In Islam, Mary is honoured as the virgin-mother of the great prophet Jesus. The Muslims also honour Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed, but not divinized. Here is a Sufi ode to the Divine Mother:

On the face of the earth there is no one more beautiful than You
Wherever I go I wear your image in my heart
Whenever I fall in a despondent mood I remember your image
And my spirit rises a thousand-fold
Your advent is the blossom time of the Universe
O Mother you have showered your choicest blessings upon me
Also remember me on the Day of Judgement
I don't know if I will go to heaven or hell
But wherever I go, please always abide in me.⁴²

Conclusion

Basically, since God is beyond name and form, any image can be used depending on our culture and experience, provided we do not confuse image with reality, which remains apophatic: 'neti, neti' – 'not this, not this.' God can be our Mother as much as our Father. We could be open to the Feminists looking for the feminine in God. We could be careful not to divinize Mary. We could be more understanding of the Goddesses of Hinduism. Does the emphasis of Pope Francis on mercy focus on the Motherhood of God?

⁴² "A Sufi Ode to the Divine Mother," *Blessings of Light*, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://blessingsoflight.wordpress.com/2014/04/22/a-sufi-ode-to-the-divine-mother/>.

CHAPTER 11

THE SACRAMENTS

Our life is full of rituals of all kinds. Any celebration, whether religious, social or political, is full of rituals. Who participates, who does what and how, when and where, are all determined by custom. There are models to follow. There are experts who tell us what to do. There may be processions. Special objects may have to be used. Particular prayers may have to be said, etc. Important moments in each one's or a community's life are marked by such rituals. A simple birthday involves cutting a cake or distributing sweets or singing 'happy birthday,' giving of gifts, having dinner, etc. Blessing a new house, a girl coming of age, the naming of a child, etc. are celebrated with rituals which involve also family and friends. Every ritual involves usually a community or a group of people. It involves objects, symbols, and gestures.

Religion has many rituals of worship. A visit to any popular shrine will show us the various ways in which the people manifest their devotion. Sometimes ritual agents like priests may be involved.

What are the Sacraments?

The sacraments are religious rituals that have a special status. They are the official rituals of the Church. We believe that they were instituted by Christ. The Church counts seven of them. Baptism, Confirmation and Anointing are rites of passage marking stations in life. Reconciliation and Eucharist structure on-going community life. Marriage and Ordination to a particular ministry determine one's role and status in the community.

A Sacrament can be described as a symbolic action of the community, representing God's action with and for the community, affecting individuals and giving them a particular status and responsibility. Baptism makes a child or a person a member of a community of believers. In that process they also receive a gift of the Spirit of God, making them children of God, and purifying them from all their sins, original or actual. As members of the community, they also have a responsibility to the community. Confirmation gives them a special gift of the Spirit, more oriented to their life and mission in the community and in the world. In the course of life people may have problems with their relationship with others and with God. Reconciliation restores those relationships, involving also forgiveness for any offences in relation to others and to God. Eucharist celebrates community by sharing food in which Christ himself becomes the food, making the community the body of Christ, enabling the community to love others through sharing,

service, and self-gift. Marriage blesses the union of a man and a woman as a symbol of the union of Christ with the Church. Ordination sets apart some to be the servants of the people, especially in the way they relate to God and to the community. They receive a special gift of the Spirit to enable their service. The Anointing of the sick is a moment when the community stands by a sick member and prays for his or her healing. The sacraments, therefore structure the life of the persons in community as the People of God, celebrating their fellowship and offering them the gift of the Spirit, integrating them more deeply in the life of the Trinitarian God, as the children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Community Dimension

What has happened in the course of history is that the social dimension was almost lost, reducing the sacraments to their ritual dimension. This makes the ritual a kind of magical action. For example, in baptism when an adult was baptized, there was a whole process of instruction and formation to a good Christian life, before a person was admitted to the fellowship of the community through the act of baptism. The community, especially through the God-parents, has been active over a period. Now infants are baptized. There is neither preparation nor follow up. The rituals are symbolic, but empty. There is no real social transformation.

The Eucharist

Similarly, the community occasionally came together to express their fellowship in a common meal called *agape* or love. In the course of the meal the leader picked up a piece of bread and a cup of wine on the table, and brought to mind what Jesus did at the Last Supper. The community believes that in this gesture Jesus becomes really present with his body and blood. Sharing in them the community becomes the body of Christ. Abuses, of course, are possible. We read in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (Ch. 7) how they gathered together but had their meals separately, the rich and the poor, and then shared bread and wine recalling the memory of Jesus. Paul said that this was a scandal. We escape the scandal by dropping the shared meal altogether and repeating only the sacramental gesture. When the social action of a shared meal disappears, the substance of the symbolic sacramental meal disappears too. We have sacralised a ritual by emptying it of the social action that supports it.

In the course of history, the symbolic dimension became worse. The shared meal as a symbol disappeared. It became predominantly the action of a priest. The symbolic gesture became a sacrificial offering. The bread and wine were no longer shared, but distributed by the priest. A horizontal dimension was replaced by a vertical dimension. So the community dimension disappeared. There was a community, but it did not act like

one. Very often the wine was not distributed either for practical reasons. So without the symbolic action of a shared meal it became a ritual gesture, centred around a priest.

Reconciliation

In the early Church, when an individual indulged in public misbehaviour, he or she was expelled from the community. When that person was repentant and did penance publicly, he or she was re-admitted to the community celebrations. It was a social act of reconciliation. St. Ambrose refused to celebrate the Eucharist in the presence of the emperor Theodosius because he had indulged in a massacre of innocent people, till the emperor repented publicly. Today individuals confess their petty personal 'sins' to a priest in private and get absolution. The social dimension is lost. There is no social control at all. It has become a private ritual. Today there are communal celebrations of Penance, but there is no public confession of unjust actions. It has become a personal gesture and more and more people no longer find it meaningful. The priest does not represent the community any longer. The people prefer to go to God directly.

The Celebrating Community

The community celebrating is the Church. The Church is normally led by a minister, who could be a bishop, a priest, a deacon or even a lay person, who acts in the name of the community. For example, any member of the People of God can baptise, in case of necessity. A deacon can witness a wedding, since the celebrants of the marriage are the couple. A bishop ordains ministers like priests and deacons. Priests perform other sacraments. It is always the Church – the People of God - which celebrates the sacraments. The Church, of course, is not merely a human group of people, but the body of Christ. God is the giver of grace. The ministers are the Church's and God's recognized and approved servants. When for some special reason a community is not present, a minister can represent it. In every case, he always acts in the name of the community. We can say that the power of God passes through the community, which is the Church, to the minister. There have been unfortunate attempts to make the priest a kind of mediator between God and the community. The priest is said to act in the place of Christ. I think this is wrong theology.

There is a whole theology of sacraments that will justify these changes. But we need not go into that because I think it is not relevant. The question before us is how can we revitalise the sacramental rituals as the actions of the Church-community, not of a priest representing the Church. For this we have to understand the symbolic structure of the sacraments.

Inculturation of the Sacraments

We have already seen in an earlier lecture on 'Gospel and Culture' how the Second Vatican Council wanted to inculturate the sacramental rituals, in view of promoting the full, conscious and active participation of the community in celebrating them. The Church believes that the essence or substance of the sacraments cannot be changed. This was affirmed by the Council of Trent and reiterated by the Second Vatican Council. But Vatican II specified that what cannot be changed is what has been instituted by Jesus Christ. Historians of the Church tell us that, as a matter of fact, many ritual symbols have changed in the course of history. Only two symbols have not changed. They are washing with water in Baptism, and eating and drinking together in the Eucharist. It is also a fact that washing with water as a symbol of purification and rebirth, especially, if the washing involves a real immersion in the water rather than pouring or sprinkling some water, as is often done in the Western Church, is a universal symbol present in all cultures. The Hindus often bathe before going to the temple for worship. Muslim mosques have always a little tank of water at the entrance in which the people can wash their hands and feet before entering the mosque. Similarly, eating and drinking together, especially of objects offered or sacrificed to the divinity, as a sign of fellowship in the community and with the divine, is also a universal symbol. It is interesting to think that Jesus chose such universal symbolic actions for two of the important sacraments. Similarly, anointing and imposition of hands are also universal symbols.

The Symbolic Structure of the Sacraments

Now if we want to inculturate the sacramental rituals in order to make them more meaningful for the people, we need to understand the symbolic structure of the sacramental rituals. The Sacramental rituals have a three-level symbolic structure. If we take Baptism, for example, there is a basic ritual level: welcoming the child or the adult by a sign of the cross, washing with water and anointing with oil. The person, or the parents and Godparents if it is a child, renounce Satan and declare their belief in the Christian God who saves us. All these symbolic rituals indicate that the child becomes a member of the community of believers. This is the social level. This social symbolic action also indicates that in this very gesture of the community, the Spirit of God is also present and active, making the child or person also a child of God and temple of the Holy Spirit. This is the spiritual or mystical level. We can analyse each sacramental ritual in this way.

Indianization

Indianizing the sacramental rituals is not very difficult. Rituals like washing with water, anointing, imposition of hands, sharing a meal are, as I have

said, universal symbols. What becomes a problem is the material we use. With what oil do we anoint the people? What do we eat and drink if we want to share a meal? The problem is that the oil we normally use or what we normally eat and drink may not be the same everywhere, even if they are available in the area. Indian Ayurveda, for example, uses many kinds of oil for anointing and massaging. The same may be true of other Asian, African and other countries of the world. Should we use only olive oil imported from somewhere and specially blessed by the Bishop? The common materials for eating and drinking are also different in different places. Should we use only bread made of wheat and wine made from grapes for the Eucharist? There are regions in the world that do not grow wheat or grapes. Even if they are available, as, for example, in India, they are not what people normally eat and drink. Does the use of materials like these make the sacramental rituals exotic? Can they use rice cakes and tea in Vietnam, rice cakes, chapatis and milk in India, bread made out of millet in some countries in Africa? Questions like these have been raised by theologians in India, Vietnam and West Africa.⁴³ I think these questions remain open. This may not be the occasion to discuss such issues elaborately. But it is helpful to keep them in mind, if we want to make the sacramental rituals meaningful in our situation.

Making the Sacraments Communitarian

We actually see how rituals are made more meaningful through some gestures. For example, during the ritual of Baptism today, while the rite suggests that the parents and God-parents make a sign of the cross on the forehead of the child, today the priests and other elders present also do so, indicating that the whole community is receiving the newly baptized person as a member. Similarly, during a wedding the thali or the rings are blessed by all the priests and elders present. We can do something similar also during confirmation. During the anointing of the sick, can we replace the anointing by one person, with the imposition of hands of many or all present accompanied by prayer – as happens in Charismatic prayer meetings? We must also develop the habit of praying for all the sick in the community and even have special healing services, and not only focus on the dying, as the sacrament of anointing tends to do. We can certainly learn from the Charismatic groups.

The one sacramental ritual we have to reinvent is that of reconciliation. Confession is a wrong name for it. We pray to God, “Forgive our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us.” But when we have hurt someone in one way or another, instead of seeking forgiveness from the other whom

⁴³ Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Can Sacraments Change? Variable and Invariable Elements in Sacramental Rites* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 1979); Rene Luneau, “L’eucharistie sans pain et sans vin?” *Spiritus* 48 (1972): 3-11; Rene Jaouen, *L’eucharistie du mil. Langages d’un peuple, expressions de la foi* (Paris: Karthala, 1995).

we have hurt, we rush to the priest to confess. I think we could promote two sorts of rituals. We could gather together as a community and we can ask for God's forgiveness, as we forgive others who may have hurt us in some way. Our forgiving each other is actually also God forgiving us. The others, obviously, need not only be Christian. In a country like ours there are also social conflicts and tensions, and even violence. Can we promote reconciliation between such groups in symbolic ways?

The Community

The development of Basic Christian Communities is a welcome phenomenon. Also for the celebration of the sacraments, a basic Christian community may be more important and significant than the parish, which tends to the more impersonal, the bigger it is. In the same way, larger family communities may also be encouraged. Every sort of community has an ecclesial significance.

Popular Religiosity: Non-Sacramental Rituals

If we go to popular pilgrim centres like Velanganni, we see many rituals through which the people manifest their devotion and prayer. They wash themselves in the sacred waters. They move from one church to another on their knees. They use blessed oil and water. They make offerings of flowers and fruit. They burn candles. They sing and celebrate. They give alms. These rituals may have more meaning for them than some of our sacraments. Sometimes, we tend to depreciate them. We forget that God looks at the heart rather than at these actions and gestures. These may have more importance for the people than the official rituals. Sometimes these are called sacramentals, which show their relation to the sacraments. Intelligent pastors encourage such devotional practices. If your attitude is encouraging on the whole, you also earn the right to be critical of exaggerations.

Conclusion

Just like us, the members of other religions like Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism also have various rituals linked to various stages in life in relation to God. We are often tempted to think of them as superstitious. They also are symbolic rituals like ours. Therefore we must respect them. On the other hand, there are some groups, especially in the West who call themselves spiritual, not religious. They will also decry all rituals. But their spirituality does not relate their God to their daily lives and experiences. It is something abstract and irrelevant. Let us therefore live our sacraments in a meaningful way and they will structure our lives.

CHAPTER 12

THE FIELD OF ENERGY

Energy and Spirituality

We often wonder at the great number of Euro-Americans visiting Indian ashrams. Hindu and Buddhist gurus seem to have a great success in Euro-America. What can be the reason for this? Is it simply people disillusioned with the Church looking for other spiritual resources? Are they after exotic practices? What do the Asians have that Christianity does not have? Why do even Asian Christians take to yoga or practice vipassana or zen meditation. For me the answer has always seemed simple. In Asian spiritual tradition one is given an experience which he or she does not get in the Church. In Euro-America, even when we have lively liturgies, they seem to cater to the mind. There are a lot of words, narrated, sung or proclaimed. There is food for thought, if one can understand the literal translation of the Latin texts. The rites are rigid and quaint with the clergy wearing 4th century Roman dresses. If any one wishes to have a deeper experience of prayer he would be sent to a monastery where one can participate in the divine office of the Church, which is once again words narrated or sung. If one goes to a retreat centre one will be offered ideas for reflection. The dark church and the candles may give an atmosphere. But if you go to an Indian or Japanese ashram you will be seated comfortably, without strain. You will be made to breathe deeply and slowly. You may be asked to repeat a prayerful phrase or to concentrate on a symbol or image or any object. Your tensions disappear and you soon have a deep feeling of peace. Prayer becomes a personal experience of integration and peace. You will rarely have such an experience in any liturgical setting. Personal prayer may mean silent reflection. Most people do not know what to do with silence, outer or inner.

In the Euro-American Christian spiritual and theological tradition the human person is seen as a composite of soul and body or soul in the body. The body is further seen as an obstacle to any spiritual effort. In India (and Asia) a third element mediates between the body and the soul. That is *energy*. It is neither material nor spiritual, but linked to both and can influence both. In the humans this energy is animated and controlled by the breath. The Indian yogis visualized an energy body with its energy centres (*chakras*) and canals (*nadis*). This energy-body is both within and without, penetrating and surrounding the body as an *aura*, which some people claim to see. But the energy can be felt or experienced. The Chinese call this energy *Qi* and are serious in tapping it for various purposes. The system of *Acupuncture* visualizes such an energy body and uses it in the process of

healing. People use the *Tai chi* exercise to facilitate the flow of energy in the body.

