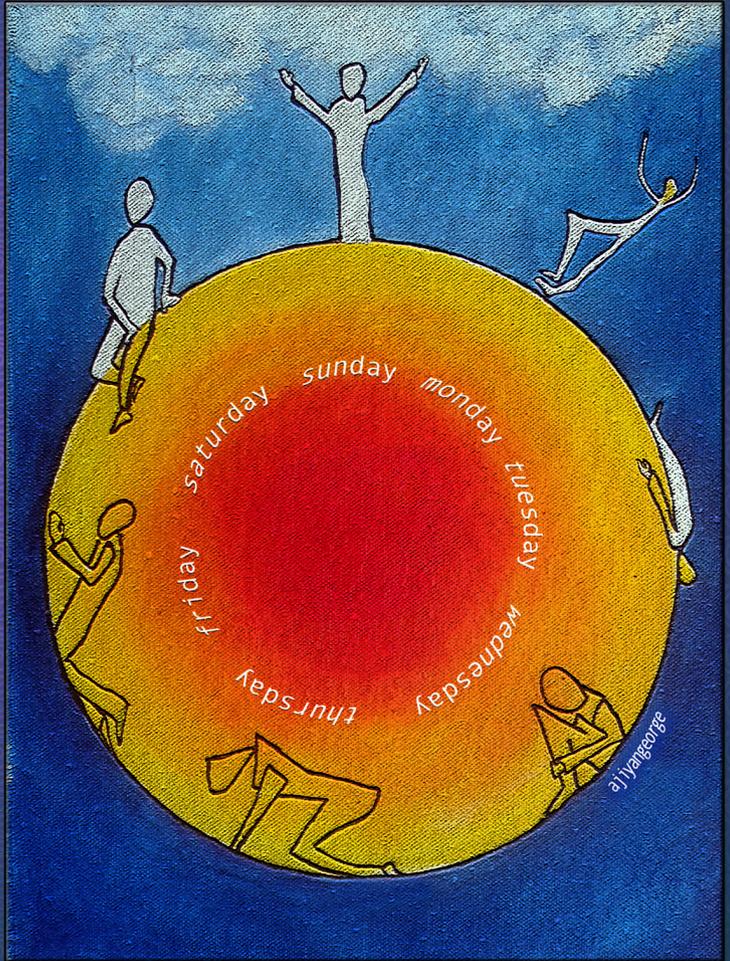


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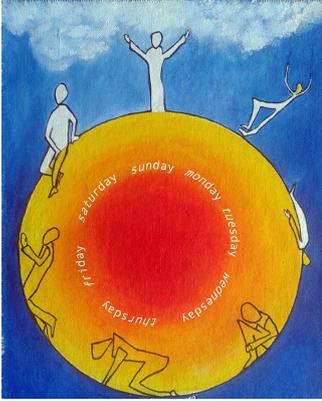
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About the cover painting...



The Cycle of Redemption

by Ajiyan George | Acrylic on Canvas | 50x70 | 2013 |

“If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall” - 1Cor 10:12

God created mankind and the entire universe in the first six days of the week and on the seventh day he rested. While, Christ redefined this weekly cycle and sanctified the Sunday to be holy and blessed by his resurrection. This painting depicts Man’s portrayal of the weekly cycle. The world that we live in is very subjective and we seldom succeed to stand strong. Our failures often end in deep sorrow. However, we are all God’s children who are continuously under His Divine Providence. This is depicted as the circle which is the wheel of Gods holy grace. The almighty does not allow us to perish even if we deserve too. Instead he gives us the opportunity to think about our failures(Wednesday), repent upon them(Thursday), to kneel down before the lord and confess(Friday), absolve our sins(Saturday) and to emerge sanctified(Sunday).

Editorial

Divine providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the universe. The doctrine of divine providence asserts that God is in complete control of all things. He is sovereign over the universe as a whole (Psalm 103:19), the physical world (Matthew 5:45), the affairs of nations (Psalm 66:7), human destiny (Galatians 1:15), human successes and failures (Luke 1:52), and the protection of His people (Psalm 4:8). This doctrine stands in direct opposition to the idea that the universe is governed by chance or fate.

Through divine providence God accomplishes His will. To ensure that His purposes are fulfilled, God governs the affairs of men and works through the natural order of things. The laws of nature are nothing more than God's work in the universe. The laws of nature have no inherent power; rather, they are the principles that God set in place to govern how things normally work.

In this regard, the current issue of Hekamtho elaborates the various dimensions of the divine providence. Each article provides a unique perspective of God's providence and narrates the human attitude towards it.

The first article, "Eco- theological Concepts of Ephrem the Syrian" by Matthews Mor Antheemos Metropolitan illustrates the Ephremian understanding of God's providence through the mirror of ecology and the relation between man and nature.

Adai Jacob Corepiscopa, in his article “Petrine Primacy-Ecumenical Perspectives”, gives an account of Peter’s role in the Ecclesial Providence of the Church. It emphasises that the Stewardship entrusted to Peter was an aspect which kept the church together and also which enabled effective administration.

Third article, “Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Proposing a Sex Education Program for the Adolescents” by Thomas Abraham deals with adolescence and sexuality. It elaborately discusses biological process of puberty and the psychological aspects of the teenage years.

Jacob Joseph in his article, “Church amidst Diversity: The Liturgy, Exclusion and the Embrace” examines the practical impact of the Orthodox mission and liturgy in the Indian socio- cultural context.

In the final article “Monasticism Today”, Kuriakose Kollannoor gives a detailed account of the characteristics, purposes and challenges of Monasticism today. The article explains the origin, growth and present situation of Monasticism and also describes how the monasteries have been beacons of religion, learning, knowledge and a lasting token of culture and civilization.

- Fr. Dr. Ajiyan George
Editor

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Eco-theological Concepts of Ephrem the Syrian

Dr. Mor Antheemos Matthews Metropolitan¹

Eco-theology has come into forefront in the midst of hue and cry over the uncontrolled and unlimited human exploitation over the rest of creation. Many scholars critically evaluated and still evaluate the lack of consciousness in the present theological discourses to address this devastating crisis. Ephrem's theology is helpful in dealing several aspects of human relation to the rest of creation and the most important is in encountering the current ecological disasters. Moreover, his concept on the *Integrity of Creation* had been influential in shaping the doctrines of Christian understanding of creation and thereby regarding the creation as a whole and its indiscriminate relation with humanity.

1. Panentheism

“In the beginning [God] created heaven and earth”,²
“brought forth vegetation through the agency of earth and water”,³

¹ H.E. Dr. Mor Antheemos Matthews is the Auxiliary Bishop of the Muvattupuzha Region and a faculty in the department of Theology and Patristic Studies at MSOTS.

² Commentary on Genesis I:1.

“animal world came into being as a result of the combining of earth and water”⁴ and finally “fashioned dust from the earth into Adam [humanity]”.⁵ And for Ephrem, one can perceive marvellous representation of the (invisible) Creator in the (visible) creation. He clarifies further, God is engraved in the natural world,⁶ and therefore, in the created world (Eden and natural world) one finds symbols and types of the Creator. Ephrem advocates that the Father fashioned creation through the Son.⁷ By this, he also affirms that creation unfolds Christ (Lord of Symbols)⁸ and Christ’s symbols too are visible in creation which carries Christ’s divinity and humanity,⁹ because “in His [Christ] womb dwells all creation”.¹⁰ Hence, he concludes that Christ dwells in the wombs of all creation¹¹ and “He was entirely in the depths and entirely in the heights; He was entirely in all and entirely in each one”,¹² i.e. “... the heavens and all the creation were filled by Him”.¹³ Therefore, “Everything in the heavens and earth are Creator’s witnesses. They proclaim His grace”.¹⁴

According to Ephrem, in the Scripture and natural world God traced His properties¹⁵ and the process of God’s self-revelation is through *types and symbols* (His properties) and their main purpose is to link the creation with the divine world and salvation history. What is revealed through types and symbols is hidden power and one can perceive this truth by an eye of faith.¹⁶ Hence, for him, the (invisible) Creator which is hidden as well as

³ Commentary on Genesis II:3.

⁴ Commentary on Genesis II:9.

⁵ Commentary on Genesis II:4.

⁶ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 8:3.

⁷ Cf. Commentary on Diatessaron 19:17.

⁸ Cf. Hymns on Faith 9:11.

⁹ Cf. Paschal Hymns (Unleavened Bread) 4:24.

¹⁰ Hymns on Nativity 4:154.

¹¹ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 21:7.

¹² Hymns on Nativity 4:159.

¹³ Hymns on Nativity 21:6.

¹⁴ Hymns on Church 48:10.

¹⁵ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 20:12.

¹⁶ Cf. Hymns on Church 24:3; 38:2.

revealed in the (visible) creation¹⁷ and the creation in turn is filled with pointers to the Creator.¹⁸

For him, Fire and Spirit can be found in the Bread and Wine (Holy Eucharist) that consume,¹⁹ the womb that which bore him (Mary),²⁰ in the river he was baptized (water of Jordan).²¹ And he also identifies Jordan as womb of the water which conceived Christ in purity,²² waters of Jordan too gave birth to Christ without intercourse.²³ He also equates wheat, olive and grapes with Bread, Wine and Oil, the (three) Medicine(s) of Life,²⁴ by which Christ heals humanity. He also identifies Christ as the Bread which issues from the blessed Wheat sheaf²⁵ and Grape of mercy.²⁶ The olive tree gives beautiful symbols of Christ²⁷ and serves Christ (olive leaves depict symbol of crucifixion, resurrection and victory).²⁸ It is a symbol of God²⁹ and in likeness of Christ, the First-born from the dead³⁰ and thus symbolizes the mystery of Christ.³¹ He portrays oil as a symbol of Christ,³² the dear friend of Holy Spirit³³ and wipes out sin,³⁴ as a forebear of Jesus.³⁵ Therefore, types and symbols contain the real presence of that which they symbolize and at the same time *connect the whole creation*. So, says Sebastian Brock,

¹⁷ Cf. Hymns on Faith 44:7.

¹⁸ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 29:9.

¹⁹ Cf. Hymns on Faith 10:17.

²⁰ Cf. Hymns on Faith 10:17.

²¹ Cf. Hymns on Faith 10:17.

²² Cf. Hymns on Church 36:3.

²³ Cf. Hymns on Church 36:4.

²⁴ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 37:3.