I am not interested here in going deeper into the analysis of the energy-body. What concerns me is the role of energy in sadhana or prayer. The popular modern gurus do not teach their disciples complicated *asanas* (postures). They show them how to breathe deeply and rhythmically and to quieten the wandering mind, and make it one pointed through concentration. Such breathing and concentration leads to a deep sense of peace. This is what people find attractive, because it is experiential.

A second manifestation of energy today is in the process of healing. There are systems like Reiki, Pranic Healing, and Hands-on Healing, that claim to direct energy through touch, impositions of hands or intention, communicating energy at a distance to a diseased part of the body, and releasing tension and bringing about healing. It seems to be taken for granted that most of the illnesses are psychosomatic. Self-healing by directing the energy to the appropriate places is also encouraged. These systems were founded in different places: Japan (Reiki), the Philippines (Pranic Healing), and the United States of America (Hands-on Healing). When they start looking for a theoretical framework they turn to (Indian) yoga. These healing practices are recognized today as palliative, additional, or alternative therapies. I personally know practitioners and beneficiaries of these systems and have heard of their experiences. Some of the paranormal phenomena may also be energy-related.

We are all familiar with the phenomena of healing in the Charismatic prayer sessions. We notice similar phenomena in other religious traditions. Much of these phenomena may be explained by the activation of human and cosmic energy. Though theoretically all have access to this energy, some people seem to have easier access to it. Yoga practice seems to facilitate such access to energy. This energy is morally neutral. We need not rush to attribute all such healing phenomena related to energy to the divine Spirit. The divine Spirit is sovereignly free. She cannot be controlled by healing techniques. I think that a greater awareness of the dimension of energy can promote inner and outer healing, as well as what is called variously as deep prayer or silent prayer or contemplative prayer.

Energy and Yoga

We cannot speak of energy today without speaking of yoga. When we think of yoga, what strikes us immediately is the different body postures called *asanas*. All of us have seen pictures of these in books. Some of them may look contorted. What they do is keep our body system, consisting of muscles, nerves, joints, and various glands, in good working order. Different *asanas* activate different sections of these, stimulate them, and help them to function well. They can improve the circulation of the blood.

They may also remove various toxins that had been accumulated by food and life habits, or by mental tensions like anger and sadness. In this way they contribute to physical wellbeing. Promoting physical wellbeing is one of the aims of yoga. As the saying goes: “A healthy mind in a healthy body.” Perhaps we can add “A healthy spirit in a healthy mind and body.” From the point of view of prayer or meditation, a healthy body will enable you to sit without discomfort for a long period of time. Certain gestures of the body can express attitudes. Dance expresses joy, prostration expresses humility, submission, and so on.

The other important element of yoga is breathing (*pranah*). Breath is the source of life and energy, by bringing oxygen into the body. If the breath circulates well in the body it can keep the body in a good tone. We feel better when we breathe fresh air. The body also can absorb through touch the energy of the universe, of light, of water, of heat and cold, of sun and nature. People can communicate energy to one another by touch or, without touch, by intention, by look, sound, etc. The yogis will speak of an energy body that functions in the physical body. It is not something material that can be measured and experimented on scientifically. But one can feel the energy, receive it, and communicate it. According to yoga theory there are seven centres of energy activity along the spine of the body, from the bottom of the torso to the crown of the head. These are called *chakras*. These are linked by three canals called *nadis*: *sushumna* at the centre, and *ida* and *pingala* on either side of the spine. The pranic energy goes through 72,000 sub-canals to irrigate the whole body system. The yogic theory is that one can control the flow of energy by focusing one’s mind on it and by wanting it. One can thus activate the various *chakras* as necessary. A doctor in the operation theatre opening up the body will not see these *chakras* and *nadis*. Yet yogic practitioners can feel them. Not only the mind, but also the imagination plays an important role here. Any book on yoga will give you images and other details. Healers claim that one can communicate energy even at a distance by willing and directing it.

The Yoga Marga

In the Indian tradition, yoga is one of the *margas* or ways of self-realization – besides *Jnana* (wisdom), *Bhakthi* (love or devotion) and *Karma* (action). As a *marga*, it does not speak of any Absolute. Reality is energy stored in various ways. It has a cosmic presence. The humans can get into contact with it through the crown of their heads. The personal energy (*kundalini*) of the humans rests at the lowest chakra. Through intense focusing on the energy and the chakras one can raise the energy along the network of the chakras. When the personal energy gets in touch and merges with the cosmic energy at the top chakra, one attains self-realization. This involves a lot of self-discipline and concentration. The way of yoga has been described in terms of 8 steps: *Yama* (moral codes: non-violence, truthfulness, non-

stealing, celibacy and non-covetousness); *Niyama* (self-purification and study: purity, contentment, austerity, self-education and meditation on the Divine); *Asana* (posture); *Pranayama* (breath control); *Pratyahara* (sense control); *Dharana* (concentration); *Dhyana* (meditation); *Samadhi* (absorption into the Universal).

It is obvious that the physico-mental discipline is rigorous. A sadhana following such a rigorous discipline is possible. It needs a guide, however. When one enters deep meditation and silences the activity of the conscious mind through rhythmic breathing and concentration on one point (image, phrase, the act of breathing itself), the energies of the suppressed unconscious may be released and appear as dreams, hallucinations. These may be exhilarating or disturbing and oppressive. These must be handled firmly and the student may need some expert help. Concentration may also produce a sort of euphoria which could be mistaken for spiritual attainment. The guidance of an expert counsellor would then be helpful too. I think Zen and Vipassana traditions largely follow a similar process, though their techniques may be different. They do not speak much about the chakras. But they seek to go beyond the limits of the conscious mind and find themselves in an ocean of energy.

Yoga and Healing

The healing traditions claim to heal diseased parts of the body by directing energy, both physically and mentally, towards that part. They use various techniques and symbols in directing healing energy. Reiki, Pranic Healing, and Hands-on Healing are some of the systems known and popular. Unfortunately, simple systems are made complex, introducing grades and multiple initiations as well as organizational controls, both for personal and financial reasons. They do not normally aim at any mystical states but at a general feeling of psycho-physical peace and harmony. They focus on the chakras to activate them and balance them, as each chakra is related to some part or organ of the body and the discomforts associated with them. They also advocate self-healing.

Yoga and Prayer

Prayer techniques use deep and regular breathing to calm one's body, especially when the body is in a restful posture. This calming of the body is accompanied by the calming of the mind. It is done by focusing on a repeated prayer or phrase which helps to empty the mind of its distracting thoughts. One could also use symbols like light or music or a painting. Thus over a period of time one enters a peaceful state both mentally and physically. This can release tensions and bring inner and outer peace. This need not be a strictly spiritual experience. The adepts of Transcendental Meditation, for example, simply used a meaningless phrase to rid the mind of its distractions and make it one pointed. But one can focus on God and make

the phrase a prayer of petition or praise, like the “Jesus, have mercy on me!” of the Orthodox Jesus prayer. John Main, a well-known prayer leader from Canada, does not demand anything more than 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening, to sit quietly, breathe deeply and regularly and repeat a short prayer - *Maranatha – Come Lord* - rhythmically. This is a bare minimum of yoga technique, and it may be enough for deep prayer, leaving God to lead the person further if God wishes. When I read in a news bulletin that Lee Kwan Yew the former Prime Minister of Singapore uses John Main’s method, including the Christian term *Maranatha*, to find inner peace, I realized that one goes beyond religious identity and finds some power in the technique itself. Yogic prayer can be tempting, because it can give one an experience of peace with a simple breathing exercise, which a multiplicity of vocal prayers and rituals normally cannot.

There seems no doubt that between the body and the spirit (mind) there is a field of energy. The Western – Greek – world has no place for it in their scheme of things, which only sees the spirit and the body in the human. Forms of energy are recognized in the universe, but not the personal kind of energy that yoga is talking about. We can experience it, communicate it and benefit from it, without being able to subject it to scientific experimentation. Some claim to see the energy field that surrounds everybody, called the *aura*. Even trees and stones can have an *aura*, in so far as they radiate energy. The energy is cosmic and human, and can be handled at that level. It may not be prudent, I think, to rush to identify it with the divine Spirit, as some people do. The divine Spirit, of course, can make use of it, as She can make use of anything else. The energy can promote mental peace and physical healing. The energy is controlled and directed by the mind. The imagination can also play a role when we visualize *chakras* and canals, etc. Many of the charismatic healers are people who have discovered a capacity, perhaps without being fully aware of it, to direct healing energy. Once one has discovered this power, one can surround it with other symbols and rituals that dramatize the healing process.

To go a step further, I do believe that if the energy can be directed for healing, it can also be directed to harm someone. The energy is neutral, but my intention can be good or bad. My intention can be embodied in various rituals. I do hypothesize further that what some adepts of cosmic religiosity consider good and evil spirits could be manifestations of energy, which shamans handle. A so-called scientific point of view will deny such manifestations and experiences of energy as superstitions, simply because science can handle only brute matter. But humans experience it. What yoga does is to systematize it based on experience. Such a system is not more fanciful than the faculties of the soul or different levels of consciousness, described by other systems. Some of what we consider as para-normal phenomena are energy related. The special powers claimed by yogis and siddhas are also energy related. I think that we have not yet fathomed fully

the powers of this human-cosmic energy. A 'scientific' spirit hinders such exploration. As far as prayer and spirituality are concerned, the relevant elements of yoga are a restful posture, regular calming breathing and mental concentration, helped by focusing the mind on one object. This can be a neutral object like light or sound, a neutral act like breathing (in vipassana and zen) or a meaningless phrase (Transcendental meditation) or a prayer or a bhajan. This way can lead to a state of objectless awareness. It is possible to believe or misunderstand it as a mystical state. For a theist, a mystical state is a gift of the Divine, not something that one can achieve by oneself, though one can prepare for it by emptying oneself. In India all the religious traditions use yogic techniques to attain such emptiness, that can be filled by the Divine. Some yogic systems may claim that they can touch the Absolute by their personal efforts alone. The Buddhists too may feel comfortable with such a perspective.

Energy in the Chinese Tradition

Energy is called *Qi* or *Chi* in the Chinese tradition. The whole universe is suffused with the divine energy that creates and sustains it. The natural, the animal, and the human world share in this cosmic energy. This energy is experienced as an interaction of the *Yin* and the *Yang*. *Yang* is the active, creative force present and active in every being. *Yin* is the passive element that receives and interacts with the creative force. Such interaction is at the root of all that happens in the world. Sr. Lai-Kuen Kwong of Hong Kong suggests that the *Qi* is the Spirit of God, and compares it with the Hebrew *Ruah* and the Greek *Pneuma*. She says:

The Chinese *Qi* is a vital overflowing force, as a fluid circulating everywhere, linking Heaven and earth, the humans and all beings. It is a prestigious force affecting many dimensions: cosmic, ethic, spiritual, social, medical, aesthetic, linking matter and spirit, heart and body, physics and metaphysics, emptiness and fullness, nothing and everything. What unifies and makes possible communion between all is the one and only *Qi*... Because of its rhythmic dynamism, its creative flexibility, its sweetness and its vigour, its unity made up of diversity, and its harmonious diversity, it allows us to go beyond certain breaks that exist in the dualist and static regime of thinking, allows us to seize better and more subtly the active and creative presence of the Spirit in the world, the mutual communication between Heaven and the humans.⁴⁴

Jesus is the 'receiver' and 'diffuser' of the heavenly *Qi* - the Spirit -, spreading harmony in the universe. In the Spirit - *Qi* - the humans are in solidarity with the whole universe in its process of moving towards cosmic harmony. This *Qi* is not something abstract. It is something that you can feel in the cosmos - the water and the wind, the light and the fire - and also in the physical (breathing), emotional and spiritual movements of the body.

⁴⁴ Lai-Kuen Kwong, "The Chinese *Qi* and Christian Anthropology," *IGNIS* 42, 2 (2012): 38-39.

The whole universe is embraced in the *Qi* of God and God lives in it, penetrates it, and makes it live and exist. The human and the whole universe, through the one and only *Qi* of God, make one whole. All together, they groan and wait for freedom, for a new and peaceful earth, and “give birth,” day after day, to the universal Christ in his fullness.⁴⁵

The Uncreated Energies

The Latin Church speaks mostly about objects and ideas. The Eastern Churches are more sensitive to the energy field. In the Eastern Church, God is said to reach out to the humans and the world through energy. God is infinite and unmoving. He reaches out to the universe through uncreated energies. These are different from the created energies that can be found in the humans and in the universe.

God, the mystery of mysteries, is at the same time hidden and revealed, inaccessible and capable of being participated in. In himself, in his essence and intra-divine life, God is *transcendent*, unknowable, invisible, beyond all names. He is the Total Other, the ultimate Reality, absolute, and “no one has ever seen him” (Jn. 1:18). At the same time, by his *energies*, God is *immanent* to the world, its most profound “interiority,” knowable, visible, present in his names.⁴⁶

God and God’s uncreated energies can be compared to the sun and its rays. God’s uncreated energies manifest themselves in revelation, creation, giving continuing life and in sanctification. In short, God is reaching out to the universe through God’s uncreated energies, and in the process transfiguring or divinizing it. The uncreated energies reach out to the created energies in us and in the universe. I think that the Chinese tradition may not be making this distinction clearly. In the Indian tradition the vision of the a-dvaita – not-two – makes a distinction that is not a separation. The Latin tradition, talking only about ‘substances,’ misses the dynamism of the energy field. It substitutes it with an army of angels. The role of the Spirit is not very much highlighted either. In the process, an experience of intimacy with God is lost.

Source of all reality, above all, through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6), the Father is present and acts in creation by his inseparable “two hands” which are the Son (Logos, Word) and the Holy Spirit. Each one has his role, complementary and inseparable from the other. The Logos structures and informs the world by his ideas-decisions (logoi). The Holy Spirit, present everywhere, animates and vivifies the world by her divine energies, permitting it to achieve fulfilment.⁴⁷

The experience of energy, therefore, makes the experience of the Spirit of God real for us.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁶ Michael Maxime Egger, “The Experience of Transfiguration,” *IGNIS* 42, 2 (2012): 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 49.

CHAPTER 13

ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

Stephen Hawking, a brilliant British scientist who passed away recently, said that given the way the Earth is being burnt up by our use of its resources today, humans may have to migrate to other planets in the universe, which can support life, in order to survive. What we see all around us is unbridled consumption of natural resources like water, minerals, fossil fuels, etc. The earth's atmosphere is being polluted and warmed up. The ice caps at the poles are melting. The sea levels are rising. The forest cover on the earth is being destroyed. Unrecyclable waste is produced in great quantities. Many natural species are disappearing. No wonder then the earth is becoming unlivable for humans. We have to do something to save the universe. We have to control our use or abuse of it. Our way of life will not only affect the universe; it affects us too – our bodies and through them our spirits.

Nature is not merely to be used or consumed. The trees and the flowers, the streams and the ocean, sun and rain, the wind and the clouds also offer us a beautiful surrounding for us to live in. It adds charm to our lives. We do not want to live in deserts. So we also have to conserve nature as our habitat – our living space. We use water. We breathe the air. We climb mountains. We enjoy the breeze.

Nature also offers us various energy sources. We produce electricity from running water or burning coal or oil. Nature as creation also reminds us of the Creator. We too, as creatures, are part of nature. Our spirit is our participation in God. But our body is born of the earth and is nourished by it.

Ecology

The resources of nature are gifts from God for humanity. We can cultivate them and use them. We are also supposed to share them, as a way of expressing and living our life as a community. What we call ecology is a way of living in harmony with nature and a way of using it equitably, so as to live as a community of humans. We can also raise our minds and spirits to God as the author of nature. It is more an art than a science. It is not only a way of living but a spirituality – a way of relating to the others and to God. We have to protect nature in order to protect ourselves.

Ecology becomes a theological issue, when religious vision and practice affect the way we treat nature. That is why we have to ask how the different religions look at and treat nature or creation.

We can look at creation in different ways. We can look at it as a collection of material objects which we can manipulate and use for our purposes, even if a creator is acknowledged as a sort of supplier. We can think of creation as a sort of an emanation from an Absolute. This would be a pantheistic perspective. God creates the world and shares God's own life with it. God animates it and leads it to fulfilment. The world, especially with the humans in it, has a certain freedom to choose different goals and courses of action and to act accordingly. How do the different religions look at creation?

Hinduism

Hinduism, in its popular forms, tends to divinize nature. The sun is a god, the moon is a goddess. The rivers like Ganges and Kaveri are goddesses too. The mountains are abodes of the gods – the Himalayas, Tirupathi, Palani, etc. In Vaishnavism, the Avatars of Vishnu take human and animal bodies according to circumstances. The world itself is seen as the body of God. The Bhagavad-Gita sings: “If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Spirit. And Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods.” (Gita 11:12-13). This was Krishna showing Arjuna his divine form. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad calls the Atman-Brahman the ‘Inner Controller’ of beings. The Katha Upanishad has a similar personal perspective: “From his light all these give light, and his radiance illumines all creation.” The Isa Upanishad offers a more advaitic perspective: “Behold the universe in the glory of God: and all that lives and moves on earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal... Who sees all beings in his own self, and his own self in all beings, loses all fear... The Spirit filled all with his radiance. He is the incorporeal and invulnerable, pure and untouched by evil. He is the supreme seer and thinker, immanent and transcendent.” (1,6,7).

It is not necessary for us here to go into the metaphysics of the relationship of the Atman-Brahman with the universe. What is important to realise is that the universe is not simply an assemblage of material objects but is animated by the Spirit. We can recall Teilhard de Chardin for whom the evolution of the universe is not simply a material process, but is animated by the Spirit.

Christianity

Paul says in his letter to the Colossians with reference to Jesus Christ: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in

heaven, but making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Col. 1:15-16, 19-20).

St. Ignatius of Loyola says in his *Spiritual Exercises*:

“I will consider how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants giving them life; in the animals giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally, how in this way he dwells also in myself, giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence; and even further, making me his temple, since I am created as a likeness and image of his Divine Majesty... I will consider how God labours and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth; that is, he acts in the manner of one who is labouring. For example, he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest, giving them their existence, conserving them, concurring with their vegetative and sensitive activities, and so forth...” God is therefore present and active in creation. (235-36).

Pope Francis reflects this same vision in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Praise be to you): “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dew drop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things.” (233).

Islam

Pope Francis also quotes a Muslim Sufi mystic, Ali al-Khawwas.

Prejudice should not have us criticize those who seek ecstasy in music or poetry. There is a subtle mystery in each of the movements and sounds of this world. The initiate will capture what is being said when the wind blows, the tree sways, water flows, flies buzz, doors creak, birds sing, or in the sound of strings or flutes, the sighs or the sick, the groans of the afflicted...” (*Laudato Si*, Note 159).

Another Muslim mystic sings:

In the market, in the cloister--only God I saw.
 In the valley and on the mountain--only God I saw.
 Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation;
 In favour and in fortune--only God I saw.
 In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
 In the religion of the Prophet--only God I saw.
 Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
 Qualities nor causes--only God I saw.
 I opened mine eyes and by the light of His face around me
 In all the eye discovered--only God I saw.
 Like a candle I was melting in His fire:
 Amidst the flames outflashing--only God I saw.
 Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,

But when I looked with God's eyes--only God I saw.
 I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
 And lo, I was the All-living--only God I saw.

Ethical Consequences

Pope Francis, in his encyclical cited above, speaks about ecology. I prefer to introduce you to his texts rather than paraphrase the ideas in my own words. The Pope draws ethical conclusions from the fact that Creation is God's gift to all peoples. They are supposed to share it equitably. The sun and the stars, the seas and the rains belong to all. Pope Francis says: "Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone." (LS 93). The right to private property is not absolute or inviolable, but subordinate to the universal destination of goods. The early Christians realized it when they "had all things in common: they would sell their possessions and distribute their proceeds to all, as any had need." (Acts 2:44-45). Pope Francis says "A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our heart lacks tenderness, compassion, and concern for our fellow human beings." (LS 91).

The contemporary world has made us compulsive consumers. We are caught up "in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending." (LS 203). People think that they are free only when they are free to consume. But the possibility of consumption is limited to a few who can afford it. And even they "have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends." (LS 203). People become egoistic and greedy. They seek to fill up the emptiness of their heart by increased consumerism. Turned to themselves, they have no sense of the common good. They do not respect any social norms, unless they agree with their own personal needs. This leads to social unrest. As the Pope remarks: "Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction." (LS 204).

But the Pope asserts that human beings can change. When people change their lifestyle, they can bring pressure on those who wield political, social and economic power. This happens when groups of people boycott certain products that contribute to ecological destruction, pressuring producing and marketing processes to change. He quotes Pope Benedict as saying, "Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply an economic – act." (LS 206).

Quoting the Earth Charter, he says: "Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life." (LS 207). A disinterested concern for the others and for the earth is not possible, if we do not move away from self-centredness and a utilitarian mind-set (individualism, unlimited progress,

competition, consumerism, the unregulated market), and move towards “harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God.” (LS 210).

In India, for instance, Mahatma Gandhi for the Hindus, and in Pakistan, Syed Abul Ala Mawdudi for the Muslims, have proposed the idea of trusteeship. There is no private ownership. Whatever we have, we hold it as trustees for the community. There is a good illustration of this principle in the Hindu sacrificial tradition, which speaks of *panchayagna* or five sacrifices. A householder, the mother, when she prepares the main meal of the day, is supposed to feed the gods and the ancestors by throwing some food into the sacrificial fire, feed the birds or animals, and offer food to a guest, before feeding the family.

Sources of Suffering

Pope Francis indicates a way in which we can look at Tsunamis, accidents, or even serious illnesses that are part of creation. Creating a world in need of development, God in some way sought to limit himself in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers, or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth, which he uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator. God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature, and this gives rise to the rightful autonomy of earthly affairs. His divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, “continues the work of creation.” The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities, and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge. (80). People living in colder climates could use less heating (which consumes fuel) and wear warmer cloths — What about excessive air conditioning in hotter climates?

Ecological Praxis

He lists some ecological habits: Avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights... reusing something instead of immediately discarding it... (LS 211). Such practices have a way of spreading to others, and of increasing our own self-esteem and self-satisfaction. – This is against a ‘throw away’ culture!

Pope Francis goes on to insist on a good aesthetic education: By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learnt to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. (LS 215).

Pope Francis then evokes the principle of “less is more.” A constant flow of goods can only distract us. Having fewer things helps us to cherish each thing and each moment. We learn to live in the present moment with full involvement without getting caught up in a rush of things and experiences, either regretting the past or dreaming of the future that prevents us from going deep into anything. We acquire a sense of detachment, moderation and simplicity. Practicing sobriety and humility, rather than dipping here and there, always looking for what they do not have, they learn to appreciate what they do have, appreciating each person and thing.

So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer. (*LS 223*).

CHAPTER 14

ASIAN SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is the path we have to walk in order to reach the goal of life. We find ourselves in a world where there seems to be an ongoing struggle between good and evil, not in the abstract, but concretely between good and evil people. We also note a tendency towards good and evil in each one of us. We also have the freedom to choose between them.

The Christian story of creation affirms that God created the world and the humans good. But people chose to do what they want than what God had destined them for. All the humans have inherited this tendency. But each one of us has the freedom to choose. Thanks to Augustine and Luther the Christian vision is that of a fallen world, in which we have to struggle to be good. The world and people in it are sinful. Jesus Christ has died for our sins. Through his sufferings and death on the cross he has paid back for our sins and has saved us. We have to appropriate this salvation through the various sacraments.

The Way of Jesus

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans compares Adam and Christ: “Just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.” (Rom. 5:18). We are in a world subject to the influence of these two persons. It is for us to choose to which camp we belong. Spirituality is the effort to follow the path that Jesus has shown us, for example, in the Sermon on the mount. We are called to be poor, meek and humble, to love the others, even our enemies, to forgive each other and be reconciled. (Mt. 5-6). The obstacles we face in our effort to follow Jesus can be summarised as egoism and pride, and the desire for money and earthly goods. Jesus warned us: “You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Mt. 6:24). On the last day of his life, Jesus gave the apostles (and us) just one commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn. 15:12). He also showed the implications of this love for the other in three of his gestures on that day. First of all, he washed the feet of his disciples as a sign of humility, asking them to wash each other’s feet. Secondly, he shared food with the others as a sign of not holding anything as one’s own, but sharing with others whatever one has. Thirdly, he was ready to lay down his own life for his friends. He died to defend the values he stood for. His death and rising enabled the disciples to launch the Kingdom he had proclaimed. His death was the death-knell of the old order which the Jewish leaders stood for.

The first Christian communities understood the way of Jesus. As a matter of fact, Christianity was known as the Way (Acts 19:23 and 22:4). "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." (Acts 2:44-45). St. Paul has a hymn to love in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

But slowly in the Western (Latin) Church a legalistic approach takes over. God is up there in heaven to reward our good deeds. The life of the Christians centres round Christ hanging on the Cross. Christ has suffered the punishment due to our sins. Still, we too have to pay back for our sins by various penances. The Spirit is not present very much, except in contemporary Charismatic movements. There were mystics, of course, and monasteries. But for ordinary Christians, religion centred around sacramental rituals. Popular devotions and pilgrimages were promoted. This is the spiritual tradition we have inherited. Of course, we have had saints like Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, and John Bosco. The question is, what kind of influence have they outside the narrow circle of their followers.

The Indian Advaita

It is in this context that we have to look at Asian spiritualities. For the Indians, God is not simply 'our Father in heaven' who is creator of the world. God is within us and in the world. We are in God and God is in us. We ourselves have been created in the image of God. We are in a way 'divine.' But this is a dimension we are blind to because of our ignorance, selfishness, and attachments. Christianity seeks to reach God (or heaven) as a reward for good behaviour. But the Indians seek to realize, become experientially aware of the God within, as the deepest element of one's own self. Once one reaches the Absolute within, in that Absolute one rediscovers everything, the whole cosmos. The Absolute embraces the whole cosmos, including myself. It is an advaitic or non-dual perspective. God and myself are not-two. We are not simply one either. I am, with the whole universe, in God. At the same time, God is my innermost being.

Nammalvar sings: "Becoming himself, filling and becoming all worlds, becoming him who becomes even me"⁴⁸; "My Lord who swept me away forever into joy that day, made me over into himself and sang in Tamil his own songs through me."⁴⁹ The Isa Upanishad says: "He moves, and he moves

⁴⁸ A.K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (Penguin Books, 1993), p. 77.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

not. He is far, and he is near. He is within all, and he is outside all. Who sees all being in his own Self and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear.”⁵⁰

Such an advaitic perspective is not absent in Christianity. Jesus declares: “The Father and I are one.” (Jn. 10:30). On the last day of his life, Jesus prays: “That they may all be one. As, you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (Jn. 17:21-23). St. Paul writes to the Colossians: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things were created, things visible and invisible... He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.” (Col. 1:15, 17, 19). It is worth meditating or contemplating on these texts and asking ourselves what that means for our experience of God, not only in prayer, but in life.⁵¹

Can we say that such an experience is not only for mystics but for everyone? It supposes, of course, that we have to get rid of our egoism and attachments that imprison us. St. Ignatius asks us to find God in all things. In his last contemplation ‘To Obtain Love’ in his *Spiritual Exercises*, he explains how God is present and working in each creature for us, feeding us, etc.

The Chinese Tao

The Chinese *Tao* is what is. But it is seen not as Being, but a force that is moving, alive, dynamic. That is why it is called the *Tao*, the way that the universe is or the things are. It is the way that is life, animated by the *Yin* and the *Yang*. *Yin* is the feminine principle, receptive, yielding. *Yang* is masculine, active, even aggressive. The first is the principle of inner personal transformation (Taoism). The second is the force of outer social construction (Confucianism). Taoism, as a way of life, is living in harmony with nature and society, avoiding any violent intervention, triggered by selfish desire. It is called the spirit of non-action or *Wu-Wei*. It is not the absence of action, but acting without artificiality, without attachment to the action itself, without desire. It is being natural, simple, free. Perhaps it can be compared to *nishkamakarma* or desireless action of Hinduism.

Tao is both the way and also the goal, which is also dynamic. It may be compared to the Hindu *Advaita* and the Buddhist *Nirvana* – also to the

⁵⁰ Juan Mascaro, trans., *The Upanishads* (Penguin, 1965), 49: 5-6.

⁵¹ May I refer to two of my books which may lead you a little deeper. M. Amaladoss, *Towards Fullness: Searching for an Integral Spirituality* (Bengaluru: NBCLC, 1994) and *The Dancing Cosmos: A Way to Harmony* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003).

Christian *Logos*. The first Christians from Syria who came to north-western areas of China in the 7-8th century translated the *Logos* as *Tao*.

Tao is nothing in so far as it cannot be identified with anything. It is not an object. It is nothing that we can know or say. It is nothing phenomenologically. It is emptiness. But it is transcendent wholeness that is at the origin of everything. Here we are going beyond the Creator-creature paradigm. The Creator is not an-other being, though infinite. It is more than simply a first cause. Transcending everything, it integrates everything. By dying to oneself, to the ego that clings to things, one becomes the *Tao*. It is a feminine way of non-violence. It is not dominating, but stooping to conquer. Evil and disorder are what we do to reality by our egoism.

All things between Heaven and Earth are the dynamic embodiments of the truth of being called the Way. If we act in conformity with our natures, we are content with our lot and are able to live happily. We must see that all things are originally one in order to realize the Way. And in order to see all things as one from such a standpoint, we must transcend all worldly things and all earthly events. What we must abandon above all is our impertinent sense of discrimination, that makes us distinguish between beautiful and ugly, good and bad, and so on, achieving non-attachment to honour, status and property. The true person thus re-born is indeed one embodying the Way. When we deny even ourselves, our true selves are revealed and we become absolutely free and non-abiding persons. It is only then that we will know for sure that we are one with all things, that everything is an embodiment of the way, and all things exist in joy and peace in the Way. One renounces, not to run away from the world, but to merge with the whole, with the Way and be free – to fly around like a butterfly.