²⁵ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 31:14.

²⁶ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 31:13.

²⁷ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 5:16.

²⁸ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:13.

²⁹ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 6:11.

³⁰ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 6:3.

³¹ Cf. Commentary on Diatessaron 21:11.

³² Cf. Hymns on Faith 82:10.

³³ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:6

³⁴ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:9.

³⁵ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:12.

*Types and symbols, then, are the means by which the interconnectedness of everything can be seen, the means by which meaning can be found infused in everything. It is a dynamic and exciting way of looking at the world – and one that is profoundly ecological.*³⁶

The *hidden Creator* is manifested in the creation and therefore creation cannot be spaced out from God's self-revelation. Ephrem's theology portrays that visible realities (creation) have been with invisible meanings (of hidden Creator). According to him, the eye of faith sees *Bread* from the *Wheat* as *Body of Christ* and the *Wine* from the *Grape* as *Blood of Christ*. He is of the view that the power in the *Eucharistic Bread and Wine* and in the anointing *Oil* is inwardly, because it is a divine mystery, even though outwardly they are products of wheat, grape and olive. Therefore, when we examine the *manifest things* (Bread/wheat and Wine/grape), they become hidden things (Christ's body and blood).

The Creator has engraved His hidden power in innumerable creations of the natural world. The three terms employed by Ephrem, namely *hidden things*, *manifest things* and *symbols* act as variables (hidden things as mysteries of God; manifest things as creation; symbols as types and symbols of God) in this context, bring the very concept of *Panentheism*. Thus, Ephrem highlights the concept of sacramental character of the natural world and thereby the model of *Panentheism*, i.e. *the Creator is sacramentally embodied in the creation* (God in creation and creation in God).

2. Pansyntheism

On the other side, Ephrem also brings Pansyntheism, i.e. God with creation. God in creation also emphasizes God with creation, however in Ephrem we can see distinctive examples of God with creation. According to him, "... God did not bless Adam in

³⁶ BROCK, The Luminous Eye 56. (Sebastian Brock. *The Luminous Eye. The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem, the Syrian*. Michigan, Cistercian Publications, 1992).

Paradise... But God blessed him on the earth first”.³⁷ For him, God blessed Adam on earth before the transgression of the divine commandment in order to prevent the rest of creation to be “... turned back into nothing on account of the folly of that one [Adam/(humanity)] for whose sake everything had been created”.³⁸ Thus, God’s act proclaims that *God is with the rest of creation* in the context of the first sin and the resulted damages.

Even though God did drive out Adam and Eve, they were not driven out without any hope for life, but “... in His [God’s] grace He granted him [Adam and Eve] the low ground beyond it [earth]”³⁹ and “... to work the earth... benefited by the toil on the earth”.⁴⁰ So, even though *thorns and thistles* have sprouted up from the earth due to their sin, still earth was *another place of living* for Adam and Eve. The heavenly mercy allowing Adam and Eve to live on the earth with limitations, again shows that *God is with creation* (God with Adam and Eve) even in the midst of their grave mistake. Ephrem gives thanks to God for bringing forth spikes of wheat from the earth, for God’s mercy and care in the midst of curses.⁴¹ He also affirms that redemption is not limited to the Adam/(humanity), but for the whole of creation.⁴² This further implies that *God is with the whole creation*, because God does not want the creation to perish.

To be precise, Adam/(humanity) were disfigured due to their sin, disfigured from their original nature, driven out from the original house, and the whole creation too became disfigured. However, this disfigurement does not mean that the whole creation is fallen out of God’s providence. Hence, Ephrem’s Eco-theology promotes not only *God in creation* (Panentheism), but also *God with creation* (Pansyntheism) in all its pain/pathos. Is it *God’s preferential option for the whole creation*? There is a high

³⁷ Commentary on Genesis I:31.

³⁸ Commentary on Genesis I:31.

³⁹ Cf. Hymns on Paradise 1:10.

⁴⁰ Commentary on Genesis II:35.

⁴¹ Cf. Hymns on Paradise 9:12.

⁴² Cf. Hymns on Paradise 9:1.

probability for that. Therefore, Ephrem's Eco-theology highlights both Panentheism (God is sacramentally embodied) and Pansytheism.

3. Eco-justice

Ephrem's *Creation Theology* affirms that the Creator has created the whole creation with beauty, and thereby demonstrated His goodness.⁴³ "In the beginning God created heaven and earth (Genesis 1:1)"⁴⁴ and "... 'the Lord fashioned dust from the ground into Adam [humanity]'"⁴⁵. The Genesis account of the Creation pictures *Creator's actions, craftsmanship and works of art*,⁴⁶ and "all creatures are endued with their beauties and varieties [uniqueness]"⁴⁷, further implies that God has fashioned a *just creation*. Therefore, Ephrem also beautifully pictured, intrinsic value/worth of creation and integrity of creation, the eco-justice principles.

3.1. Intrinsic Value/Worth of Creation

Ephrem is of the view that "... they were [the whole creation] pure as far as to [the fall of] Adam".⁴⁸ There are various instances, where Ephrem highlights the value of earth and water. He says, "... 'the fountain [of water] went up from the earth', as Scripture says 'and it [fountain of water] irrigated the surface of the entire earth'. The earth then produced trees, vegetation and plants".⁴⁹ He further explains that God was able to generate everything from the earth, however God initiated this process of earth producing vegetation because of two reasons, i.e. "... it was His will that the earth should give birth through the agency of water"⁵⁰ and also "... it would be carried on until the end".⁵¹ So, it

⁴³ Cf. Hymns against Heresies 28:8.

⁴⁴ Commentary on Genesis I:1.

⁴⁵ Commentary on Genesis II:4.

⁴⁶ Hymns on Paradise 6:1.

⁴⁷ Hymns on Virginitly 51:5.

⁴⁸ Hymns against Heresies 28:8.

⁴⁹ Commentary on Genesis II:3.

⁵⁰ Commentary on Genesis II:3.

⁵¹ Commentary on Genesis II:3.

is crystal clear that God's Will enables earth to give birth to the vegetative world through the agency of water and this process will continue until the end. So, this is an *authority/blessing* given to earth and this portrays the intrinsic value of the earth and water.

In the same way, Ephrem interprets the creation of the animal world. According to him, "... 'the Lord fashioned out of the earth all the wild animals, and the birds of the sky'".⁵² Then he further says that "They were not actually 'fashioned', for the earth produced the animals and the water the birds. By saying 'fashioned' Scripture wishes to indicate that all animals, reptiles, cattle and birds came into being as a result of the combining of earth and water".⁵³ He concludes that by combining earth and water, God fashioned the animal world. Therefore, in the creation of the animal world, we can also see the value of earth and water in the creation of the animal world.

Adam, whom God has gloriously fashioned, was from *the dust of earth*.⁵⁴ So, he reveals that Adam was made out of existing material (dust/earth), i.e. "... His [God] hand took from every quarter and created Adam".⁵⁵ Therefore, according to Ephrem, Adam represents the whole earth. "... since you [Adam/(humanity)] originate from dust... you shall return to your dust"⁵⁶ shows that Adam/(humanity) has to go back to their original component due to the sin. Adam's birth from the virgin earth⁵⁷ further implies that Adam was created directly out of the dust, while humanity including Second Adam (Christ) out of the dust via Adam.⁵⁸ Therefore, earth has a value in itself, for it is a part of living creatures.

⁵² Commentary on Genesis II:9.

⁵³ Commentary on Genesis II:9.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hymns on Paradise 6:21; 13:3. Commentary on Genesis II:4.

⁵⁵ Hymns on Paradise 6:21.

⁵⁶ Commentary on Genesis II:31.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 1:16.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 4:84; 26:6. Hymns on Virginity 7:12.

When he interprets *olive* in the context of Noah's history, he says that the *olive stands as the mirror of peace*,⁵⁹ because "... in which they saw the peace of the earth".⁶⁰ Therefore, olive symbolizes *promise for the revival of all*. In the New Testament, we can see that during Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:1-10. Mk. 11:1-11. Lk. 19:29-40) the crowd who followed Jesus also used the branches of olive tree and it becomes a symbol for Jesus, the peace of the earth. He is also of the view that the oil (product of olive) depicts Christ, because the oil also saved the free born (orphans),⁶¹ therefore it has an intrinsic value in itself. He describes natural restorative (instrumental value) properties of the olive with the spiritually restorative (intrinsic value) character of sacraments (in the baptism by putting oil as a symbol of Christ⁶²); this also shows its intrinsic value.

Christ brought up the salvation for humanity from the waters of Jordan⁶³ and Ephrem's exegesis reveals that when Christ was baptized "... rays flashed out from [waters of Jordan] it".⁶⁴ The gospels never give the event of *rays flashing out from water during Christ's baptism*. Here, he brings the concept of mixing the Holy Spirit with water through Christ's baptism, because "... the Spirit was with the Son".⁶⁵ Therefore, Christ's baptism sanctifies all baptismal waters by mixing up with the Holy Spirit. In another context, "giving birth [by baptism] rejuvenates the old just as the river rejuvenated Na'man [2 Kings 5:1-14]",⁶⁶ Ephrem equates the healing of Na'man with the birth from baptism. From these exegetical notes, one can see that Ephrem elaborates the sacramental value of water and thereby its intrinsic value.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 6:4.

⁶⁰ Hymns on Virginitly 6:4.

⁶¹ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:11.

⁶² Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:5.

⁶³ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:10.

⁶⁴ Hymns on Nativity 23:12

⁶⁵ Homily on Our Lord 55.

⁶⁶ Hymns on Virginitly 7:7.

To conclude, he solidly declares that “all creatures are endowed with their beauties and varieties [uniqueness]”.⁶⁷ So, Ephrem opts for intrinsic value/worth of creation and it is only revealed for the *eye of faith*. This intrinsic value/worth in creation makes Ephrem’s Eco-theology contextually valid, because value for the whole creation is Theo-centric, while value for only humanity is anthro-centric.

3.2. Integrity of Creation

Integrity of Creation is a major theological as well as ecological concern in Ephrem’s *Creation Theology* and his theology highlights “... nothing in creation exists in isolation”,⁶⁸ says Sebastian Brock. Ephrem interpreted the *Creation Event* in the light of interrelation between the whole creation. Therefore, *Integrity of Creation* is a major concept of his Creation Theology. So, inter-connectedness within creation as a whole, within creation and humanity (natural world and humanity), and between the natural world and the spiritual world are marked clearly in his literatures.