The Way is the current of the dynamic force without beginning and without end. In this original current of the Way, all things come and go realizing themselves. With all its creations and evolutions, the Way will never boast of having reached fulfilment. Now empty and now full, the Way never retains its form for so much as a single moment.

In the Christian tradition, we can identify the *Tao* with Jesus Christ, who called himself “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (Jn. 14:6). But, like him, we have to empty ourselves. (cf. Phil. 2:7). The *Tao* can also be seen as the Spirit who is the moving force within us and the cosmos. As a matter of fact, it is the Trinity embracing and animating the whole universe.

The Asian methods of prayer, particularly Yoga and Zen, through their techniques of breathing and concentration, aim at emptying one’s consciousness of the self and the world to let the Absolute shine forth in all its splendour and fullness. One cannot empty one’s consciousness if one does not do away with one’s egoism, desires and attachments. This does not mean that one sits quietly doing nothing. One does what one has to do. One fulfils one’s role in the universe. The *Tao* or the *Atman* lives and works in

you. In a theistic perspective, I can say that one lets God act in and through oneself. One can then confess with Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20). St. Ignatius would say that it is finding God in all things and all things in God. The God who works in the universe, as Ignatius affirms in the 'Contemplation to obtain love,' also works in you and me. The only difference is that, unlike the other creatures, we have to let God live and work in us.

Secularising the Sacred

Jesus himself, in his description of the final judgment, almost secularises the Sacred. He tells the blessed: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Mt. 25:40). We can experience God in the other who needs our love. Earlier in his public life, he had told someone who questioned him about the greatest commandment, to love God and his neighbour. (cf. Mt. 22:37-39). But on the last day of his life, he says: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 17:12). God seems to disappear here. I think the implication here is that we love God in the other. This is what I call the secularization of the Sacred. The risk, of course, is that the sacred dimension is ignored. The Eastern traditions like Buddhism may speak more of compassion and inter-being than of love. But what matters is to reach out to the other(s) and build community. Where there is real community, God is present, even if God is not openly acknowledged.

God as Spirit

Becoming aware of the God within myself and in the cosmos is to realize that we are facing not a dominating God above who demands, but an inspiring God who animates and enables from within. It also facilitates the dialogue with God in others and in the world, discovering God by reading the signs of the times. Another dimension of this God-experience is the practical realization of God as Spirit. As I had indicated earlier, our approach to God is Christocentric. Here we realize that God is also Spirit, present and active everywhere and at all times. Such an awareness helps us to relate to the divine manifestation in other religions and in all people of good will. The symbols of this mystery are multiple. They are facilitators rather than mediators. The Spirit itself can lead us to newness that transcends history and culture. The Spirit is new, creative, inspiring, free, daring. While a focus on Jesus tends to historicize and institutionalize our perspectives, the Spirit frees.

The Biblical tradition of the Trinity is Father-centred. Sometimes I wonder whether we cannot think of a Trinity that is Spirit-centred. The Spirit is the creative source from which arises the creative force of the Father and restoring force of the Son. We also recognize today that the Spirit is everywhere. The Spirit is immanent and transcendent. When we discern

and seek and find the will of God, the Spirit seems free and unstructured. The Spirit is said to blow where it (she) wills. The Indian tradition speaks of God's *leela* or play. There is nothing pre-determined. One thinks of the 'dependent co-arising' of Buddhism. Given the interplay of divine and human freedom we should not hang on to tradition, but be open to newness, which may look unstructured only because the deeper structures of the Spirit are unknown to us at the moment.

The Body

Asian spiritualities also valorise the body. The Indian yoga is an independent system of psycho-somatic spirituality. Postures and methods of breathing can facilitate relaxation and concentration. But for those who wish, it opens a whole field of energy, that is supra-normal and supra-human. Structured by the seven *chakras* that can be accessed through the breath and concentration, it reaches out to the energy field in others and in the universe. This need not necessarily be spiritual. But it helps us to rise beyond the normal. It can be used for purposes of healing. There are systems of healing based on energy like Reiki and Pranic healing that operate both at physical as well as personal and social levels. At popular levels they may be imaged as spirits. Such energy can be used to heal, but also to harm. Such supra-normal phenomena can be confused with super-natural phenomena. This is an area that has to be handled carefully. Valorising the body in spirituality will also valorise the arts like music and dance, and their use for concentration and contemplation. The yogic techniques for quietening the body and the mind; and concentrating are also used by other systems like Zen.

Conclusion

Asian Christian spirituality does away with a dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. It makes us move from ritual to life. Rather, life becomes ritual. It secularises the sacraments and valorises the priesthood of the People. It is closer to the cosmic religiosity of the people. It integrates the body and the cosmos with the spirit. It is not 'spiritual' in a narrow sense. It helps us to find God in all things. It moves away from a spirituality that is built around sin, punishment and satisfaction. It promotes inner freedom. It lives in the present moment.

CHAPTER 15

MOTHER MARY IN OUR LIVES

Jesus was hanging on the Cross. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple: “Here is your mother.” The Church understands this scene as Jesus telling all of us that Mary is our mother. John represented all of us. A mother gives birth, loves, nourishes and helps growth, protects, supports, guides, and is a model. Mary is all this for us in our spiritual lives.

We see her with the disciples after the death of Jesus. St. Ignatius of Loyola tells us that it is evident that the risen Jesus must have appeared first to her. This can be taken for granted. She was in the upper room at Pentecost with the foundational group of the Church. (Acts 1:15). Though we do not hear much about her afterwards, she must have been a point of reference to the early Church. She must have narrated to the disciples details about the early life of Jesus. The disciples too must have visited her to get her guidance, wherever she was.

Mary is following us in our own lives through her apparitions in all parts of the world. She appears mostly to children! About 12 of these are officially recognized, but there are many more according to oral tradition. The more famous are Guadalupe (Mexico), Lourdes, and Fatima. But Marian apparitions are claimed in many countries. (Our Lady of Health of Velanganni is for the Indians!) Her message is simple. She calls for conversion, personal and global. She asks for prayers for peace and harmony in the world. The story of the miracle of water turning into wine at Cana, shows us that we have to go to Jesus through Mary.

Mary and Jesus

The Council of Ephesus (431) proclaimed that Mary is the mother of God, because, though she was the mother of the human Jesus, he was personally divine. She was not the mother of a ‘nature’ (the humanity of Jesus), but of the ‘person’ who was the Son of God. It is this belief that Mary is the mother of God which leads us to believe that she was conceived without original sin (Pius IX, 1854). Being without sin, she did not die like other humans, but was assumed, body and spirit, to heaven. (Pius XII, 1950). But the Church has refused other titles like Mediatrix and Co-redemptrix. Christ is the sole redeemer and mediator.

Throughout her life, Mary was free in collaborating with God in total obedience, without always knowing all the implications. The pattern is set at the annunciation. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Lk. 1:38). The actual 'Magnificat' may be a later composition. But Mary knew the implications of her vocation at least vaguely. She is observing silently the various events surrounding the birth of Christ: the angels and the shepherds, the presentation of Jesus in the temple, the visit of the three wise men and the running away to Egypt. The words of Simeon and Anna in the temple were certainly of a different tone from the Magnificat. "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel... and a sword will pierce your own soul also." (Lk. 2:34). This was a first warning. After twelve years, the question of the lost and found Jesus in the temple "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" was a second. But all Mary could do was "to treasure all these things in her heart." (Lk 2:51). Understanding was to come slowly much later.

During the public life of Jesus, Mary was not totally detached. She was at the marriage at Cana, as if to initiate the ministry of Jesus, since he works his first miracle there. At the same time, she seems to have kept a distance, though, whenever her name comes up Jesus pays her a hidden compliment. "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mk. 3:34). "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it." (Lk. 11:28).

Mary goes to Jerusalem with Jesus for the paschal celebration. I think Mary must have participated in the Last Supper and must have been in the upper room when Jesus appeared to the disciples. I have seen at least one painting of the Last supper in which Mary is present, kneeling! She was there at Pentecost. Then she goes into the background, as far as the Acts of the Apostles are concerned. But we cannot imagine Mary keeping quiet in a secluded sort of life. She must have been a point of reference and must have been encouraging the apostles and others like St. Paul.

Conclusion

Mary certainly calls us to imitate her in discerning and doing God's will in our lives, irrespective of the consequences. Her Magnificat certainly places before us a framework for our own lives. Mary is our mother and we go to her for all our needs. But do we respond to her call for conversion: to discern God's will and do it? And to pray for the success of God's and our mission to build Christ's Kingdom in the world, promoting justice, sharing, and peace, working in collaboration with all people of good will? Or do we tend to honour her and go to her for our needs rather than join her in doing God's will? The way of Mary in our lives is simply what she told the servants at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you." (Jn. 2:5). Then water will turn into wine! Our lives too will be transformed!

PART III

THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

CHAPTER 16

GOSPEL AND CULTURE

Culture is the way people live, the language they speak, the songs and dances they create, the way they eat, dress and celebrate life and build community. When the Portuguese traders came to India in the 16th century, soldiers and priests came with them. The priests, not only catered to the Portuguese, they also preached the Good News and made other people Christian. But Christianity was transmitted with its cultural baggage. The people who became Christian also became culturally Portuguese. The rituals of worship in the Church were in Latin. They began dressing and eating, even beef, like the Portuguese. They even adopted Portuguese names like Rodrigo, Miranda, Gomez, etc. For some of the poorer fisher people along the coast, this may have been upward mobility socially, associating with the group of people who held economic and political power. The Gospel came with a cultural baggage. Some catechism and popular prayers may have been translated into the local languages. The Church became a Portuguese colony. Churches were built in Portuguese style. The Church's administrative structures were also imported with bishops, priests and catechists. This was also the situation in the Coromandel coast in south-east India in the fisher villages around Tuticorin.

Roberto de Nobili

When Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) came to India and landed in Madurai there was a Christian colony there, mostly of traders, looked after by a Portuguese priest. De Nobili himself was Italian. He studied the situation. He found that Christianity was not reaching out to the people of the dominant castes, because they thought it was a low-caste, foreign religion. Looking at the caste system, he thought that if he succeeded in converting the Brahmins, the others would follow. So he presented himself as a Brahmin sannyasi. He learnt Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. (Telugu was the language of the Nayaks who ruled Madurai.) He tried to show the Indians that one can be culturally Indian while becoming religiously Christian. He supported the caste system as a social system. Coming from a feudal European society with its nobles and common people, it looked normal to him. He explained the faith and even criticised Hindu doctrines like rebirth in his Tamil books. De Nobili's approach to Indian culture became the official policy of Jesuit missionaries. They went even a step further. There were Brahmin sannyasis to focus on the higher castes and Pandaraswamis to care for the others. It was not an exclusive division, but a question of focus. John de

Britto and Beschi (Viramamunivar) were Pandaraswamis. We know what sort of literary giant Beschi became.

While the way of life became Indian, the official worship remained in Latin. But it did not satisfy the people. So they developed a lively popular religiosity for their devotions, life cycle rituals associated with birth, marriage, death, etc. and seasonal cycles as in agriculture, and festivals, and celebrations. These were in Tamil and followed Tamil culture, adapting practices borrowed from Hinduism but Christianized with a prayer or a sign of the cross. The Tamil writings of Beschi show that the Swamijis encouraged it. Beschi's writings were certainly meant to be read and sung. The Pasch or Passion play and dramas based on the lives of saints were common in many villages. In the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, a lot of songs were composed and published, with the indication of the ragas and talas with which they have to be sung. Poets like Vedanayagam Pillai contributed to Tamil (Karnatic) music, with songs that could be sung by people of all religions. But theology was studied and liturgy was still celebrated in Latin. Theological journals in English appeared in the 1930s. This situation continued until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), but even before the council there was some talk about indigenization, culture, etc.

Cultural Pluralism in Vatican II

The very first document on the *Liturgy* encouraged what can be called indigenization. It took as its goal the promotion of full, active and intelligent participation of the people in the liturgical celebrations. It said: "The Liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with passage of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable." (21). It continues: "provision shall be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples, especially in mission countries." (38). It goes on to say, "In some places and circumstances, however, an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed," and the responsibility for this is given to the local conferences of bishops. (40).

The document on the *Church* says, the Church "fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples." (13). The document on the *Church in the Modern World* says:

The Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilized the resources of different cultures in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in various aspects of the life of the faithful... The Church is faithful to its traditions and is at the same time

conscious of its universal mission; it can then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves. (58).

Inculturation

In the 1970s the term ‘inculturation’ emerges in mission circles. In the beginning, the Church, with its origins in Semitic Palestine, got inculturated in Greece and Rome. Latin was the language used in Rome. But in the missions that accompanied colonialism, the Church structures were simply transplanted. The Catechism was translated. Very much later the Bible too was translated. But the liturgy (and theology too) remained in Latin. There were some adaptations of externals. Compared to these processes like transplantation, adaptation and translation, the term ‘inculturation’ indicated a deeper process. Patterned on the term ‘incarnation,’ it suggested that the Word of God must become incarnate in every culture. This term was welcomed by the local churches.

The Office of Theological Concerns of the FABC looks at inculturation from the point of view of the emergence of a local Church. It says:

Inculturation consists not only in the expression of the Gospel and the Christian faith through cultural medium, but includes, as well, experiencing, understanding and appropriating them through the cultural resources of a people. As a result, the concrete shape of the local Church will be, on the one hand, conditioned by culture, and, on the other hand, the culture will be evangelized by the life and witness of the local Church.⁵²

Today people seem to have a certain freedom in the area of theologizing and in spirituality. In India, we have an Association of Indian theologians and they have been trying to reflect on the Indian situation, life and its problems, from the point of view of their faith.⁵³ The theological literature has been abundant and has led the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith to take note of them critically, from their (European) point of view. Just as no one can tell someone else how to think, so no one can be told how to pray. So the Indians have also felt free to develop an Indian Christian spirituality. The first Indian Christian ashram was founded in 1950. Now there are many ashrams. Efforts are made to practice Indian methods of prayer. Yoga is practiced also as a help to spirituality. Some have tried to experience a Christian *advaita* or non-duality. Of course, this is not the place to go deep into these matters.

⁵² See “Theses on the Local Church,” *FABC Papers* 60 (Hongkong, FABC, 1991).

⁵³ See for instance Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Chennai: Christian Literature Society, 1969) for a history. For a more contemporary effort, see M. Amaladoss, S.J., *Quest for God: Doing Theology in India* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2013).

The administrative structures of the Church are based on Roman Canon Law. When it was revised after the Council, there was a suggestion to have a first section on general principles and then a second section that will be adapted to each region. But this suggestion was not taken. In the area of the liturgy, in spite of the provisions made in the document which I have referred to earlier in this chapter, nothing much has been done, except for some singing and dancing in Congo in Africa and the use of oil lamps and Anjali hasta – holding one's palms together as a sign of worship – and also some dancing in India. The texts of the official prayers can only be a literal translation of the originals in Latin. We cannot pray in our own way in our own languages – except in private prayer. Washing with water to purify, imposition of hands to bless, anointing as a sacred sign, and eating and drinking together to indicate community, are universal rituals. But can the people use any oil locally available which people usually use? Can they eat and drink what they normally eat and drink, rather than use something else or even import the material from elsewhere, as happens in some countries in Africa where wheat and grapes are not grown? Such questions continue to be discussed. In the meantime, our rituals look exotic and not fully meaningful.