According to Ephrem, the house (natural world) which God constructed provides everything in equal measure for each creature.⁶⁹ According to him, the created beings depend on a *Single Table*, “... the house which He created”,⁷⁰ for sustenance. But, *Image of God* makes Adam exceptional and elegant among other creations. Even though “... glorious was Adam in all things”⁷¹ and gloriously formed, only the image of God makes the Adam in a way supreme among other created realities. However, God’s creations are intended to live in mutual dependence with each other.

Ephrem depicts the earth as the *mother that gave birth to Adam*⁷² and further acknowledges that the earth is our *nursing*

⁶⁷ Hymns on Virginitly 51:5.

⁶⁸ BROCK, *The Luminous Eye* 164.

⁶⁹ Cf. Hymns on Paradise 13:2.

⁷⁰ Hymns on Paradise 13:2.

⁷¹ Hymns on Paradise 13:3.

⁷² Cf. Hymns on Nativity 1:16.

*mother and we are her children.*⁷³ Adam and Eve were blessed *on this earth, not in Paradise.*⁷⁴ God has prepared this dwelling place, earth, before they sinned, because "... [God] knew that they were about to sin",⁷⁵ says Ephrem. And it is well known that after the transgression of divine commandment humanity began to fill the earth and multiplied. So, for Ephrem, there is a hereditary relation between earth and humanity.

According to Ephrem, there was peace and harmony between the animal world and humanity before the transgression of divine commandment.⁷⁶ Moreover, he says that "... knowledge which God gave to Adam"⁷⁷ enabled him to name animals. Therefore, Adam was naming animals on behalf of the Creator and the *event of naming* also shows the inter-relatedness of Adam/(humanity) with the animal world. However, after the transgression of their commandments, "... He [God] made us [Adam/(humanity)] to live with the wild beasts"⁷⁸ and that also proved harmful to humanity. But for Ephrem, this change is "... so that might we see how little our honour had become".⁷⁹

Ephrem titles Christ as "the Physician Who healed all",⁸⁰ "the Nourisher of all",⁸¹ "the Purifier of all",⁸² "the Enricher of all",⁸³ and "the Reviver of all",⁸⁴ because Christ is the physician sent to heal the diseased creation. i.e. Christ was "sent to heal the ills of a land that is under a curse"⁸⁵ and "He came down to free His creation",⁸⁶ "to sanctify the whole of creation",⁸⁷ "to restore

⁷³ Cf. Hymns on Paradise 9:1.

⁷⁴ Cf. Commentary on Genesis I:30. Commentary on Genesis I:31.

⁷⁵ Commentary on Genesis I:30. Cf. Commentary on Genesis I:31.

⁷⁶ Cf. Commentary on Genesis II:9.

⁷⁷ Hymns on Paradise 12:16.

⁷⁸ Hymns on Paradise 13:10.

⁷⁹ Hymns on Paradise 13:10.

⁸⁰ Hymns on Faith 12:9.

⁸¹ Hymns on Nativity 11:8.

⁸² Hymns on Virginity 15:1.

⁸³ Hymns on Nativity 4:203.

⁸⁴ Hymns on Nativity 23:1.

⁸⁵ Hymns on Paradise 11:9.

⁸⁶ Hymns on the Nativity 22:5.

all creation”⁸⁸ and thereby “Christ renewed the earth”.⁸⁹ Christ’s restoration of the whole creation demonstrates that “he was not manifesting another creation”,⁹⁰ nor “introducing an alien creation, but was transforming the original creation”.⁹¹ Moreover, he is of the view that another God cannot renew the creatures which do not belong to him.⁹² So, for him, the restoration is not only exclusively to Adam/(humanity), but also to the creation as a whole, i.e. God will renew both heaven and earth.⁹³ To conclude, *Integrity of Creation* is interwoven in the theology of Ephrem. Thus, Ephrem brings a common thread of the modern Eco-theology.

4. Ecological Reading of Kenosis

Christian theologies, especially Christology, cannot ignore the concept of kenosis.⁹⁴ One can find the concept of Christ’s self emptying (kenosis) in Ephrem’s theology embedded with ecological concerns. Ephrem identifies Christ as the *Beautiful staff of Wheat* that grew among ugly tares⁹⁵ and *Grape* who was brought out from wild grapes⁹⁶ (elsewhere he says “... in love he [Lord of the vineyard] grafted the branch of the bitter [vines] on to branches of sweetness”⁹⁷). For him, like the foot of the persons

⁸⁷ Hymns on Faith 73:17.

⁸⁸ Hymns on the Nativity 17: 11.

⁸⁹ Hymns on the Nativity 17:12. Cyril of Jerusalem (contemporary of Ephrem) says in his *Catechetical Lectures* that, Jesus’ crown of thorns is destined to nullify the curse of *thorns and thistles* (Gen. 3:18) while his burial in the ground is destined to cancel the *curse of the earth* (Gen. 3:18). Cf. KOFISKY-RUZER, Justice 330. Kofsky, Aryeh and Ruzer, Serge. Justice, Free Will, and Divine Mercy in Ephrem’s Commentary on Genesis 2-3. *Le Museon* 113 (2000). pp. 315-332.

⁹⁰ Commentary on Diatessaron 5:11.

⁹¹ Commentary on Diatessaron 5:12.

⁹² Cf. Hymns on Nisibis 37:10.

⁹³ Cf. Hymns on Paradise 9:1.

⁹⁴ *Kenosis* is derived from the Greek word *keno* which means to empty. It was developed as an exclusive Christological theme and the *Kenotic Christology* is based on Phil. 2:6-11, which depicts that Jesus emptied himself to a servant in order to save the world.

⁹⁵ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 31:14.

⁹⁶ Cf. Hymns on Nisibis 43:3.

⁹⁷ Hymns against Heresies 39:10.

who crushes the grapes washes in its juice, Christ's blood washes the foot of those who crushed him, thus identifying the kenosis of Christ with grape. He seems to have in mind that the dirty feet of the grape trader are washed by the juice of the grape!⁹⁸

Ephrem portrays that Christ, the beautiful sheaf of Wheat has been self emptied to grow among the ugly weeds in order to give *Bread of Life* and also Christ as Grape grown among wild grapes to give *Medicine of Life*. The *suffering of Christ* is the key to open God's treasures. Ephrem equates the suffering (self emptying) of Christ and the result with the suffering of various things in the natural world.⁹⁹ The natural world¹⁰⁰ also produces their treasures/(fruits) through a *form of suffering*.

*All these things teach by their symbols:
they open by their sufferings the treasure of their riches,
and the suffering of the Son of the Gracious One
is the key of His treasures.*¹⁰¹

He also compares the crucifixion and resurrection with the olive by saying that "... the olive gave water and blood through its death, Messiah gave these through his death".¹⁰² He again says that like Christ, the olive the first born among the trees was buried in the flood, but it rose up and gave a leaf to the dove as a promise of restoration of the whole creation.¹⁰³ He goes on further by comparing the nature of oil with Christ, by connecting the oil with baptism. In the baptism, the oil descends to the water along with the body, which shows the love for the needy i.e. descends and buries in water.¹⁰⁴ However, *Christ by nature cannot die*, the oil too ascends from the water. Moreover, "oil gave itself to the sick

⁹⁸ Cf. Hymns on Nisibis 5:12.

⁹⁹ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 11:20

¹⁰⁰ See Hymns on Virginitly 11:10-18.

¹⁰¹ Hymns on Virginitly 11:20.

¹⁰² Commentary on Diatessaron 21:11.

¹⁰³ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 6:3.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Hymns on Virginitly 7:10.

that they might gain by it all helps, as the Anointed Who gave himself”.¹⁰⁵

The self-emptying love is nothing but a renewal of power too. The whole *Christ-event* – from the manger to the Cross – is a perfect example of kenosis and by Christ’s kenosis the whole creation was renewed with a new life. This mode of reflection is quite evident in Ephrem’s analysis when he depicts wheat grew among ugly tares, grape of mercy among wild grapes, the sprouting of olive tree by overcoming the flood etc. The kenosis aspects in creation in turn give a renewal power to creation to proclaim the glory of the Creator.

5. Ecological Reading of Sin

Ephrem promotes a radical ecological reading which defines nature and Scripture as *clear waters*, disturbed by the sin of humanity.¹⁰⁶ For him, sin corrupts the nature, while disputation disturbs the Scripture. Sin makes the earth diseased,¹⁰⁷ darkness,¹⁰⁸ mother of thorns and the prison,¹⁰⁹ and grew old.¹¹⁰ Therefore, according to him, sin injures not only the person who sins, but also harms the whole of creation.¹¹¹

According to him, “... cursed is the earth because of you [Adam’s sin]”¹¹² clearly emphasizes that there is an intimate connection between the transgression of Adam and the innocent earth as recipient of the curse.¹¹³ There were no thorns or thistles on the earth before the sin. Therefore, for him, the earth was cursed because “... He [God] caused [Adam] to suffer by means of the curse on the earth”¹¹⁴ and “... he [Adam] did not escape

¹⁰⁵ Hymns on Virginity 4:5.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Hymns on Faith 35:8.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Paschal Hymns (Crucifixion) 8:1.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hymns against Heresies 26:7.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Hymns against Heresies 26:7. Hymns on Paradise 5:13.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 17:12.

¹¹¹ Cf. Hymns on Faith 35:2, 8.

¹¹² Commentary on Genesis II:31.

¹¹³ Cf. Hymns against Heresies 26:7. Hymns on Faith 35:2. Hymns on Paradise 9:1; 11:9; 14:15. Hymns on Nativity 17:12. Hymns on Virginity 31:14. Sogiatha I:50.

¹¹⁴ Commentary on Genesis II:31.

punishment ate the curse which received”.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the curse of the *earth’s being* also made them to suffer.¹¹⁶ After the sin, the earth brought forth thorns and thistles, to eat plants of the fields etc are visible signs of Adam’s misery on the earth because of the transgression.¹¹⁷

According to Ephrem, ““when you till the earth shall no longer yield to its strength””¹¹⁸ again portrays God’s pronouncement of the curse on the earth, the second curse the earth received after the sin of Cain. Even though the earth was cursed for the second time in order to make the life of Cain and his descendents miserable, the curse was stronger that time. Therefore, he opines that the sin of Adam and Eve, and Cain placed before us a corrupted earth, i.e. thorns and thistles came out and the earth’s returns were reduced.