What Culture? – The Problem with the Popes

In the meantime, Popes St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI have been ambiguous regarding the very idea of inculturation. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, addressing a meeting at Regensburg, Germany, declared:

In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieu. This thesis is not simply false, but it is coarse and lacking in precision.⁵⁴

As an Indian theologian, I find the final sentence insulting. He has also said on other occasions that the inculturation of the Church in Greek culture is providential and normative for others. He had a great respect for Greek rationalism and tried to impose it on others. But in another talk on the Syrian poet-saint St. Ephrem, he acknowledged that Christianity also had a different inculturation in Aramaic-Syrian culture. He even refers to the influence of the Syrian Church in India. This only shows that we have to be careful in interpreting Papal texts.

⁵⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," Lecture at the University of Regensburg, accessed May 10, 2021, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

Similarly, John Paul II, in his encyclical *Faith and Reason* says:

When the Church deals for the first time with cultures of great importance, but previously unexamined, it must even so never place them before the Greek and Latin inculturation already acquired. Were this inheritance to be repudiated the providential plan of God would be opposed, who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. (72).

But he also says: “Simply because the mission of preaching the Gospel came first upon Greek philosophy in its journey, this is not taken to mean that other approaches are excluded.” (72). He also exhorts the Indians:

An immense spiritual impulse compels the Indian mind to an acquiring of that experience which would, with a spirit freed from the distractions of time and space, attain to the absolute good. This is the time, above all for Indian Christians, to unlock these treasures from their inheritance. (72).

Please note that all three quotations above from John Paul II are from the same number.

Transforming Culture

The Gospel is also supposed to transform culture. St. Paul said: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:27-28). This text affirms a basic equality. But when he comes to practical directives, Paul has to take account of the prevailing social situation. So he asked women to cover their heads and not to speak in public. (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5). He sent Onesimus, the runaway slave, back to Philemon his master. The Christians – even the bishops and the religious – practiced slavery for 18 centuries. The Church was not in the forefront of the movement that officially abolished it. If today we look at the fate of foreign workers in Europe and elsewhere, we can ask whether the abolition has been only formal. The women too are not really equal in the Church and in the world, if we consider the #Me too movement. They are still exploited in various ways. The caste system and racism are still strong, even among the Christians, especially in rural areas.

Today we have other problems to face. One is secularization. We are told that in California in the USA, one third of the people declare themselves atheist. Another third claim to be spiritual, but not religious. They do not belong to nor practice any religion. Only a third claim to belong to a religion. If we look at the youth today, especially in urban areas, we can say that a similar situation may also develop here.

Other problems are unbridled consumerism, elaborate and wasteful celebrations, the improper use of the social media, widespread corruption in public life, the abuse of women and even children, etc. I need not develop these problems further.

A final issue, linked to consumerism, is the question of ecological destruction and the need to protect creation. There are many efforts to create an awareness about these and I need not add to these.

CHAPTER 17

TOWARDS A NEW HUMANITY

We have described earlier evangelization in Asia (India) as a three-fold dialogue of the Gospel with the many poor, the rich cultures, and the living religions of Asia (India). We have briefly explored the dialogue between the Gospel and the religions and cultures. It is time to reflect on the dialogue of the Gospel with the many poor. India is rated as the fastest growing country in the world today. But the growth is only making the rich people richer and the gap between the rich and the poor is growing too. Poverty is primarily an economic category. But the poor are also politically powerless – except for the ‘vote’ which also is sold for money today – and socially marginalized and excluded. Even the religious leaders exploit their vulnerability, by encouraging them to go to various saints to satisfy their needs in miraculous ways. How can we bring the Gospel to the poor in such a situation?

Option for the Poor

At a basic level, we have to do what we can to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and help them to meet their basic needs. Jesus cured their various illnesses. He even fed the people occasionally in a miraculous way. These were symbolic gestures to recall to us our own responsibility to meet the needs of the poor. Mother Teresa and many others who are engaged in similar work are models for us. By opting to be poor, not having resources of his own and depending on the good will of others, Jesus also shows his dependence on others. Building up self-sufficient institutions was not one of his options. He did not seek to organize the poor to promote (violent) revolutionary movements, as some leftist politicians may seek to do. He sought to convert both the rich and the poor, not to be attached to money, but to share and to build community. He said clearly: “No one can serve two masters... God and wealth.” (Mt. 6:24). The early Christian communities understood the message. They sold what they had and had everything in common, each one taking what he or she needed. (cf. Acts 2:44-46). Jesus chose not only to help the poor, but to be poor – unattached –, to look at the world from the point of view of the poor, and to struggle with the poor to build communities of fellowship and sharing, and, in this way, change the world.

An Analysis of Society

In the 1970s a new stream of theology, known as liberation theology was born in Latin America. The liberation of the poor and the oppressed was

their goal. To understand the problems of poverty they used the analysis proposed by Karl Marx, which was primarily economic and political, and so were branded 'Marxists.' Some of them also suggested a violent revolution. The Church at large was not for a violent but a non-violent revolution. Some suggested that the analysis of society should not be merely Marxist, but more integral. I therefore suggest an analysis of society focusing on six elements: economics-politics, person-society, and culture-religion.

Economics deals with the production and distribution of goods to meet people's needs. Profit making is the goal. Needs are artificially created through advertisements. The cost of production is kept low because of low wages. The profit margins are high. Today commerce – the market - and banking are more profitable than production. People who have money to invest make more money. The wage earner remains poor. Today the corporates have taken over both production and marketing. The corporations are controlled by the few rich. The politicians are supposed to promote a good life for the people. But today they work hand-in-glove with the rich. Money and freebies buy votes even in democracies. The politicians make laws to protect the rich and their business interests. Following the old Roman principle, the people are kept satisfied by 'food and entertainment.' The poor continue to remain poor while the rich grow richer. There is a middle class that keeps things going.

Social relations structure activities in society. In India, besides the rich and the poor, the society is also structured by the unequal caste system. Gender discrimination and ethnic diversity add to the confusion. Religion also has become a socially divisive factor because of communalism, which pretends that people who share a religion also share economic and political interests. Contemporary living patterns promote individualism. The wider family unit seems to be disappearing, not to speak of tensions within families. A competitive spirit may also interfere with social relationships.

Culture refers to the worldviews, attitudes and value systems of people. There is no doubt that these are being challenged today by the impact of factors like globalization, consumerism, and forces for change at every level. Corruption has become a way of life. The media also contributes to the destruction of culture through misinformation and manipulation. Religion is the quest for ultimate meaning in life. But today fundamentalism and communalism are blunting the prophetic force of religion. Need based rituals and fake gurus abound.

Transforming Society

In such a situation, our goal cannot be simply helping the poor. This may be necessary. But eventually we must address the structures that make and keep people poor. We must promote freedom, equality, brotherhood, and justice in society. These are also the goals of our Constitution. Our

attention to the poor may make us aware of the situation of society. But the poor alone are powerless to change anything. Revolts and revolutions have not really liberated the people. They have only brought new masters. Only the dominant groups can bring about change. The prophetic message of Jesus was in favour of the poor. But it addresses critically the people who were in power – the Pharisees and the High priests. They felt challenged and put him away. They have to be freed from the alienation and the dehumanization that comes with wealth and power, that also encourages selfishness and pride.

What Jesus does is to launch alternate communities that have a prophetic role in society. This was the Church. It was persecuted, precisely because it challenged the consciences of the rich and the powerful. But eventually the Church endured while the rich and the powerful disappeared. Jerusalem was destroyed. So was eventually Rome. It was not the Church that destroyed them. They were brought down by internal factors and external enemies. But the Church endured and held society together. So what we need to promote are not political and revolutionary movements, but alternate ways of living as a community. Unfortunately, the Church too became occasionally politicised. But saints kept it on the right path, even if a period of confusion could not be avoided – as when there were two or three Popes at the same time supported by different political powers seeking to use religion – that is, the Church and its ministers as a political tool. At the same time, the Church itself was helped, in the course of its history, by various religious Congregations, who do not offer alternate ways of being the Church, but witness to one or other dimensions or values that are important. So there are groups that stress poverty. Others are involved in actively helping the poor, the migrants, the marginalized, the excluded, the sick, the abandoned, etc. Still others highlight the spiritual dimension by focusing on prayer and contemplation. Together they offer models of alternative ways of living in community in the world.

The Challenge to the People of God

It is from this point of view that the People of God are challenged to provide models of Christian behaviour in the world. What is needed from them is not that they should spend more time in prayer, show an example of poor living, take part in liturgical and catechetical activities, read and reflect over the Bible, etc. Some of this is useful. But what is needed from the People of God – the Lay people, if someone wants more clarity – is that they be committed politicians, model business men, devoted servants of the people in the various offices where they may be working, excellent educators, competent lawyers and judges, good family people, involved in the social life of the wider community, reaching out to people of other religions and all people of goodwill, concerned with the promotion of social equality and defence of gender justice. In a word, they have to be good people, not fake

priests or religious who have taken their vows. From this point of view, we may have to rethink the character and role in society and Church of the Basic Christian Communities. Unfortunately, while the People seem to be trying to become more like priests and religious, these latter are seeking to become more like the People of God, getting involved in politics and business.

Reforming Religion

If we look around the Church in Asia, a lot of resources appear to be spent in building or rebuilding Churches. Popular devotions are promoted. People are encouraged to pray. New forms of prayer associated with Charismatic groups seem to be attracting more and more people. Pilgrimages are encouraged. Festivals are celebrated more elaborately and are becoming more expensive. Devotions to various popular saints are also encouraged. I am sure all these efforts are making people more religious. Are they making them better Christians? Are they attracting the young people? Are they making the people better? Are we sensitive to the different charisms of young people? These are questions that are worth reflecting on. A certain concern to help the poor and the needy has characterised Christian congregations. But how active are they in the social and political life of the wider community? We defend minority rights. Are we equally sensitive to the basic rights of the people, especially of the poor?

A New Humanity

Our focus until now has been rather the Christian community. But in India, and also in the world, we cannot think of the human community as being only Christian. Christianity may be the biggest religion. But it is still a minority in the world. In India we are a very small minority. India is a multi-religious country. We can think of a new humanity in India only as a multi-religious community. While there are divisive movements, religious fundamentalism, and communalism, the majority of the people are tolerant. In any case, building a new humanity also involves facing and overcoming divisive forces. A first step in this effort will be to link up with all people of goodwill, whatever be the religion they belong to.

We have already clarified two things above. It may be good to recall them here. Dialogue between religions is no longer a conversation leading to mutual understanding. Today we are speaking of dialogue in action. We have to collaborate in building up the human community. In a narrow perspective of mission, the goal of dialogue may be said to be the Church. Dialogue is considered as a way to mission. Today we say that dialogue is worthwhile in itself. We are reaching out to the same God. There is only one God. So not only can we know more about God by sharing our experiences of God, we can even pray together to God to achieve the goal that God has set for Godself and for us. It is to gather all things together. (cf. Eph. 1:3-

10; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Cor. 15:28). So today we say that the goal of dialogue is not the Church, but the Kingdom of God which is a cosmic reality. So it demands collaboration between different religious groups. As a matter of fact, Asian theologians like Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka speak about the Basic Human Communities, consisting of members of all religions, side by side with Basic Christian Communities. This will really be a challenge in India. Because of the caste system, forming a community even within one religious group is difficult. Forming multi-caste, multi-religious communities will really be a challenge. We can say that in a secular society that is India, all the religions in dialogue should be able to offer a common ethical and spiritual base, for common life and action in the world.

Such a process will involve a reform of religions themselves as they are. In Hinduism, for example, scheduled caste Hindus cannot enter some temples. Some kinds of women cannot enter some other temples. Such discriminations are not absent in other religions, including Christianity. So a concrete goal of dialogue will be mutual conversion, so to speak. Such conversions will be possible if our focus is not on rules and rituals, but on God; not on the institutions, but on charism; not on rituals, but on life.

Conclusion

We can conclude with the vision of the Book of Revelation. It speaks of 'a new heaven and a new earth.'

See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
They will be his peoples,
And God himself will be with them;
He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
Mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
For the first things have passed away.
And the one who was seated on the throne said,
"See, I am making all things new." (Rev. 21:3-5).

Let us participate in this creative activity of God, because God will not do this without us.

CHAPTER 18

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The world is said to have about 300 million indigenous people, of whom more than 150 million are in Asia. Quite a few of these are Christians. But our discourse about Christian theology and life often does not take them into consideration. Aloysius Pieris makes a distinction between cosmic and meta-cosmic religiosity. The world religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam speak of the divine as transcendent, that is, above the cosmos – meta-cosmic. They seek God by withdrawing from the world and engaging in meditation and rational enquiry. But the popular streams of the meta-cosmic religions and the religions of indigenous people relate rather to the divine in the world or the cosmos. They live in a world of nature and ancestor spirits, though a supreme God may be recognized. They interact with the spirits through various rituals that characterise life and nature cycles (the seasons). This is said to be cosmic religiosity. The theologians often operate at the meta-cosmic level. They tend to look down upon the religious practices and rituals of the simple people, who do not have a theological discourse either. But given the fact that almost a majority of the people may belong to the cosmic level of religiosity, though they may occasionally participate in meta-cosmic rituals, it is good to take some time to look at their cosmic rituals and beliefs.

A Personal Story

To help us to understand the difference between these two levels of religion, I would like to start with a personal story. My father died about 30 years ago. When the time for the funeral came, I started a small revolution by opting to have the funeral mass at home, not officially permitted, rather than go to a nearby chapel which was rather small. When the mass was over, I was stopped from starting the funeral procession to the cemetery. An old lady appeared from somewhere. Under her direction, my sister-in-law was directed to bring a full measure of rice and was asked to touch the head, the chest, and the feet of my father, starting with a small sign of the cross made over the body, with the measure of rice. Then this rice was taken into the house and was emptied in a corner of the main hall and an oil lamp was placed on the heap of rice. I shall not go into the other rituals while the body of my father was ritually bathed before the funeral and then at the grave, after I had said the official prayers. Being interested in symbols, I began reflecting what this ritual could mean. Rice, as food, is the symbol of life. By touching the body of my father his spirit was being absorbed, so

to speak, in the rice. While the body was being taken away the spirit was partly kept back in the house. This was done, not by my mother, but by my sister-in-law, that is the next generation in the family. During the period of mourning – three days – when relatives and friends from far away came to the house after the funeral, they went straight to the heap of rice with the lamp, expressed their grief and then only sympathized with the people in the house. For them the heap of rice was the spirit of my father. It was taken away once the official period of mourning was over. The ritual was obviously pre-Christian. It was Christianized with a sign of the cross. There was no prayer. But the taking away of the body did not mean, for them, that the ancestor was leaving the house totally. He continued there, at least for ritual purposes, in the symbol of rice. I am sure that the parish priest (and the Church) would have looked on this as a superstitious gesture, without understanding its significance. Probably the Chinese, with their own practice of experiencing the presence of their ancestors through the symbol of tablets, would have understood it.

The Indigenous People

A UN sub-commission, to protect the interests of the Indigenous People, has described them in the following words:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations, are those which having an historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves as distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society, and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as people in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institution, and legal system.