Sin is the major cause for the exploitation of the creation, whether it is disobeying the divine commandment (Adam and Eve) or other sins (murder in the case of Cain). In both these incidents, the earth too was brought under God’s curse in order to heap on the curse on humanity. However, the gravity of sins makes the earth helpless, because God used the earth to make the sinful humanity’s life miserable. Therefore, Ephrem warns against the deeds (sins) of those (haughty) who corrupt the creation.¹¹⁹

6. Misuse of Free will

The early humanity (Adam and Eve) have had a joyful life in communion with God and in harmony with other creations. However, Ephrem observes that the free will guided the first inhabitants to stretch their hands to pluck the forbidden fruit, which brought *visible* (sin) and *invisible diseases* (disfigured creation).¹²⁰ Therefore, he strongly believes that the misuse of free will (early humanity) transgressed the commandment of God,

¹¹⁵ Commentary on Genesis II:31.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Commentary on Genesis II:31.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Commentary on Genesis II:31.

¹¹⁸ Commentary on Genesis III:7.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Hymns on Faith 35:9.

¹²⁰ Cf. Hymns on Church 32:1.

resulted in the fall from the state of dignity. So, he is of the view that the misuse of our free will leads into errors. According to him, thorns will not peep out from the earth as long as there will not be any misuse of our free will.

*The sprouting of the thorn (Gen. 3:18)
testified to the novel sprouting of sin [wrong actions],
for thorns did not sprout
as long as sin [wrong-doing] had not yet burst forth;
but once there had peered out sin
[hidden wrong choices] made by free will,
then the visible thorns began to peer out from the earth.*¹²¹

However, our sins (wrong doings) due to the misuse of free will make thorns to peer out from the earth. According to Ephrem, both body and soul¹²² are having the free will and hence both have the responsibility for wrong-doings. Therefore, free will, the gift of God often misused by human beings through their evil actions, disturbs cosmic harmony and life. So, Ephrem prays to God to make clean our free will which was disfigured.¹²³

7. Authority (to dominion with limits?)

Ephrem writes in the *Commentary on Genesis* that God has graciously given Adam/(humanity) "... authority over Paradise and what is outside Paradise",¹²⁴ "... authority of the fish of the sea, and over birds, and over the cattle and over all the earth"¹²⁵ and this authority received by the humanity "... constitutes the likeness [image] of God who has dominion over the heavenly things and the earthly things"¹²⁶ and therefore, "... in the image of God He [God] made... (Gen. 9:6), concerns his [Adam's] authority for, like God".¹²⁷ Ephrem concludes that "... Adam took care of the earth and became master over everything... in

¹²¹ Hymns against Heresies 28:9.

¹²² Hymns on Nisibis 69:5.

¹²³ Cf. Hymns on Church 32:1.

¹²⁴ Commentary on Genesis II:4.

¹²⁵ Commentary on Genesis I:29.

¹²⁶ Commentary on Genesis I:29.

¹²⁷ Commentary on Genesis VI:15.

accordance with the blessing he had received [from God]”.¹²⁸ Therefore, Ephrem very clearly states four things in the context of authority, i.e. humanity received the authority over the rest of creation from God, it is nothing but a blessing from God (like naming event) and constitutes the *Image of God*, and lastly, but importantly the authority humanity received is “... just as the authority of God rules over all”.¹²⁹ Therefore, authority *is a blessing of God and an outcome of Image of God, and not vice-versa*.

However, the following questions reveal Ephrem’s doubt about the nature and quantity of the authority which humanity received. He asks: How can we rule over the fish, when we do not have proximity to the sea? How can we rule over the birds, unless we do not have proximity to all regions? How can we rule over animals, unless we do not have proximity to the entire earth?¹³⁰ He also gives a very thoughtful answer, i.e. “if they [fish] dive deep, they escape those who would catch them”.¹³¹ With these questions and answer, Ephrem highlights that the authority does not imply *dominion for exploitation*, because God rules over His creation not for exploitation. Moreover, he indirectly conveys that there is a limitation for our authority and this authority should not be taken for granted for massive destruction on other creations for greedy needs. Hence, Ephrem is crystal clear that human dominion is subjected to limitedness and this limitedness also highlights that humanity cannot exercise unlimited dominion over the rest of the creation, because God does not provide “complete dominion”.¹³²

*He [God] did not give us the whole earth
to walk on, but [gave] with measure;
nor the sea so we would sail it all,*

¹²⁸ Commentary on Genesis II:10.

¹²⁹ Fourth Discourse to Hypatius 113-114. (MITCHELL-BEVAN-BURKITT, Fourth Discourse to Hypatius Ixxxv-Ixxxvi)

¹³⁰ Cf. Commentary on Genesis I:30.

¹³¹ Hymns on Faith 20:5.

¹³² Hymns on Faith 38:14.

*nor again the sun so the eye would have complete dominion over it.*¹³³

Even though Adam/(humanity) was gifted with free will and other gifts which give an awesome space among other creations, Ephrem points out the limitations when it comes to the supremacy of human beings over the rest of creations. One can argue that today science and technology reduce the degree of proximity, but the very fact is that human beings can only reduce the degree of proximity, but its complete deletion is not possible. Therefore, Ephrem's exegesis of Genesis 1:28 gives a paradigm shift in the interpretation of *Theology of Dominion*, saying authority/dominion is practical, but limited too. Ephrem's discussion over authority proclaims in height that *humanity has authority/dominion, but dominion with responsibility*.

8. Ephrem's Eco-theological Concerns

From the above discussion, we can see that there are eco-theological perspectives inherently interwoven in Ephrem's literatures. He brings forth an insightful Eco-theology with the concept *God is sacramentally embodied in the creation* (Panentheism) and also one can find natural view of God's presence, i.e. *God with creation* (Pansyntheism). His exegesis on the *Creation Account* portrays in details the eco-theological principles such as Eco-justice, Intrinsic value/worth and Integrity of creation. Moreover, one can find ecological readings of kenosis and sin in his literatures which is so powerful in its flavour. The interpretation over authority and misuse of free will also appears in his literature with a considerable importance, especially in today's context of more aggressive dominion over the whole creation just for amassing wealth. Through the eco-theological perspectives, Ephrem put forward two vibrant concerns for today's praxis – *Spiritual Sensitivity* and *Moral Responsibility*.

¹³³ Hymns on Faith 38:14.

8.1. Spiritual Sensitivity

Ephrem's literature is highly embedded with spiritual awareness and therefore, spiritual sensitivity is one of the underlying principles of his Eco-theology. "In his book Moses described the creation of the natural world, so that both *Nature* and *Scripture* might bear witness to the Creator"¹³⁴ ("Everything in heaven and earth are Creator's witnesses. They proclaim His grace"¹³⁵). In his analysis, Moses described the creation of the natural world in order to highlight that it is a witness to the Creator. Moreover, it is clearly notable that nature is the first witness to the Creator and then comes the Scripture, and Ephrem also followed exactly this order. Christ dwells in the wombs of all creation,¹³⁶ He is entirely in all and in each one,¹³⁷ and the heavens and all the creation were filled by Him¹³⁸ reveal that the Creation is a dwelling place of the Creator (Panentheism). This spiritual sensitivity enabled Ephrem to bring natural world and the Scripture side by side as two witnesses of the Creator. So, natural world also points to the Creator. In another instance, he says that even though the foot of the crusher abuses the cluster of grapes, its juice/blood in turn washes the filth of the crusher's foot.¹³⁹ This is a kenotic love of grape for the crusher and Ephrem equates this with the blood of Jesus which washes our filths. Before the first sin, the earth was clean and there were no thorns or thistle, however the earth was cursed because of sin.¹⁴⁰ So, there is a connection between sin of the humanity and the innocent earth as recipient of the curse¹⁴¹ (Integrity of Creation). In these examples, Ephrem wilfully as well as evidently upholds the concept – spiritual sensitivity in order to realize the *Integrity of Creation* and

¹³⁴ Hymns on Paradise 5:2. (*emphasis mine*)

¹³⁵ Hymns on Church 48:10.

¹³⁶ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 21:7.

¹³⁷ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 4:159.

¹³⁸ Cf. Hymns on Nativity 21:6.

¹³⁹ Cf. Hymns on Virginity 11:11.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Commentary on Genesis II:31.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Hymns against Heresies 26:7. Hymns on Faith 35:2. Hymns on Paradise 9:1; 11:9; 14:15. Hymns on Nativity 17:12. Hymns on Virginity 31:14. Sogiatha I:50.

one must realize this spiritual sensitivity through the eye of faith. Therefore, spiritual sensitivity from the part of the faithful should become an obligatory response and unless and until we come to this spiritual consciousness, understanding *natural world as a witness to the Creator* will remain far from the purview of the *Christian Spirituality*.

8.2. Moral Responsibility

The spiritual sensitivity in turn demands praxis – *Moral Responsibility* and it will bring righteous fruits from humanity which pleases the Creator.¹⁴² The misuse of free will is due to the lack of moral responsibility and this guides humanity to stretch their hands to pluck the forbidden fruits which brings *visible* (sin) and *invisible diseases* (disfigured creation) as in the case of Adam and Eve.¹⁴³ The visible thorns sprout from earth due to the lack of moral responsibility and the resulted misuse of free will. Therefore, “... for thorns did not sprout as long as sin [wrong-doing] had not yet burst forth”,¹⁴⁴ says Ephrem. So, the moral responsibility is essentially needed for the fruitful execution of free will otherwise the misuse of free will *shall no longer yield to its strength*. Hence, the lack of moral responsibility in our actions is nothing but abusing the God-given free will. Moreover, backing up of moral responsibility is an essential criterion for exercising the mastership/authority. Mastership/authority with moral responsibility will not guide our deeds to master over creation in an exploitative manner. So, human actions should be morally responsible and then only the free will and mastership/authority can be fully and effectively implement in its real essence.

9. Model of Ephrem’s Eco-theology

Ephrem’s eco-theological model is undoubtedly *Theo-centric*. In his model of Eco-theology, God is in the centre and vegetative world, animal world and the human world are linked by earth, because earth is a component that mixes up with their

¹⁴² Cf. Hymns on Paradise 6:13.

¹⁴³ Cf. Hymns on Church 32:1.