Often the lands which these Indigenous People occupy also contain mineral and other natural resources. The more ‘civilized’ people who have the economic and political power in the country seek to occupy their land, driving them away from it and destroying their community. The identity, relationship, and community of the people is closely linked to the land and to the various divine and natural and animal spirits living there, and the spirits of their ancestors who have lived there before them. Effectively, their community is being destroyed as a consequence of the aggressive globalization that one speaks of. This has been happening in the Americas and Africa and parts of Asia too, and it is ongoing. The Indigenous People and their land need to be protected. This is an issue of social justice and needs to be taken seriously.

Indigenous Religion

But my concern in this brief chapter is their religious life. Many of these Indigenous groups become Christian. In the process, another kind of

aggression may be taking place in the religious sphere. Missionaries who come from more developed areas or countries may try to impose their meta-cosmic religious structures and theology on these people, and thus alienate them from their own religious and cultural context. The Indigenous people normally live in a world full of spirits. God is the great Spirit. But there are also other nature and family spirits that help and structure their lives. Their ancestors are with them and looking after them, and they need to be remembered and honoured periodically. They also should try to live like them. Then there are other spirits that bring them sickness and healing, sun and rain, good or bad harvests. There are also evil spirits who bring misfortune. They have shamans and rituals to control the evil spirits and to benefit from the good ones. Sometimes we hear stories of people who seek to harm others by the intermediary of evil spirits. The role of the shaman is to facilitate by the use of symbolic ritual, the interaction between the ancestor and nature spirits and the community. Their facilitating rituals may follow closely the seasons.

Technically speaking the Church should not have any big problem in functioning in such a situation. We have our supreme God, the master of all. But we also have a host of angels and saints, not to speak of the devils. We read of their interventions in the Bible. We hear of Jesus casting out demons on a regular basis and freeing and healing people. But there are three kinds of problems.

The Problems

One problem is that while we have our own army of angels, saints and devils to do God's bidding and to answer our prayers, we simply reject the local good and evil spirits as pagan. This does not always work. We may not be able to avoid some syncretism. I have another story. With another priest friend I went to visit a cousin of his. She had a small baby, who was getting sick with what seemed a simple fever. They were educated people living in the city. They went to the doctor who gave medicines. But the child was not getting healed. Then they took the child to the church, got the blessing of the priest and also lit candles on the altars of the saints in addition to their prayers. The fever however continued. Living in a multi-religious country, friends, probably non-Christian, suggested that there may be some 'evil eye' involved. The local experts in casting away evil eyes were Muslim shamans. So a shaman was also approached. Finally the child got well. And since two priests were visiting the house, we were also asked to bless the child and the house. When I encountered a similar case in Cameroon in Africa some years ago, in the company of a priest who was also functioning as a shaman, and asked an adult person who had been healed, "To whom do you attribute the healing?" The answer came immediately, "To God." It is always God who heals and God can use any means! Going to different ritual specialists is like approaching different doctors according to need and reputation. Given the

present openness to other religious traditions and their rituals, we cannot really be critical of such an attitude. A basic trust in God is there. There are not many gods. But there is an openness to the possibility that God may be approached through a variety of means. I think that most people have such an open attitude. The openness that we have to other religions at the meta-cosmic level should also be there at the cosmic levels.

The second problem is that, with increasing secularization, the spirits, good and evil and even Godself may be disappearing from the awareness of modern generations. For people affected by secularization, the world of the spirits itself is taboo. But we are still living in a world of pilgrimages and miracles.

The Energy Field

The third problem is that today we have healing systems that do not invoke any divine intervention, but claim to heal you by activating your own energy system by touch, imposition of hands or other mental means. The Yoga system believes strongly in the flow of energy in the body and in the universe, and claims that it can be directed physically or even through intention. There are healing systems like Reiki from Japan, Pranic healing from the Philippines, and Hands-on healing from the United States. All these systems go to the Yoga system with its chakras in the human body for a theoretical system to explain themselves, though they may not take seriously the spiritual orientations of the Yoga system. The Yoga sadhana or spiritual practice is supposed to lead one to an experience of an absolute oneness in oneself and with reality. One becomes part of a universal energy field. Yoga is not merely about healing but about oneness with the Absolute – a total self-integration. Technically, the system of Indian Yoga claims to be agnostic, if not atheistic. Something similar may be true also of Taoism, with its *Yin-Yang* dynamics, and the flow of *Qi* or energy in the Chinese tradition.

Another phenomenon that can be evoked in this context is the healings and prophecies that take place in the context of charismatic prayer. Denying such phenomena is easy. But explaining it away is rather difficult. We know the use of blessed water, oil, etc. in the context of popular religiosity. An element of faith is there, since a special power is attributed to the blessing given by an authorized person or to the sacred place from which it is procured. As a matter of fact the whole sacramental system of the Catholic church comes into question here, involving God, the agent or minister, and the object or actions like washing, anointing, etc.

I think that if the human and cosmic energy can be used to heal, it can also be used to harm people. Without pronouncing any judgment on the existence of good and evil spirits in the universe, some of the phenomena we attribute to the spirits may also be caused by human energy that is

consciously (or unconsciously) directed. Since this force is not visible or tangible, we attribute it to the spirits. Just as through Reiki one can heal oneself, one can harm oneself too.

Theological Implications

For the Indigenous people, God is not up there in heaven. God is in the world, creating it and animating it. St. Ignatius of Loyola spoke of finding God in all things and all things in God. In the final contemplation in his *Spiritual Exercises* he spoke of God working in the universe as a manifestation of God's love. The incarnation of the Word makes God part of the world so to speak, so that redemption includes also the universe. It is God gathering up all things. (Eph. 1:10 and Col. 1:15-20). Christ is really cosmic as Teilhard de Chardin suggested. We can envisage the Spirit as the *Tao* or *Qi* of the Chinese tradition, and the *prana* or breath of the Yogic tradition of India.

The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences has said:

In our contemporary society, where there is a steady erosion of traditional Asian values, Indigenous Asian communities can play an important role. Close to nature, they retain the values of a cosmic view of life, a casteless sharing and a democratic society. They have preserved their simplicity and hospitality. Their values and cultures can offer a corrective to the culture of the dominant communities, to the emerging materialistic and consumeristic ethos of our modern societies.⁵⁵

After almost destroying the earth by our consumer habits and our abuse of nature through our science and technology, we can learn ecological attitudes from the Indigenous peoples.

Jyoti Sahi, an Indian Christian artist who has been working with the Indigenous people of India lists seven values that we can learn from them. These are:

1. *The value of the land.* The community belongs to the land; land and people sustain each other.
2. *The value of culture as part of nature.* The community participates in nature's life, where customary law is seen as an extension of natural law.
3. *The value of the group.* The ethnic group ("nation," "tribe," or "clan," however they define themselves) is the most important unit in society, rather than the family, or an administrative unit, or the state. The individual tends to merge with the group.
4. *The value of consensus in government.* Decision making takes place through consultation, deliberation and consensual agreement.
5. *The value of cooperation over competition.* Ideas and activities that unite are given precedence over ideas and activities that divide and separate.
6. *The value of hospitality.* An open welcome to the visitor and the stranger freely acknowledges the "cosmic interdependence" of each person and

⁵⁵ Hong Kong: *FABC Papers* 93, p. 11.

group, and of the human family with the earth. 7. *The value of celebration*. Life is for living, enjoyment and happiness, not just for toil, sweat and tears.⁵⁶

Conclusion

We are living in an increasingly secularizing world. God is exiled to a faraway world up in the heavens, if God is not outright denied. The world has become matter to be used, abused, and destroyed. The Indigenous People remind us that God is everywhere. The universe is alive with the divine. We too are part of the universe and the universe is part of us. Our bodies are not objects to be used and thrown away. We are not only our bodies, but we are our bodies too. Asian spirituality, especially Indian and Chinese, have affirmed the communion of all things in the universe. St. Francis saw God in the flowers, plants and animals. St. Ignatius of Loyola spoke of finding God in all things. He spoke of God present and working in the universe. The world comes from God the creator and will be gathered back to God through Christ. (cf. Eph. 1:3-10; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Cor. 15:28). The Word took flesh in Jesus and has sanctified the universe. Such a vision of God in the world and the world in God is also true of Hinduism and Taoism. The Indigenous people can help us to rediscover this universal 'oneness' in God, whether we call it the advaitic Atman-Brahman in India or the cosmic Tao in China. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter a distinction between the cosmic and the meta-cosmic. Maybe now I should say that the meta-cosmic should merge back into the cosmic. A meta-cosmic perspective may have helped us to realize the transcendence of the divine. But the cosmic perspective keeps reminding us that the divine is also immanent, and that we are not living in a God-less, material universe.

⁵⁶ John Mansford Prior, *Dignity and Identity: The Struggle of Indigenous Peoples in Asia to Preserve, Purify and Promote their Cultures* (Hong Kong: FABC Papers 104, 2002), p. 9. Here John Summarises this passage from Jyoti Sahi, "Cultures in Relation to the Mission of the Church," *Mission Today* 1 (1999): 319-20.

CHAPTER 19

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Science is based on observation, experiment and reasoning. It can observe facts, analyse them and try to understand their relationships. It can go back to the origins and predict the future in a physical sense – that is, independent of human (and divine) freedom. Today, the scientists will tell us that history started with a Big Bang. From that moment the universe has been evolving according the laws of science. It has not required any intervention from an outside force, natural or divine. God as a creator is not necessary as a hypothesis. The world as we know it is self-explanatory. Science can tell us the ‘What?’ and the ‘How?’ Mathematics can guess, predict and project things and events mechanically. It can even guess objects and events that are later confirmed by observation. The universe is a network of causes and effects. The unanswered question, of course, is, ‘Where did the Big Bang come from? Did it just happen?’ Religious people have also another question. We believe that the humans are not just products of matter. There is spirit, intelligence and imagination. Did all these simply evolve from matter? It is true that intelligence too has evolved from the animals to the humans. But do the laws of matter and science adequately explain intelligence?

As compared to science, religion also deals more with the ‘Why?’ of things. It concerns freedom and morality and relationships. Human events are unpredictable and unnecessary. They are not merely facts, but possibilities. Religion projects forces unseen which are beyond science or reason: God, the other world, the freedom of the humans and their interaction, their creation of the arts and of literature, the origins of science itself. The sciences cannot prove these according to their laws. For the same reason they cannot deny these either. These are not objects that they can see, touch, measure, experiment upon, etc. If a person does not have the religious sense we cannot persuade or convince him/her either.

In the course of history, people have had experiences which they could not explain from whatever scientific principles they knew at that time. But, as science advanced, they could explain more and more phenomena. But such increasing scientific knowledge did not answer the question ‘why?’ People seek to answer this question by telling stories about origins and ends. All religions have stories of creation and of explanations of what happens in their life in the world. They project divine beings. They do not believe that death is the end of life. They have precepts of morality that guide life in community.

Science and Religion

As science progresses, it comes to discover more about the world and its functioning and of human life too. It challenges the stories in the scriptures. Again, they can enlarge our knowledge of 'what' and 'how.' They can even describe how our mind functions. But they cannot answer the question 'why.' But already at the level of 'what' and 'how' there may be a conflict between what science describes and what the stories of the scriptures narrate. Thus starts a certain conflict between science and religion. Let us have a brief look at this conflict in so far as it concerns Christianity.

Let us move to Europe where this conflict started. People in olden times believed that God created the world. They thought that the earth was the centre of the world and the sun, the moon, and the stars were revolving round it. The Bible tells us the story of creation. Then we have a story in the book of Joshua who was fighting the Amorites:

On the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke to the Lord; and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. (Joshua 10:12-13).

Christians, of course, believed this because it is in the Bible. But in the 16th century Copernicus in Prussia discovered that it is the earth that revolved round the sun, and not vice-versa. Galileo, an Italian scientist, also experimented on it and believed and taught it in Italy. The theologians of the time, of course, believed in the Bible and condemned Galileo. In 1633, he had to appear before the Roman inquisition and was condemned to a sort of house arrest. Only in 1992 Pope John Paul II officially regretted this, though the Vatican had its own observatory from 1891. But because of the Galileo story, the Church has been dubbed anti-science.

The Story of Evolution

The next issue is the story of evolution. Charles Darwin proposes his theory of evolution in his book *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859. This theory obviously goes against the story of creation in the Bible, which says that God created the world in six days. There are still some Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States of America who do not accept the theory of evolution and are opposed to it being taught in the schools. The Catholic Church also opposed it for some time. Today no one in the Catholic Church officially opposes the theory, or rather the fact, of evolution. Only in 1996, Pope John Paul II accepted that 'evolution is more than a hypothesis.' In this story too, the Church was considered to be anti-science. The Church and its theologians still have some difficulty about the theory of evolution. This theory accepts the possibility of what is called 'polygenism.' If the humans have evolved from monkeys, as the theory suggests, there is no reason to suppose that this happened only in one place on the earth. It

could have happened in many places. But such a theory will be against the Bible, which speaks of the whole of humanity as having descended from one human being – Adam. We believe in original sin, Adam's sin, the effects of which have been inherited by all human beings. This belief would support 'monogenism,' the origin of the human race from one person. Our present belief in and theology of original sin and redemption will collapse, if we do not believe in 'monogenism.' If 'polygenism' is a possibility, then we have to rework our theology. This has not been done yet. Of course, 'monogenism' or 'polygenism' are not scientific facts just now, but theories. But we can see the tension between scientific theories and our theology, if not faith. Believers will accuse some scientists as being atheists, and scientists will blame some Christians as being irrational.

Future Challenges

Such a tension will continue. Today, for instance, we are discussing seriously whether there are intelligent beings in other planets of the universe. We often hear reports of people sighting celestial bodies or discs which are suspected of being controlled, if not piloted, by intelligent aliens. The questions for theologians, of course, are: does salvation history include also such 'people'? Was Christ born for them too? Or are there are other incarnations or different histories of salvation? What will happen if we meet them? Some will consider such questions as pure speculation. Others will think of them as possibilities. If we take the theory of evolution seriously, and if we consider the almost infinite vastness of the universe, anything is possible. Anyway, it is not for us to determine what God has done or can do.

The scientists do not want a 'God of the gaps' – that is, a God who is used to explain some phenomena that we do not fully understand at the moment. They believe that science will eventually explain everything, that is, all the phenomena that we observe or may observe in the future, thanks to our increasingly powerful telescopes and possible journeys into space in the future. Since the earth is becoming increasingly unliveable, scientists think that we need to colonize space and move to the Moon or to Mars.

I think that a good attitude for us in the face of science is to leave the discoveries to the scientists, and focus on the non-material or spiritual dimensions of life. We have to focus, first of all, on our lives, and leave the future in the hands of God and our own descendants. We no longer believe a God outside the world. We do not believe either that the world itself is somehow divine. We believe in a Creator God, a God in the world, who is not only transcendent, but also immanent, who respects the laws of nature, but who inspires the humans to go beyond it, focusing not only on nature and its continuing evolution but on the human community, divinizing itself.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a French scientist engaged in the study of fossils, a deeply spiritual Jesuit, speaks of the process of evolution in four stages: cosmogenesis (the emergences of the cosmos with its galaxies, stars and planets), biogenesis (the origin of living beings), anthropogenesis (the emergence of the humans), noogenesis (the building up of a community of intelligent humans), leading to greater spiritualization and personalization. Teilhard suggests that evolution is not a natural, material process, but is animated by the spirit. It is led, not by a God above, but by a God ahead, the Omega point, who is personal, pre-existent and transcendent. For him, this is Christ – the Cosmic Christ, God who became human in the cosmos. Noogenesis is therefore Christogenesis. The universe becomes the cosmic body of Christ, experienced and celebrated in the cosmic Eucharist, the whole world becoming the body of Christ. This cosmic body is not a pantheistic entity, but a communion of persons united together in love. Teilhard was inspired by the letter of Paul to the Colossians.

He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created... In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:15-16, 19-20).

As it happens with pioneers and original thinkers, Teilhard was ordered by Church authorities not to publish his theological writings. Fortunately, he left them with friends, who published them after his death. Today there is a move to ask the Pope to withdraw that order.

Another important dimension, very relevant in contemporary discourse, is the place of the cosmos in the salvific plan of God. It is significant that both Paul and John speak of God creating 'all things' (Jn. 1:1-4) and gathering all things (Eph. 1:3-10) so that God is 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15). Romans 8:21 confirms this. Christ is the saviour, not only of 'souls,' but of the humans with their bodies that will rise again, and then of the cosmos, because one cannot think of the body without the cosmos. Salvation is not only for the people, but for the whole of creation. Raimon Panikkar speaks of cosmotheandrisms involving the cosmos (world), theos (God) and anthropos (the human). Jesus is a cosmotheandric being.

Scientifically speaking, our world is destined for destruction. The world may burn up or the whole universe may collapse on itself. Long before that, the humans may make the world unlivable. Would this be so? Should this be so? Are cosmic and human evolutions over? What is in store for us? We respect science. But it is not the last word. God will certainly find a way of saving us and the universe.

Albert Einstein

The world-renowned scientist Albert Einstein has written:

A conflict arises when a religious community insists on the absolute truthfulness of all statements recorded in the Bible. This means an intervention on the part of religion into the sphere of science; this is where the struggle of the Church against the doctrines of Galileo and Darwin belongs. On the other hand, representatives of science have often made an attempt to arrive at fundamental judgments with respect to values and ends on the basis of scientific method, and in this way have set themselves in opposition to religion. These conflicts have all sprung from fatal errors.

Now, even though the realms of religion and science in themselves are clearly marked off from each other, nevertheless there exist between the two strong reciprocal relationships and dependencies. Though religion may be that which determines the goal, it has, nevertheless, learned from science, in the broadest sense, what means will contribute to the attainment of the goals it has set up. But science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion. To this there also belongs the faith in the possibility that the regulations valid for the world of existence are rational, that is, comprehensible to reason. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.⁵⁷

John Paul II echoes this sentiment with a different metaphor. He says in his Encyclical Faith and Reason (1998): “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth.” It is good for us to know that 65% of the Nobel prize winners for science are (believing) Christians.

⁵⁷ Albert Einstein, “Religion and Science,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 1930, 1-4, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/aor/einstein/einsci.htm>.

CHAPTER 20

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

We are living in a male dominated world and the women are at a disadvantage everywhere. It starts with birth. Parents want male children. So female children are aborted or, in some regions in India, killed when born. Practically every day we read in the newspapers of girl children violated and, sometimes, killed. If they grow up, they are not as well educated as the boys. When they have to get married big dowries are expected from their families. Once they get married there is violence at home for whatever reason. At the work stations, they may be paid less than the men for the same work. We are living in a male dominated world. Only motherhood is respected. Exceptions only prove the rule.

The Church too is a male dominated community. The priesthood and the leadership belong to the males. The women, even the Religious, are expected to offer different kinds of services. In the Synod of Bishops on youth last year (2018), for instance, the male superior generals of religious orders were offered a vote, not the women. The bishops are successors to the Apostles, and all the Apostles that Jesus chose were men. Given the cultural and social situation of the time, probably Jesus could not have done otherwise. But today the cultural and social situation is changing. Women are entrepreneurs, political leaders, social organizers, educationists. They are shining in jobs that require intellectual acumen or social graces. So the question is whether we should sanctify traditional practices in the Church with presumed divine sanction, or relative to cultural and social conditions and practices. There is certainly a growing demand for greater participation and responsibility. There is a slow increase in women acceding to positions of responsibility, not only in society, but also in the Church. Women demand more participation and equality. One symptom of this is the request that women be ordained priests. 'Tradition' does not seem to be favourable. But the theological arguments against it seem to be weak. There are women priests and bishops in other Churches, and they seem to be doing well.

Women in the Bible

With regard to the status of women, the Bible seems to speak with a double voice. We see this already in the story of creation. Actually there are two stories of creation in the book of Genesis. In the first story, God creates humankind and puts them charge of the universe, so to speak: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over everything on the earth'... So God created

humankind in his image, ... male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" (Gen. 1:26-27). In this picture, man and woman seem to be equally in God's image.

In the second story of creation, man is formed from the dust of the earth. (Gen. 2:7). Then God does not want the man to be alone. So first he creates the animals. But that was not satisfactory enough. Then God wants to give Adam a helper like himself. (Gen. 2:20). So the woman is made out of one of his ribs. (Gen. 2:22). The man exclaims: "This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." (Gen. 2:23). "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24.). I think that the sense of equality between man and woman in the first story becomes an experience of a dependant community in the second.

Then, we have the story of the Original sin. Eve is tempted first by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit. She succumbs to the temptation first and then persuades Adam too. (Gen. 3:1-7). So culturally, the woman will be seen as the temptress! In the course of the story of Israel, though the leadership is with men – Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon – the women too, play a (subordinate?) role: the mother of Samuel, Ruth, Esther, Judith, etc. The prophets are all male.

In the New Testament

In the Gospels, Mary, the mother of Jesus, of course, plays a special role, especially in the early stages. But does not figure much in the public life of Jesus, except in the marriage at Cana (Jn. 2:1-11) and later under the cross. She remains a silent follower: "His mother treasured all these things in her heart." (Lk 2:51). Mary is mentioned as one among the women disciples who were praying together with the apostles and others – 120 people, we are told (Acts 1:15) – waiting for the gift of the Spirit.

But there are Martha and Mary, who play hosts to Jesus (Jn. 11:17-27; 12:1-8), the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:1-42), who becomes his first apostle, the woman taken in sin who experienced his mercy (Jn. 8:1-11), the Canaanite woman, who gets a miracle out of him (Mt. 15:21-28), the woman who washes his feet with her tears (Lk 7:36-50), the widow whose offering of one coin is praised by Jesus (Lk 21:1-4) – Jesus seems to use these women to teach a lesson to the men who exploit them. There were also women disciples who followed him and "who provided for them out of their resources." (Lk 8:2-3). There were women at the foot of the cross, together with Mary (Jn. 19:25-27), when all the apostles, except John, had abandoned Jesus. Jesus appears to some women who go looking for him in his tomb. (Mt. 28:9). Finally, there is Mary Magdalene, who was not only at the foot of the cross, but was also one of the first to whom the risen Jesus appeared, and whom he sent to proclaim the good news to the other

(male) apostles. St. Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* asks us to contemplate the risen Jesus, appearing first of all to Mary, the mother of Jesus. He takes it for granted as a very reasonable supposition.

One interesting question is whether there were women at the Last Supper. The Gospels speak only of the apostles being with him. There were 120 people in the upper room at Pentecost, with women among them. The women were at the cross, and also saw Jesus risen, before the men. They must have all come to Jerusalem with Jesus on pilgrimage. The paschal meal that Jesus took was a family meal. The women too must have been there, I think, also arranging and serving. In any case the women were there to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Some Christian painters do put Mary at the Last Supper, though she is kneeling by the side. Such a supposition would raise interesting theological questions! Scripture scholars say that the Gospel narratives are not accurate reports of what Jesus said and did. They are reports of reports. Later practices in the Church may have influenced, if not the stories in the gospels, at least some of the details. The limitation of the participants at the Last Supper to the twelve apostles, may be such a detail. If they became priests because of their participation at the Last Supper, others who were present may have had the same privilege!

Ideal and Practice

St. Paul strongly asserts the equality of all the baptized in the community. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ." (Gal. 3:28). But then come the restrictions. There is a hierarchy and also attendant conditions. "Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:3). The man should love his wife; but he is the head and the wife should obey. The relationship of the husband to the wife is compared to that of Christ to the Church! (Eph. 5:22-33), though Paul starts off saying: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:21; cf. also Col. 3:18-19). The inequality between men and women is starker when Paul advises the Corinthians – and the reference is to the second story of creation in Genesis. "Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head; but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head... For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man." (1 Cor. 11:4-5, 7-9). However, Paul does not feel quite happy with this assertion of inequality. So he balances this statement with: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God." (1 Cor. 11:11-12). What we see here is a tension between

the Gospel ideal and the actual practice, which depends much more on current cultural and social norms. This remains even today.

Similarly, the ideal is that in Christ there is no longer slave nor free. But Paul asks the slaves to obey their masters. (cf. Col. 3:21-25). Slavery was practiced in Europe till the 18th century. Even religious Congregations had slaves. When slavery was officially abolished, it was more thanks to other Christian groups like the Quakers than the Catholics. However, we can wonder whether the 'guest workers' and the poor migrants in richer (Christian?) countries are treated like slaves even today. Just recently (Jan 2019) an international IT company was accused of paying their employees from the Third World 25% less. Groups like the Blacks in America and Dalits in India are fighting still for liberation. The same is true, unfortunately, for women.

At the socio-cultural level, the women are becoming increasingly equal to men in the family, the work-place, in government, etc., though traditional cultural attitudes continue. Besides, equality need not mean that all should do the same thing. There can be complementarity. Women (and men) may do some things better than the others. Physical and psychological differences between the sexes can be recognized, without compromising equality – equal, but different! Equality means no hierarchy, simply by virtue of gender!

Towards the Future

As a matter of fact, women have played leadership roles in the Church. There have been women saints, doctors of the Church, foundresses of Congregations and advisors to the Popes, etc. Today, there is an awareness that they should be given more responsible roles in the Church. Equality need not be identity. Two people can be equal, but different. A biblical commission some years ago said, after serious study, that there is nothing in the Bible to deny ordination to the priesthood to women. If we can accept that even Jesus may have been conditioned by the cultural situations of his time in his practical options, then our own practical options can change with cultural and social changes. We must resist the temptation of equating the priest to Christ by saying that the priest represents the person of Christ (*'in persona Christi'*). The whole community is priestly and the priest remains a servant of the community. That is why we speak of his ministerial priesthood. One has to be a 'human' to 'represent' Christ, not necessarily a male.

It is a paradox, however, that attempts are being constantly made, by some small groups in the Church, to equate Mary with Christ, by calling her, for example, co-redemptrix. Such attempts must be resisted. She can be considered the first and the best apostle of Jesus Christ. She can be

considered also the mother of the apostles. We shall speak more of Mary in a later lecture.

Women in the World

So far, we have spoken mostly about the role of women in the Church. Similar perspectives will apply for their participation in life in the world. Gender differences may be relevant in so far as physical labour is concerned. But such differences will become increasingly less important as more and more machines are being used to do that kind of work. As Artificial Intelligence develops such differences will disappear. On the other hand, in the area of relationships, women may do even better.

CHAPTER 21

RELIGIONS IN CONFLICT

Interreligious violence or tension is present across the world. In our country, India, Hindu-Muslim violence occurs almost regularly. In some areas Christians are also under attack from the Hindus. In neighboring Pakistan, Hindu and Christian minorities are often maltreated. In Sri Lanka the conflict between the Hindu Tamils and the Buddhist Sinhalese is ongoing. Tension between Buddhists and Muslim is present in Thailand. In Myanmar the Buddhist majority is harassing the Muslim and Christian minorities. Interreligious tensions, if not violence, is not absent in Europe. Migrants, specially Muslim minorities, are often marginalized. What are the basic causes of this phenomenon? India is a secular country according to its Constitution. The freedom of religion is respected and the non-Hindu religious groups even enjoy minority rights. Why is it that this political secular spirit does not filter down to the social area of interreligious relationships?

A Conflict of Identities

Individual and social identities are socially constructed. A child is not born Christian or Hindu. It is initiated by the family into a particular religion, language and culture. Culture and religion are key elements in this identity construction, because they determine the worldviews and systems of values that guide behavior. These are interiorized in the course of daily life in terms of patterns and customs of behavior, instructions from the elders, celebrations of rites of passage, family and social celebrations of cultural and religious festivals, events like pilgrimages, etc. Today the media also play an important role.

This identity is constructed in opposition to the others. As the child grows up it realizes or is made to realize that it is not like the others. The others are different. Except in the context of a hierarchical caste structure, in which one's place in the social order is determined and almost imposed, at the religious level the other is also considered inferior. One's own God is considered as the true God or a more powerful one. It has been suggested that some groups of socially oppressed people in India may have converted to Christianity or Islam to escape from the hierarchical caste system – perhaps, without much success, since the caste system is not so much a religious as a socio-cultural and even an economic reality.

One group's difference from other groups may be further strengthened

by ignorance, prejudice and stereotypes. One would speak of Hindu fundamentalists, Muslim violence, Christians as more 'westernized' than Indian. Sometimes different religions may be practiced by different ethnic groups. In Sri Lanka, for example, the Hindus are Tamils and the Buddhist Sinhalese. In Malaysia, a Malaysian is Muslim, while Hindus are Indians and Christians are Indians or Chinese. These are also migrants. The Indigenous people will have their own cosmic religions, though some of them may embrace Christianity or Islam. Ethnic differences may lead to political tensions. Even in a secularized society religions may keep a sociological function. In a country like France, for example, a French person who is no longer a practicing Christian will still identify with the French, when opposed to the Muslim Arab migrants from North Africa. Psychologists say that the basic individual religious identity is formed in a pre-school age. This means that it is more unconscious than conscious. So it is more difficult to change, even if that person is not practicing his/her faith. Psychologists also say that, in a situation of tension/conflict, one tends to project one's own evil or unacceptable side on the other. In a religious conflict, one may identify oneself with God and the other with Satan, so that it becomes a struggle between good and evil. In such a situation, the other can be demonized, destined for destruction. Killing the other then becomes almost a sacred duty. One no longer feels guilty about it. This has been verified in situations of interreligious conflict.

Religious Fundamentalism and Communalism

The term 'fundamentalism' with reference to religion has its origin in the southern United States of America in 1930. A group of Christians organized themselves to oppose the theory of evolution of Charles Darwin, because they found it contradicting the story of creation in the Bible. They held on to five FUNDAMENTALS of their religious belief: 1. The inerrancy of the Bible; 2. The Virgin birth and divinity of Jesus; 3. Substitutionary atonement by the death of Jesus; 4. The resurrection of Jesus; 5. The truth of miracles. They were proud of calling themselves fundamentalists. Later they will also be critical of and opposed to Marxist communism and the Soviet Union. Still later they will be contrary to the process of secularization. They were committed to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures. They were not happy either with the modern interpretations of the Bible.