¹⁴⁴ Hymns against Heresies 28:9.

lives, i.e. God “brought forth vegetation through the agency of earth and water”,¹⁴⁵ “animal world came into being as a result of the combining of earth and water”,¹⁴⁶ and “fashioned dust from the earth into Adam [humanity]”.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, vegetation, animal world and humanity have come into being out of the same earth and in today’s ecological context it provides a powerful symbol of the interrelationship of the whole creation. In the modern era, therefore, Ephrem’s Eco-theology has its own distinctive place. To conclude, through ecological concerns, Ephrem discovers his *Image of God* in his living context and in a unique way this explains the religio-socio-political-economic as well as spiritual conditions for *being a human*.

¹⁴⁵ Commentary on Genesis II:3.

¹⁴⁶ Commentary on Genesis II:9.

¹⁴⁷ Commentary on Genesis II:4.

Petrine Primacy – Ecumenical Perspectives

Rev. Dr. Adai Jacob Corepiscopa

Part I: Petrine Primacy as an Undeniable Truth as per NT and the Traditions of the Primitive Church

When we think of the whole inhabited world (oikumene) as a global village in this cyber age, Christians form a formidable part of its inhabitation. But unfortunately the Christians in the world lost their feeling of oneness though they all believe in one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The church existing in this world is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality. In our creed we confess our faith in one holy catholic and apostolic church. The church as body of Christ cannot be divided, but remain united under its head Jesus Christ. The Universal Church as a visible reality needs a visible head to realize its unity and oneness. The church is continuation of incarnation and therefore the role of Jesus Christ and his apostles especially the leader of the apostles Peter cannot be ignored and suppressed when we think of unity. If the Christian churches in this world dream of a

unity of all Christians in this world, the role of Peter as the head of the primitive church and afterwards the role of the successors of Peter to represent Peter cannot be denied. Ecumenism in its wider global sense is inevitably related to Petrine primacy. With such a primacy I never mean the exercise of temporal authority. From Petrine Primacy I mean the responsibility to represent Jesus Christ and follow the model of leaderships that Jesus taught which is expressed and practiced in love self-sacrifices and service.

1. Primacy of Simon Peter among the Disciples of Jesus

Among the disciples of Jesus, Peter holds a special position. This special position occupied by Peter is clearly stated in the Gospels when they deal with the earthly ministry of Jesus.

a. Simon Peter as first among the disciples

When the synoptic Gospels give the list of the twelve apostles,¹ the name of Peter is listed first always. This practice of listing Peter in the first place continued in the Primitive Church also (Acts 1:13). In the case of the calling of the disciples Simon Peter was the first one to be called by Jesus.² The first position of Peter is explicitly expressed in the Gospel of St. Mathew (10:2). A clear trace of primacy of Simon Peter is visible in the attribute “first” given to him.³ St. Mark and St. Luke use a short form to mention the twelve apostles – Peter and the companions. This shows that the twelve apostles accompanied Jesus under the leadership of Peter.

b. Confession of faith and giving of the new name “Kepha”

The primacy attributed to Peter is not simply an inference based on abstract texts of the NT. The primacy was given to Peter by Jesus, when Simon made the decisive church building confession of faith: “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). The Christian church exists in this world

¹ Mt 10: 2-4, Mk 3:16-19, Lk 6:14-16

² Mt 4:18-19, Mk 1:16-17, Lk 5:1-11

³ Ratzinger, called to communion 54

on the basis of this faith confessed by Simon. Just after the confession of faith Jesus gave Simon a new name- Kepha and it means stone or rock. In NT this new Aramaic name given to Peter is preserved and used as it is. In Greek NT the name Kepha is not translated but transcribed adding an “S” and thus the form “Kephass” is used. Apostle Paul always used the Aramaic form Kepha except in Gal 2:7. By giving a new Aramaic name Jesus was projecting the primacy of Peter among the disciples.

The answer of Jesus to Simon’s proclamation of faith is also decisive: You are Kepha and on this rock I will build my church (Matthew 16:18). The church is thus built on the Rock, who is Simon Kepha and on the foundation of faith professed by Peter. In the interpretations of this text by the early Fathers of the Church the prime position of Peter is emphasized.⁴

c. Peter as representative and spokesman of the disciples

In Synoptic Gospels Peter appears as the representative and spokesman of the disciples⁵. Prominence of Peter among the disciples is evidently reported in the Synoptic Gospels. As we know Peter, James and John belonged to the close circle of disciples and among them Peter comes first (Luke 5:10; Matthew 17:1). When Jesus walked on the water in sea of Galilee Peter wanted to reach Jesus by walking on the water (Matthew 14:28). During important representing all the disciples the questions of Jesus to them were answered by Peter. Jesus knew that his last supper is going to be a crucial incident in the life Jesus and also in the life of Christian church for ever. Jesus entrusts Peter and the beloved disciple John to make preparations for the last supper (Mark 14:13; Luke 22:8). In Gethsemane Jesus prayed in agony and his sweat became like great drops of blood (Lk22:44) and just

⁴ Cyprian : “It is on one man that He builds the church” (de unitate ecclesiac 4)
 St. Aphraat : “ Simon, the prime of the disciples... the lord look him made him the foundation and called him the rock the foundation of the church (demonstrations 7:15
 St. Ephrem: “Blessed art thou, thou whom the Son of God choose and appointed had of his disciples, and to who he gave the power and authority to bind and to loose.

⁵ Mk 8:29; Mt 18:21; Lk 12:41; Mk 10:28; Mt 17:24

after that he turns to the disciples calling Peter (Mk 14:37; Mt 26:40).

d. Peter as Holder of the Keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Through his public ministry Jesus wanted to establish the kingdom of God. It can be realized only through repentance and true faith in Jesus (Mk 1:15) Peter followed Jesus and proclaimed true faith in Jesus. Therefore Jesus built his church on the rock that is Peter who confessed the faith. Here we see the starting point of establishing the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus moved a step further and entrusted with Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. To entrust with the keys of the kingdom of heaven means that the duty to administer the same is handed over to Peter by Jesus.⁶ Jesus makes Peter his vicar with the unique function of carrying and ministering the household of God, the church⁷.

e. Peter as leader is the one who strengthens the disciples and the believers.

In NT Peter is never pictured as a superman with extraordinary ability, power and authority. He is depicted with all his human weaknesses as a simple fisher man, but he is chosen by Jesus to be the leader of the disciples and to be the primate of the church he established. During the most difficult time of the trial of Jesus like a criminal the fidelity of the disciples were put in trial. Jesus said to Peter that the Satan demanded the fall of Peter but Jesus prayed for him so that his faith may not fail (Luke 22:31-32) Peter expressed his readiness to go to prison with Jesus and also to die with him. Though Jesus foresaw Peter's denial and momentary loosing of fidelity He entrusts with Peter the difficult and great duty of strengthening the faith of the disciples and the believers⁸. Peter's role of strengthening the faith of the believers points to the future. To strengthen the faith of the

⁶ Mathew Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches* (St. Pauls, Bombay 2009), 278.

⁷ Ibid 278.

⁸ Ibid 279.

brethren means to give leadership to the church in safeguarding and strengthening the faith of the church.

2. Primacy given to Peter by the resurrected Christ

Peter exercised primacy not only during the earthly life of Jesus, but also after his death and resurrection. The resurrected Christ himself appointed Peter as the chief shepherd of the people of God. To become the first witness to the resurrected Christ is a special privilege allotted to Peter. After resurrection Peter turns out to be the best fisherman to fish human beings.

a. Appointing Peter as the chief shepherd of the new people of God (John 21:15-18)

Before ascension the resurrected Christ entrusted Peter the most important duty of feeding the lambs and sheep of God. The threefold affirmative entrusting the duty of feeding the whole sheep means that Peter is appointed as the chief shepherd. The resurrected Christ wanted to keep the unity of the sheep under one shepherd after his earthly ministry. This chief shepherd is but indebted to follow the path of Jesus and must be ready to die for the sheep. (John 10:11, 21:19). The role of the Shepherd is not to rule over the sheep, but to feed, guide and to die for the sheep. The only role model for the chief shepherd is none other than the role of Jesus Christ himself.

b. Peter as the first witness to the resurrection.

The most important qualification that an apostle of Christ possessed was to be a witness of the risen Christ and to have direct experience of the presence of the risen Christ (Acts 1:22). St. Paul reports the tradition of the confession of faith of the primitive church in 1 Cori 15:3-8. According to it the risen Christ appeared to Peter at first and then to the twelve apostles. The true Gospel to be proclaimed to the whole world contains all the experiences from the earthly Jesus and from the risen Christ. Peter was the first one to be called as a disciple to experience the earthly Jesus again the first one to get the appearance of the risen

Christ and to experience the risen Christ (1 Cori 15:5) The Gospels also emphatically affirm and project the appearance of the risen Christ to Peter.⁹ The primacy given to Peter during earthly life of Jesus continued after the death and resurrection and it is clearly expressed in the narrations of the appearances of the risen Lord (Luke 24:34).

3. Primacy of Peter in the Primitive Church

a. One of the Pillars

In the epistle to the Galatians, Peter, James and John are considered to be the pillars of the early church (Galatians 2:9). The whole NT witness to the special place of Peter among the apostles and in the early Church¹⁰. In the account of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is kept as the focal point in explaining the history of the primitive church. It asserts the primacy of St. Peter in the primitive church. After the death and resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ, Peter was accepted as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It was Peter who addressed the crowd on the day of Pentecost which lead to the conversion of the thousands to Christianity. Though Peter is primarily the apostle to the Jews (Gal 2:8), it is Peter who inaugurates the conversion of the Gentiles by converting and baptizing Cornelius and his family. The epistles of St. Paul give evidence to prove the primacy of Peter in the church. Paul as apostle to the Gentiles got the necessary permission to carry out his mission from Peter (Galatians. 1:18) and Paul used to give a report about his missionary activities to Peter (Galatians 2:2). Peter was honored in the primitive church as the main witness to the resurrected Christ, as the head of the apostles, as protector of the true faith and traditions and as the one who is responsible to keep the discipline in the church and above all as the main shepherd of the newly formed sheep of god.

⁹ Lk 24:34; John21:7-11, 15-17

¹⁰ Cf Matthew 4:18-20; 8:14; 10:2; 14:28-32; 15:15; 16:18-19; Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-18; Acts 1-12; 15:7; Galatians 1:8;2:9.

According to Oscar Cullman, Raymond E. Brown, A. Findly and J.K. Blank, the special role allotted to Peter in NT cannot be denied¹¹. They have made scientific studies on this matter and tried to give an objective picture of Peter. The scholars unanimously agree that Peter had a special role in the early church. The special role of Peter is entrusted by the resurrected Lord himself. According to Cullman the leading position of Peter among the apostles and in the early church is evident in Synoptic Gospels, in 4th Gospel, in Acts and in the Letters of St. Paul¹².

According to Thomas Athanasius, the primacy of Peter has three levels of function in the church¹³. Firstly, Peter is the foundation of the church since he has been given the title Kepha (John 1:42; Matthew 16:18). Secondly, Peter has been given participation in the mission (Luke 5:10). Thirdly, Peter exercises pastoral functions as the leader of the universal church (John 21:15-17).

b. Keeping of Discipline in the Church

The history of the early church as described in the Acts of the Apostles is supportive of a Petrine ministry at the service of the unity of the whole Church. After Easter, Peter is presented as the leading figure among the disciples and supposed to be accountable for maintaining the discipline in the early church. When Luke describes the history of the primitive church in Acts of Apostles he puts Peter at the top. The important speech on the day of the Pentecost that led to the conversion of thousands was made by Peter. It can be seen that Peter was accountable for maintaining the discipline in the early church. The incident of punishing Ananias and Saphira who broke the discipline as described in the scripture is an example for it. The special

¹¹ Adai Jacob, *A doctrinal study on the relation between Episcopacy and Petrine Ministry* (unpublished article).

¹² Adai Jacob, *A doctrinal study on the relation between Episcopacy and Petrine Ministry* (Paper Presented in the Catholic-Syrian Orthodox Theological Dialogue).

¹³ Thomas Athanasios, *Ithu Viswasathinte Karyam* (Malayalam), (Udayagiri: MSOT Seminary Publications, 1994), 23.

mention of the Hellenists in the Book of Acts and their special views proves that even in the Primitive Church itself there were different tendencies. Peter and the rest of the apostles as a whole appear to have taken a mediating position between the Judaizers and the Hellenists¹⁴. All these points to the fact that Peter had a crucial role in keeping the discipline in the early church.

c. Leadership in Missionary Activities

The evangelization among the Jews was entrusted primarily to Peter (Galatians 2:8), but at the same time he is presented as the initiator of the Gentile mission. Cornelius and his family who were the first gentile converts were baptized by Peter. Paul as apostle to the Gentiles got the necessary permission to carry out his mission from Peter (Galatians. 1:18) and Paul used to give a report about his missionary activities to Peter (Galatians 2:2). The Pauline writings are also not exceptions to this privileged position of Peter. Paul's various journeys to visit Peter also indicate the special position Peter had among the Pillars, the college of leading men in the Jerusalem Community. Antioch was considered to be the center of missionary activities in the early church and it is believed that Peter was in Antioch for a long time. This points to the fact that Peter was giving guidance and leadership to the missionary activities. There are texts, which show Peter's special function even in the Pauline communities. When speaking of his function in his own communities. Paul refers to Kephas as the first one who is recognized by the believers as having authority. Paul speaks about his right comparing himself to the other privileged persons in the Church among whom there is Kephas. When speaking of the apparitions of the risen Lord as a tradition handed over to him and as a privilege of apostleship he presents Kephas as the first one to have that privilege. This recognition of Peter in the Pauline Churches seems to indicate the special role of Peter among the

¹⁴ Oscar Cullman, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, translated by Floyd V. Filson (New York: Living Age Books, 1958), 36.

Jerusalem community, among the apostles and in primitive Church, in which Jerusalem is the point of departure and origin for all the Christian communities. The importance given to Peter in the Pauline communities is also pointing to the vital role played by him in the missionary activities in those churches. According to Cullman the power of the keys concerns the missionary leadership and definitely presupposes the church leadership¹⁵.

d. Peter in Antioch

Although Christian Church had its beginnings in Jerusalem, the severe persecutions (Acts 11:10) lead to the shift of the center from Jerusalem to Antioch, a cosmopolitan city of that time. Antioch was not just a refuge for the Christians, rather also a center of missionary activities. St. Paul made his missionary journeys from Antioch and it was the center of all his operation. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 lead to massive migration of Christians to Antioch, increasing the prominence of the city¹⁶. The historical fact that the title 'Christians' were given to the followers of Christ in Antioch reveals the importance and the presence of many Christians in the city.

It is widely accepted that Peter came to Antioch and worked for several years in Antioch (Acts 12:17; Gal 5:11). The Fathers of the church give report about the same. (E.g. Eusebius, Johannes, Chrysostom's, Heronimus). According to Eusebius Peter is the founder of the Church in Antioch and also became the first Bishop of Antioch¹⁷. If Peter is the first Bishop in Antioch, then Bishop or Patriarch of Antioch after Peter are his successors. The Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch has above all a legitimate claim over the Throne of Antioch in the succession of Peter. The importance of Rome regarding primacy is vested

¹⁵ Oscar Cullman, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, translated by Floyd V. Filson (New York: Living Age Books, 1958), 223.

¹⁶ Adai Jacob, "*The Patriarch of Antioch and the Throne of St. Peter*", Excelsior (Udayagiri: MSOT Seminary Publications, 1990), 30.

¹⁷ Adai Jacob, "*The Question of Primacy in the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*," (Paper Presented in the Catholic-Syrian Orthodox Theological Dialogue), 2.

mainly in the fact that Peter suffered Martyrdom in Rome. As it is understood that Antioch was the center of Christianity in the early church for a long time, it is to be assumed that Peter who was in Antioch was the one who was monitoring the whole church and its activities.

Part II: Ecumenical Perspective of Petrine Primacy

If we now consider ecumenism as dealing with the unity and cooperation among the churches in this world, the Petrine primacy and ministry, if it is biblically analyzed, can play a vital role in ecumenism. We have just seen the primacy attributed to Peter during the earthly ministry of Jesus, after the resurrection and during the formation of the primitive church. In the light of the NT we can affirmatively say that Peter was the primate and the symbol of unity of the first century church. Our ecumenical perspectives today have to consider and adopt the model of the role played by Peter in the primitive church.

1. Trinitarian Model

The church as communion is to be understood in relationship with the Trinitarian Communion. We are at the heart of the mystery of the Church in the final salutation of Paul in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians : ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you’. The fellowship with the Father and the son in the Holy Spirit is the life towards which the whole economy of salvation tends. The Church is the Sacrament of this fellowship. Within this Ecclesiology of Communion it is easier to see the theological significance of the Petrine ministry.

The structure and life of the Church reflects the mystery of the inner life of the Triune God, a life which is a community of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and at the same time uniquely and mysteriously one. ‘Just as in the communion of persons within the Trinity there is a certain hierarchy, so also in

the Communion of Churches there is a hierarchy¹⁸. There is a first church and a first bishop. The fact that the Father is first within the Trinity does not mean that the Son and the Spirit are less or in any way subordinate to him. As the Father is in a special way the source and the symbol of the unity within the trinity, the succession of Petrine ministry is holding a special primacy within *the perichoresis* or communion of Churches and college of bishops. It is not a primacy of domination by one and subordination of others, but is rather a primacy of service in communion.

2. Reaffirming the Unity of the Church

Petrine Ministry is intended to preserve the unity of the Universal Church. Just as the three persons of the Trinity do not imply a division in the divine essence, but each of them possesses it fully and has His life in it, so also the essence of the Church the Body of Christ, is not divided by the plurality of Churches. Just as God is one and yet three without being divided, so too the Church is one and yet many again without division, because each Church represents and contains the full reality of the one Universal Church. It is in the context of this Ecclesiology of Communion that we see the significance of the Petrine ministry as a ministry of unity. In local level every bishop is a symbol of the unity of the church. In the universal level the Petrine primacy can be an aspect promoting unity among the churches. Abraham, the father of faith, is by his faith, the rock that holds back the chaos, the onrushing primordial flood of destruction, and thus sustains creation. Simon the first to confess Jesus as Christ and first witness of resurrection, now becomes by virtue of his Abrahamic faith, which is renewed in Christ, the rock that stands against the impure tide of unbelief and its destruction of man.¹⁹ Similarly the

¹⁸ Matthew Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2009),281.

¹⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, translated by Adrian Walker (San Francisco, 1996)49-50.

successor of Peter is intended to hold back the church together against the challenges that arises against its beliefs and existence.

According to the Eucharistic Ecclesiology each local church is an expression of the universal church possessing all its fullness.. This fullness is realized when there is a Eucharistic celebration under the leadership of a bishop. Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, there the fullness of the church is realised. Each bishop as the head of the local church shares the promises given to Peter. Here local churches exist in communion with the apostolic throne of Peter and it is a communion with apostolic succession of St. Peter. The local church exists in relation to the universal where the successor of Peter is a symbol of unity²⁰.

The churches that accept the Petrine succession and Petrine authority in the church are the Catholic and Syrian Orthodox Church, accepting Popes and the Patriarchs as the successors of St. Peter and as a symbol of unity. Maintaining this line we can have a reinterpretation in the line of Cyprian. According to him succession of Peter cannot be limited to the bishop of Rome or of Antioch. Every local church is the church in its fullness. So the bishop of the local church shares the promise given to Peter. Peter is the model of every bishop. So Cyprian says each bishop is Peter and each bishop is the foundation of the church. This early Christian ecclesiology could help us for a more ecumenical interpretation of the Petrine office without discarding the primacy of bishop of Rome or Antioch.²¹

The successor of Peter as the head of the universal church can be seen as a symbol of unity. The patriarch of Antioch as successor of Peter is the symbol of unity of the Syrian Orthodox Church. As the holder of the Petrine office the patriarch of Antioch has two types of representative character, a.) He represents Peter and just as Peter was the head and shepherd of

²⁰ James C.S., "Petrine Ministry in relation to Antioch and Rome," (Paper Presented in the Catholic-Syrian Orthodox Theological Dialogue), 6.