This fundamentalist movement was religious and non-political in the beginning. Then when the whole world was divided into two poles, American and Russian, and Russia itself was promoting atheistic communism, it became political and anti-Russian. In local politics they were anti-abortion and anti-homosexual. They were for prayer and for teaching the Biblical story of creation in the schools. They constituted a group called 'The moral majority' that supported the Republican party, though they faded out after some years. The younger George Bush, for instance, referred to Iraq, Iran

and Russia as Satans. When he invaded Iraq he called it a crusade, recalling the crusades fought by Christian armies against the Muslims, ostensibly to liberate the Holy Land for the Christians. Even some bishops supported him on this occasion. But, probably under sager advice, he did not repeat that word again. In any case, religion or Christianity had nothing to do with that long war.

Historically, the missionaries, and even the colonialists whom they accompanied, believed that Christianity was the only true religion offering salvation from sin and evil. So when the Spanish and the Portuguese colonized South America, they converted the indigenous people by just imposing Christianity on them, with political and military force if necessary. They believed that they were offering the gift of salvation to these people. Some theologians offered justification from one of the parables of Jesus. Jesus narrates how a king prepares a wedding banquet for his son and invites all the rich and important people in the Kingdom. The day of the banquet arrives and the guests do not turn up offering various excuses. The king asks his servants to go out and bring the poor and the beggars to the banquet. But there is still room. So he tells the servants: "Go our into the roads and lanes, and *compel* people to come in, so that my house may be filled." (Lk. 14:23). So the colonial missionaries felt justified in *compelling* the simple indigenous people to come into the Church, which was offering everyone the banquet of salvation.

Later similar movements in other religions were also called fundamentalist. Being strong believers in the fundamentals of their own religion, literally interpreting their scriptures, they were also critical of other religions. So fundamentalism was opposed to religious pluralism. As a matter of fact, all religions tend to be fundamentalist, in so far as they are based on faith in their scriptures or in the authoritative teachings of their founders or leaders. All religions, therefore, tend to be exclusive. The monotheist religions, especially, tend to be more aggressive, easily demonizing the others. It is also a way of defending themselves against secularization and atheism.

Fundamentalism in Islam has an interesting origin. In the Middle Ages, Islam extended from the south of Spain, through North Africa, the Middle East, West Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Malaysia, Indonesia, and southern Philippines. But they were all under foreign colonial domination, before, during, and after the Second World War. Some Islamic scholars in the Middle East, especially Egypt, suggested that this was because Islam had become weak, not believing in the fundamentals of the Quran. So they advocated a return to the Quran, interpreting it almost literally, and to traditional Islamic practices. Such a move obviously distances it from other religions, dialogue with which may have brought about changes in the way of life.

Religious Communalism

If some groups of people are fundamentalist in their religious beliefs, it is their choice and no one has anything to say about it. They have the freedom to hold and follow their beliefs. This is religious freedom accepted by most modern nations. But the affirmation of religious identity becomes a problem when it becomes political and is used to bring people together into a political force, though their economic, cultural and social situations may be different and even conflictual. Religious identity is used to cover up those differences and tensions. The force that knits the people becomes stronger when God enters into the picture. The people are then fighting not only for their material interests. They are defending their religious identity and their God. So the bond that unites them becomes strong. This is not merely fundamentalism, but communalism. Religion becomes a political force and tool. People may be blinded to the other social, political, and cultural dimensions of the struggle. The political movement becomes a religious one, or a religious group becomes political. Religious leaders too acquire a political role. The religious other becomes the enemy.

What happens is that other issues that may divide the people are swept under the carpet. The Hindu community in India is deeply divided. There are people who follow Vishnu or Shiva or Devi as their main divinity. There have been conflicts between them. There is the unjust and divisive caste system. There are social problems like discrimination against and even suppression of women. The indigenous people have their own cosmic religions. All these differences and struggles for basic rights are papered over to bring everyone under the label of Hinduism. The RSS-Hindutva is Hindu, but also promotes cultural nationalism and communalism. For them India is Hindu, not only religiously, but also culturally, and they would say that Indian Christians and Muslims are also culturally and nationally Hindus. They would not accept the distinct Dravidian and the indigenous cultures and their contribution to Indian culture. They would also claim that the Aryans – the authors of the Vedas – were indigenous Indians, and not migrants who integrated with other Indian ethnic and religious groups, to create and develop Hindu/Indian culture. Indian Christians and Muslims are Indian, but not Hindu. Indian culture is multicultural and multi-religious. There are also communalist Islamic movements in the Middle East and communalist Christian movements in the West. These movements have to be fought at the political level, not merely at the religious level.

Just as there is religious communalism, there can also be communal movements based on caste, language, or ethnicity. All these would try to sweep social and economic differences under the carpet and defend injustice at these levels, under the pretence of communal unity.

Historical and Political Factors

We have to understand that the majority Hindu community in India, for example, has been ruled by Muslims invaders, who became native, and by the Christian British, who remained foreign, for nearly 12 centuries. There has been some feeble Hindu resistance, especially in the South: the Vijayanagara kingdom in the south and Shivaji. A search for a national identity in the name of a religious or ethnic majority is universal in Europe, America, and Asia. Thailand is a Buddhist country. A Thai is normally a Buddhist and Christians and Muslims belong to smaller ethnic groups or are migrants. Myanmar is Buddhist, though there are many groups of indigenous peoples, some of whom have become Christian (Karens) or Muslim (Rohingyas). Sri Lanka claims to be Buddhist and looks upon the Hindu Tamils as migrants, though the migration had taken place centuries ago, not ignoring the fact that the Sinhalese themselves were earlier migrants from a different part of India. The Philippines which is Christian, is still having an ongoing struggle with Muslim minorities in the South. Malaysia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh consider themselves Muslim. Nepal used to be a Hindu Kingdom. Only Indonesia and India consider themselves multi-religious and have secular Constitutions. The problem is that most of these countries were not the result of a natural evolution, but were put together artificially by colonial powers and offered independence. A competition for scarce resources, a quest for autonomous economic and/or political power, an interplay of majority and minority forces, and the self-assertion of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups arose, after a period of colonial domination/oppression.

At times of conflict, mass psychology, irrational and unconscious emotion take over. There is scapegoating, when one can blame some other group for one's own problems. Sociologists also point to institutionalized riot systems, when a group of people – often poor, unemployed youngsters – are available for a fee to start a riot, which then follows its own dynamic. Once there has been a violent struggle and there has not been a process of reconciliation, it becomes an undying historical memory of losses of property and of near and dear ones, with suppressed anger and a spirit of revenge ever alive. There is also a sense of suspicion and a lack of trust.

The Religious Factor

We cannot ignore the fact that religions are not innocent. The religious scriptures – except the Buddhist – justify wars in the name of God, in the context of a cosmic struggle between good and evil. The Old Testament of the Bible is full of wars, Godself fighting on behalf of Israel. There have been crusades by Christian princes, actively encouraged by 'saints.' Islam speaks of the *jihad*, defensive at first, but also offensive later. In Hinduism the defence of Dharma involves war. The two big epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata – are stories of war. In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna is persuaded

to fight his cousins. Unfortunately, when fighting in the name of God, one does not feel guilty for all the destruction and loss of life that one causes.

Conclusion

I have spoken of dialogue between religions in an earlier lecture. We shall explore the perspectives of 'Religions and Peace' in the next one.

CHAPTER 22

RELIGIONS AND PEACE

The Second World Parliament of Religions (Chicago,1993) published a Declaration of a *Global Ethic*, which made four basic commitments, obviously in the name of all the religions represented there: 1. A commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; 2. A commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; 3. A commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; and 4. A commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. It said further: “*No world peace without peace among religions; no peace among religions without dialogue between religions.*” But unlike economics which focuses on profit, politics that aims at power, and social structures that seek order that is often hierarchical, only religions or quasi-religious ideologies like Humanism, Socialism, Communism, etc. are sources of values like freedom, rights, justice, equality and peace.

When we speak of religions for peace, we should include also non-religious ideologies as dialogue partners. But only religions can be prophetic in the name of the Absolute that transcends, looks critically at, and challenges all socio-cultural structures: For example, the Buddha, Jesus, Krishna in the Gita, Mohammed, Francis of Assisi, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Narayana Guru, Ambedkar, etc. It would be interesting to explore why Ambedkar, while seeking to move away from Hinduism, chose Buddhism.

Religions facing Violence

Religions, besides, teach forgiveness because a violent response to violence leads to a never-ending spiral of violence: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life... When the Africans gained independence from the Whites in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, wanting to exorcise the spirit of inter-racial violence that had been prevalent for decades appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, presided over by Bishop Desmond Tutu. The commission provided a social space in which the victims of violence could narrate what they have gone through, and obtain some compensation from the government in terms of a house or a job, and the perpetrators of violence could confess their evil deeds and obtain forgiveness. After about three years, though the Commission was not an investigative agency and did not bring out all the incidents of violence, and its search often did not reach out to the real culprits behind the scenes, the process did serve as a healing balm and restored an atmosphere of social reconciliation and

peace in the country, so that the violent past was no longer an oppressive memory. At that time, Bishop Tutu said that the aim of the commission was to search not for retributive justice looking for revenge, but for restorative justice based on truth as far as one can reach it, and forgiveness that breaks the circle of violence leading to reconciliation and peace. I am sure that Mahatma Gandhi, with his ideas of Satyagraha (clinging to truth) and non-violent love that challenges the oppressor to change, was an inspiration.

A Multi-religious Society

Bishop Desmond Tutu promoted communal peace in a Christian context. Where there are many religions, as in India and in the world, peace can be promoted by religions only through dialogue and collaboration as equals. Multi-religious India could have affirmed unity by holding on to the religion of the majority as central to its political structure, as Pakistan and many other countries seek to do. It could have claimed to be totally non-religious, at least in principle, like France or China. But India chose to be secular, with a clear distinction, not separation, between the sacred and the secular, and treating all religions equally positively. It acknowledges individual rights and freedoms – especially religious freedom - in a secular democratic set up. Religious and cultural/linguistic minorities are protected with special minority rights. While fundamentalist movements based on religions, castes, languages, etc. are not absent, the secular democratic structure is holding on, specially defended by the courts of law. Another Asian country which has developed an open secular political structure is Indonesia which recognizes as official religions Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. All the religions are expected to believe in one God.

Charles Taylor, a Canadian sociologist and philosopher, has written a lot to promote peace and community in a multi-cultural situation like that of Canada. He suggests that every culture, whether big or small, must be respected. As we defend individual freedom, the identity and freedom of even smaller cultures must be recognized. Not only individuals, but also groups with their cultures and religions are formally equal, irrespective of their numbers and status (in development). Respect for them follows recognition. Sympathetic, but true, knowledge must precede recognition and respect – mutual knowledge is promoted through active dialogue. Recognition and respect should lead to the acceptance of the other as integral part of one national community. Acceptance supposes our readiness to collaborate in the pursuit of our Constitutional goals of promoting freedom, equality, fraternity, and justice for all. I think that such an approach of recognition, respect and acceptance can also be applied to multi-religious situations. I think that this is what has been done officially in India and Indonesia.

At a socio-political level, adapting an idea of John Rawls, a political philosopher, we can develop an overlapping consensus through dialogue around key social values, that can guide our common socio-political action and economic policies and projects. Developing an overlapping consensus for common action involves finding justification in their own religious resources, for the defense and promotion of common human and social rights, duties, and values.

The Way of Dialogue

We have already seen that dialogue is the way of living and acting multi-religiously. At a basic level, interreligious dialogue promotes mutual knowledge of religions as such. But at the level of life, dialogue should promote common cultural and social values. In a situation of conflict, dialogue should focus on bringing out the truth, doing justice to those affected, and facilitating forgiveness and reconciliation. In ordinary life, mutual knowledge can lead to enrichment, but also to mutual challenge and change for the better. For example, the caste system, the treatment of women, the protection of nature, etc. An early impact of British rule in India was precisely attempts at social reform, like opposing child marriage, the practice of sati, which was the burning of the widows on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands, the possible remarriage of widows, etc.

Dialogue supposes that the identities of the different groups must be respected, and they must be allowed to develop in their own way. What happened in the USA, though in the social sphere, can be a good example for us. At some stage, some well-wishers wanted to promote equality between the 'Whites' and the 'Blacks.' They thought that a good way to do this is to educate the white and black children in the same schools. A big programme of what was called 'bussing the children to school' was organized. Since the black children were living in ghettos, they were brought by buses to the schools where the white children were studying. But the other dimensions of their lives were left untouched. The experiment did not succeed. Though the Whites and the Blacks were citizens of the same country, their ways of living were different. They did not even speak the language in the same way. There was also a hidden assumption that the Blacks must eventually become like the Whites. But the Blacks began asserting their identity as equal, but different. So there was a movement proclaiming, 'Black is beautiful.'

A small example in India can be seen in the field of music and culture. Some people may have thought that a good way of promoting cultural equality was to teach Carnatic classical music to the Dalits. But we see the Dalits asserting their identity and difference by beating their own drums as a different kind of music that has its own intricacies, and as worthy of recognition as a separate art form. It is not simply a defence of an art form, but the assertion of a group of people of their special cultural identity. This would be true of every socio-cultural group in Asian countries.

In the field of religions, when we explore the role of religions in peace making and propose dialogue as a way, we may tend to focus on religions in their more developed forms. So intellectuals and experts come together, exchange views etc. But the people who are normally involved in conflict are not such experts, but ordinary people, and they are much more sensitive to the presence of evil and violence in the world. Their gods or angels or saints are people who confront such violence. We have distinguished earlier between cosmic and meta-cosmic religions. Dialogue meetings often take place among religious experts and sannyasis, not among ordinary people. Obviously these people may not sit down at meetings to share and discuss about their spiritual experiences. They are more involved in life's problems, which include struggles and even violence. It is at this level that real peace-making is required. But this is hardly done. That is why most of our dialogues are intellectual exercises, and are not practical. They do not evoke popular interest. When there was Hindu-Muslim violence during partition, Gandhi did not organize meetings of religious experts. He personally visited areas where there was violence and tried to organize prayer meetings that did not involve high-level intellectuals or 'spiritual' people. He just provided a space where ordinary people could come together and experience fellowship, in a religious – prayerful – context.

A final comment would be that religions through dialogue can play a role not only in solving interreligious conflicts, but also to conscientize and mobilize people against other current evils, like ethnic and caste discrimination, the oppression of women, destruction of creation, corruption in public life, etc.

Conclusion

I should acknowledge the fact that I myself have made a discovery in writing this chapter, namely that real effective dialogue for peace making must go down to the people, and not remain at the level of intellectual and religious experts. It must involve people who are actually involved in the struggles of life, including interreligious struggles, people who have suffered violence or have inflicted it, often misled by selfish, power-hungry leaders. They will not be sharing theological explorations or spiritual experiences. These may not be necessary at their level. But what is needed is dialogue at a popular level. Authentic dialogue will be attractive and effective for people who have suffered violence. Interreligious dialogue for peace must reach out primarily to people who have suffered or inflicted violence. I know that this is a difficult challenge. It can be organized only by leaders who are involved with the people in some way, not by experts in theology or official institutional leaders of religions. We have to energize and empower the silent and moderate majority, isolating the fundamentalist and communalist minorities.

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