²¹ Thomas Athanasius, *Function and Role of Bishop in the Regional and Local Level*, (Paper Presented in the Catholic-Syrian Orthodox Theological Dialogue), 5.

the primitive church, the Patriarch of Antioch keeping the same position safeguards the unity of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church b.) The Patriarch as the high priest represents the whole body of the people of God. The acclamation of the people, just after the consecration of Patriarch saying *axios* is a clear indication of the approval of the people as their representative. Unity of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church is realized through the Patriarch of Antioch acting as the one chief shepherd of the whole church. Similarly in an ecumenical context the recognition of the Petrine primacy can pave way for much cooperation among the churches leading to a unity.

3. Expression of Catholicity

We know that in ecclesiology catholicity is basically a qualitative terminology and at the same time quantitative. It is to be understood that every local church under a bishop is expression of the Universal Church. If the Peter is ‘*risho daslihe*’ (a head of apostles) then the Patriarch as successor of Peter is ‘*risho depiscopos*’ (the head of the Bishops) In the context of Eucharistic ecclesiology when the patriarch celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the one holy catholic and apostolic church is manifested in a special and concrete way. There we find above all the manifestation of the union of catholicity and universality and the Patriarch appears as the visible symbol of catholicity. Hence it is to be concluded the Petrine primacy is always an expression of the catholicity of the Christian Church.

The Petrine ministry is given to the Church in view of maintaining the unity and integrity of the apostolic faith, which concretely exists in the different Ecclesial Traditions. Hence Petrine ministry, as the ministry of unity, is also collegially shared by the Heads of the Individual Churches who exercise the ministry of unity in their respective Individual Churches. On the Individual Ecclesial level, it is exercised by the head of the particular church who in the Eucharistic perspective, presides

over the Eucharist, in which all the Particular Churches and all the Bishops of that Individual Church participate

4. Orthodox Perspective - Primacy and Conciliarity

The conciliar way of exercising the authority and taking decisions in the Church is seen from the early church itself. The election of Matthias and of the seven deacons and the Council of Jerusalem are all examples of conciliarity in the Church²². The decisions were taken in agreement with the whole church. The election of Matthias was effected by the congregation of a hundred and twenty people under the leadership of Peter. The institution of the seven deacons was established with the approval of the whole assembly. The apostles settled the controversy about the gentile Christians together with the elders and the whole Church, gathered in the Council of Jerusalem. The primacy of Peter in the Church is necessarily associated with conciliarity. If Peter is the Rock on which Christ has built the Church (Matthew 16:18), the apostles are foundations to the Church (Eph 2:20). If Jesus has prayed for Peter in view of his role of strengthening his brethren (Luke 22:32), he has also prayed for all his apostles and for the whole Church in view of their unity and solidarity. If Peter has received in a special way the keys of the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19), all the apostles have received it in a collegial way (Matthew 18:18, John 20:23). If Peter is the first one who had the privilege of experiencing the Risen Lord and being his official witness (1 Corinthians 15:5-15), all the apostles are official witnesses of the risen Christ (Acts 24:48; Acts 1:8).

Tavard says that it is the oneness of the church that is insisted in the conciliarity. It consists in the existence of the one universal gathering of believers and in the teaching of one doctrine. It implies the sacramental union of the whole people of God in the body of Christ and thereby the mutual communion with one another under their bishops.²³

²² Acts 1: 15-26, Acts 6:1-6, Acts 15:5-30.

²³ Tavard, *The Church Community of Salvation, An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, 107.

The Syrian Orthodox Church emphasizes the conciliar nature of the church. The council of bishops or the Episcopal Synod is the Supreme Spiritual authority in the church. It is the highest spiritual authority and the protector of true faith and tradition in the church. The Patriarch of Antioch has got primacy to a certain extent as successor of Peter and as the President of Synod of the Universal church. As the president of the Synod the Patriarch who is holding the office of Peter has the duty to see that true faith and traditions are kept, practiced and propagated in the church. Just as Peter is the house keeper so also the Patriarch is the keeper of the house of God the church, who has responsibility to keep the same clean free from all types malignity of heresy. Primacy does not mean that the Patriarch can take unilateral decision regarding important matters of the church. The Patriarch is not over the Synod but subject to the decisions of the Synod. For example if there are complaints against the Patriarch the synod has the authority to discuss the complaints and to take action. In Syrian Orthodox Church primacy and conciliarity go hand in hand and they are not contradictory to each other. While the successor of Peter exercises the primacy on the level of the Universal Church, it is collegially shared by the bishops who exercise this ministry of unity on the local level.

5. Exercise of primacy in love, service and self-sacrifice

AS we have already seen in the Trinitarian model the Father is considered as first in the trinity, but it does not mean that the Son and the Spirit are less or in any way subordinate to Him²⁴. He is in a special way the source and symbol of the unity of that mysterious divine life. Similarly in the communion of the churches there can be one particular church and the head of that church to hold a primacy. This primacy never means dominating others, rather a primacy that is exercised in love, service and self sacrifice. The primacy is intended to provide the universal church

²⁴ Matthew Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches* (Mumbai: St.Pauls,2009),281.

a sense of unity and also to face the chaos that arise in the course of collaborating with each other. It intends to develop a cooperative attitude between the members of the various churches, who are part of the single body of Christ. Just as the father is the source and symbol of the unity, the primacy should also stand for the unity among the churches, which demands a greater sense of love, service and self sacrifice.

6. Petrine Primacy in the context of wider Ecumenism: A new challenge

From wider ecumenism I mean the unity of all the Christian churches in the world – a dream to be realized in near future. In His High priestly prayer Jesus prayed for the unity of the whole church and it is essential to safeguard and protect the Christian faith in this world. (John 17:21). St. Paul emphatically advises the church to keep the unity of the church based on the one Body, one spirit, one hope, one lord, one faith, one baptism and one God the Father (Eph 4:3-7). Unity and mutual love are the essential qualities that the church and its members have to possess and that is actually the final will of our Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace of God in this 21st century the age old theological disputes and quarrels that led to the division of the Christian church into several denominations, have lost their relevance. But when we examine the history of the church we cannot deny the fact that disunity led to mutual persecution decline of the church and later to the decline of the Christian faith. Now in different parts of the world the Christians are persecuted and in many ancient Christian centers the very existence of the church is in danger. The Christian church is entrusted to impart the message of salvation brought by Jesus aiming at establishing the universal brotherhood of the human race, through mutual love and unity under all embracing and loving God the Father. The message of Jesus should not be crushed through the disunity and mutual hatred and disputes between the churches. Just as Jesus inaugurated his mission with the words – “The time is fulfilled” so also now the time is fulfilled for all the churches in the world to establish unity

in diversity in the model of the unity of the church that we see in the New Testament. Though the church during the NT times existed as different local churches with different traditions, it maintained its unity under one visible primate – Peter. As I have already mentioned earlier during the earthly ministry of Jesus, Peter was the first among the disciples, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ Peter was appointed by the resurrected Christ as chief shepherd or primate of whole flock of God, and according to Acts of the Apostles Peter was the primate of the primitive church in order to reaffirm and experience the Unity of church and all the individual Christians in this world. We have to pray and expect for a new Pentecost in which the Holy Spirit may be poured a new upon all the churches and on all people God and the successor of Peter may be able to safeguard the unity and lead the whole flock of God to the Kingdom of God following the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, depicted in the New Testament. It is a new challenge for all churches and for all individual Christians and it is high time that all the ecumenical movements and activities may adopt this model of unity found in the NT.

Conclusion

In the light of the scripture, it is quite evident that Peter possessed primacy among the Apostles and in the early church. The primacy was an aspect which kept the church together and also which enabled effective administration. Today in the midst of several Christian denominations, the Petrine primacy can function as a cohesive force leading to much cooperation between these different denominations. But it is to be emphasized that this primacy is never intended to be a super power or a biased one, rather it advocates for mutual love, respect and equality. In such a scenario the Christian Church can excel much more as a collective unit in the present world of disintegration, competition and suppression.

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Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Proposing a Sex Education Program for the Adolescents

Fr. Thomas Abraham Malecheril¹

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of revolutionary changes and complex challenges. It is like a bridge between childhood and adulthood. This is the period in which they try to cope with their sexuality by learning how to deal with their changing sexual feelings. It is also a time of discovery and awakening, a time when intellectual and emotional maturation combine with physical development to create increasing freedom and excitement to experience reality of life.

In this paper I would like to discuss mainly about adolescent sexuality. Here we need to understand the meaning and purpose of sexuality. The term sex has been one of the most discussed

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terms in all ages and cultures and we are bound by sexual myths passed on from generation to generation. Many cultures have a negative approach towards human sexuality and unknowingly communicate a message that sex is something improper and something one ought not to talk about. This is mainly because of the lack of awareness about human sexuality. We need to have a systematic study programme about sexuality and it should start from childhood itself. The most prime period is adolescence. It is the task of each individual to understand the meaning of sexuality, what it stands for and what kind of identity does it provide? How can it be related to the relationship between man and woman?

To address the above said issues in adolescent sexuality we have to consider both the biological process of puberty and the psychological aspects of the teenage years. The challenge which we face is that most of the adolescents are not educated properly to overcome this situation. The whole intention of this paper is to see the psychological and physical transitions of adolescents and to propose a Christian sex education programme so that they could be able to overcome the crisis.

2. What is Adolescence?

Adolescence is the period of psychological and social transition between childhood and adulthood. This is the most important transitional period of life during which the child experiences a number of changes - physiological, emotional and intellectual. Stanley Hall regarded adolescence as a “period of storm and stress”². This is a period of identity crisis and the adolescents may have adjustment problem with their elders. According to Anthony A. D'Souza,

Adolescence is a transitional period in personality development, bridging the year between childhood at the onset of puberty, and adulthood. Like all periods of transitions, adolescence presents a number of problems of adjustments. At this time of their life, adolescents have

² Mohanty & Mohanty, *Family Life Education: Adolescence Education*, 1.

special needs, interests and difficulties of their own, which are different from those of childhood and adult life.³

In fact most of the elders are not able to understand the difficulties of adolescence which affect them badly. The elders consider them as children and think that they are grownup and became an adult overnight. In reality adolescence is not an overnight process; rather a long and complex development occurs in physical, mental and emotional level.

Adolescence is a very crucial period of time and they find it difficult to concentrate their attention on anything for a long period of time. While analyzing the physiological and psychological development we may understand more about adolescents.

2.1 Physical development

The amount and speed of physical changes during adolescence is much greater than in any other period of growth in an individual's life. The first indication of changes to physical level varies from individual to individual. "Mostly changes in hormone levels, bone structure, fat deposits, and sex organs begin almost simultaneously, markedly altering the appearance of pubescent girls and boys."⁴ This physical maturity gradually provides a new identity to them and also demands them to elevate themselves to the expectation of the family and society.

2.1.1 Puberty

The onset of puberty is a sound indicator for the beginning of adolescence. The term puberty is derived from the Latin word 'puberatum' which means age of maturity or manhood. This mainly refers to the bodily changes of sexual maturation rather than the psychosocial and cultural aspects of adolescent development. Adolescence mainly overlaps the period of puberty, but its boundaries are less precisely defined and it refers as much

³ D'Souza, *Sex Education and Personality Development*, 48.

⁴ Jaffe, *Adolescence*, 71.

to the psychosocial and cultural characteristics of development during the teen years as to the physical changes of puberty. “The Maturation of the sex organs, sex characteristics, and sex drives direct the individual along the pathway of development to adult attitudes, and sexual maturity helps to bring out what is best, most generous, and most constructive in the individual’s life.”⁵

The hormonal change is the important aspect of puberty which controls the emotions and behaviour of an adolescent. “The gonads (ovaries in women and testes in men) produce hormones that circulate in the bloodstream and, due to their effects on the reproductive cycles and sexual maturation, are called sex hormones.”⁶ This hormonal change during puberty is a process by which a child’s body becomes an adult body capable of reproduction. Fast changes occur during this period in many body structures and systems. Growth accelerates in the first half of puberty and stops at the completion of puberty. Before puberty, body differences between boys and girls are almost entirely restricted to the genitalia. During puberty, major differences of size, shape, composition, and function develop in many body structures and systems. The most obvious of these are referred to as secondary sex characteristics.⁷ The secondary sex characteristics appear and the shape of the body becomes increasingly that of a woman or man. Often children feel surprised and shocked at the physical changes during the time of puberty.

Thus puberty refers to the bodily changes of sexual maturation rather than the psychosocial and cultural aspects of adolescent development.

2.1.2 Sexual Maturation in Girls

Sexual Maturation mainly refers to fertility and other bodily changes that support the reproductive process. In girls it discloses

⁵ Rao, *Adolescence Education*, 105.

⁶ Kimmel & Weiner, *Adolescence: A Developmental Transition*, 63.

⁷ cf. Dixon, *I’ M a Teenager Pls Understand Me*, 22.

during the time of menarche, the first menstrual period, and which symbolizes the emergence of femininity. Most of the reproductory organs of girls lie inside the body and develop gradually during adolescence. They feel this change due to the growth in their abdominal and the menstrual cycle gets started. The first external sign of sexual maturity in girls are the growth of the breasts and usually it takes three years to reach its size. "The development of breasts and hips and the appearance of hair around the vagina and in the arm-pit are the definite signs of onset of sexual maturity in girls."⁸ The primary sexual changes include vagina, ovaries, fallopian tubes and uterus. The maturation of the ovaries leads to an irregular ovarian cycle that becomes increasingly regular over time. A regular cycle of ovulation starts months or years after menarche.⁹

Secondary sex changes include growth of body hair, breast enlargement, adult facial features and increasing fat deposits and these occur after the primary changes. The production of hormones like estrogens and progesterone increases throughout the pubertal stages and both play a major role in pubertal development. These physical changes provide an identity to them as a woman.

2.1.3 Sexual Maturation in Boys

Sexual maturation in boys and girls are associated with puberty and it is believed that boys take a longer period for sexual maturation as compared to girls and which is also controlled by hormone changes. It is difficult to predict an exact time for sexual maturation because it varies from person to person. This variation includes several factors like, heredity, food, climate, disease, environment etc. Usually boys take two to four years to attain their sexual maturation. This is the time when the penis starts increasing in size and the pubic hair appear around the root of it. Then hair starts appearing in the underarms and later on over the

⁸ Chaube, *Adolescent Psychology*, 14.

⁹ Cf. Jaffe, *Adolescence*, 76.

face. Voice break is also a visible sign of sexual maturity in boys. “In males, androgens, in the form of testosterone or its related hormone dihydrotestosterone, promote the growth of the testes, penis, prostate, seminal vesicles, vas deferens, and the epididymis. Again this hormone promotes the growth of body hair, which is thought to be greater in males than females.”¹⁰

When a boy is sexually matured, the sexual thoughts in his mind and feelings in his body are quite definite and strong. They have to be very much conscious of the activity of the penis, of the sensitive way it responds to their secret thoughts. This sexual maturation leads to an attraction towards the opposite sex. This mostly disturbs them and sometimes leads to sexual deviations like masturbation. Another associated issue along with this is “wet dreams”. This is quite unavoidable but many boys feel guilty about it.

2.2 Psychological development

Generally adolescence is a period of stress and strain. This stormy period begins from the middle adolescence and continues till the end. It should help us to understand their emotional level more clearly. Manju Mehta analyses the personality of adolescents in a different way. According to him,

Chronologically, adolescence ranges from age 12 to 18 years. Sociologically, adolescents are those who are trying to bridge the gap between dependent childhood and self-sufficient adulthood. Psychologically, it is terminating of a prolonged period of infancy and processor to adult personality in which one witnesses changes in nearly all aspects of life - physical, mental and social which requires lot of adjustment on part of adolescents, which lays the foundation stone for adult personality traits.¹¹

It is precisely a period of psychological growth and more a transitional period in human life. They undergo different levels of

¹⁰ Kimmel & Weiner, *Adolescence: A Developmental Transition*, 71.

¹¹ Mehta, *Adolescent Psychology*, 1.

changes in their life and the emotional intensity differs from that of a child or an adult. As Hurlock opines that, “The developmental tasks of early adolescence are all focused on putting away childish attitudes and behaviour pattern and learning to be an adult.”¹² This is really a time in which the adolescents experience physical as well as psychological changes in life.

According to Balir and Jones, “Adolescence is that period in every person’s life which lies between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood... It varies in length from family to family, from one socio-economic level to another, and from culture to culture. Its length may even fluctuate in the same society from time to time depending upon economic or other conditions.”¹³ Since it is a life between childhood and adulthood adolescence has a key role to play in human personality. Here a shift comes from the dependence and restrictions of childhood to the independence and freedom of adulthood. It is a period in which they build a bridge between these two periods and that is the crisis that adolescents face. Here the crisis according to Hurlock is, “The physiological and psychological changes which accompany sexual maturity come so quickly that the individual is unsure of himself, of his capacities, and of his interests.”¹⁴ This instability mostly leads to insecurity. Sometimes they feel dissatisfaction and indifference quite frequently without any reason which may leads to emotional tensions. However by the end of this period they will be able to acquire a relatively more mature mode of behaviour.¹⁵ More over as a result of this transformation the adolescence develop new attitudes, ideas and desires in their life.

Adolescence is the period in which the individual’s personality and maturities are being ascertained and developed. They feel self-confident and try to experiment with their own

¹² Hurlock, *Developmental Psychology*, 397.

¹³ Blair & Jones, *Psychology of Adolescence for Teachers*, 1.

¹⁴ Hurlock, *Developmental Psychology*, 394.

¹⁵ Cf. Chaube, *Developmental Psychology*, 134.

strength which they like to exhibit. Acceptance and due respect from elders are the primary need of an adolescent. A great demand for the company of the peer groups which provide them a sexual identity. According to Bhaskara Rao, "Adolescence is a period of great excitability and turbulent emotions. Love is the dominant feeling of adolescence."¹⁶ There is a strong natural desire among adolescents to come into intimate touch with members of the opposite sex. But the social restrictions demand them not to express their feeling publicly and thus they face a crisis of intimacy. The feelings about sex matters take their root in this period and there is a great demand for true and mutual psychosocial intimacy with another person.

Adolescents show their interest in group action and a great demand for independent life. There is a quest for autonomy in their life. They spent less time with their parents and more engage in outside family relationships. This doesn't mean that they become emotionally detached from their parents rather they continue to maintain a great deal of love, loyalty and respect for their parents. This assures them greater independence, higher self-esteem better performance in their educational activities and fewer psychological and social problems.¹⁷ As Hoffman et.al. discuss about the changes in the self of adolescence and according to them, "They are striving for autonomy and dealing with issues of principle, politics and values. As they wrestle with these issues, they discover that their changed bodies evoke new expectations and behaviour from friends, peers and society."¹⁸ This is the period in which the adolescents start to incorporate psychological characteristics and social relationships into their self-description. They handle this issue with little difficulty but through formation of a mature identity they gradually overcome this and have a stabilized position. This is the way the adolescents develop the self-concept.

¹⁶ Rao, *Adolescence Education*, 123.

¹⁷ Cf. Rathus, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 554.

¹⁸ Hoffman, et al., *Developmental Psychology Today*, 347.

3 Human Sexuality

3.1 Meaning of Sex & Sexuality

Sexuality has fascinated people in all walks of life from ancient times until the present. Religion and culture have played a great role to communicate its meaning and values as well as sexual taboos to the people. Most of the time both functions as a moral code for the people because both insist on some kind of norms and conditions for practicing sex. Moreover in most cultures human sexuality have been considered as something improper or bad. Thus it has been widely used and abused by people. This is because sexuality mainly refers to genitality. Of course genital experiences are sexual but there are many sexual experiences that are not at all genital. Thus most of the psychologists and sexologists opine that sexuality is not merely an act, rather it is an experience. It has a wider meaning and it involves the total personality of a human being. Our sexuality is rooted in a particular consciousness we have about ourselves. This self understanding comes from our own experience with family, friends, Church and the society. Thus we need to develop a clear definition about sexuality and uphold certain values so that the new generation could be brought up with a positive attitude towards their own personality.

We generally define “Sex” as sexual intercourse and try to relate it to the sexual organs. When we ask common people about the meaning of sex, we get plenty of answers. “It is certainly the physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of an individual’s personality that expresses maleness or femaleness.”¹⁹ This is seen and expressed in all our activities such as work, feelings, intimacy, expression, relationships, etc. In marriage it is not merely sexual intercourse but it includes sharing, caring, touching, talking, embracing, kissing, caressing, etc.

When we discuss about human sexuality, the foremost idea to be highlighted is to have a positive approach towards sexuality.

¹⁹ Mohanty, *Family Life Education: Adolescence Education*, 30.

While discussing about the Yahwistic understanding of the creation account Kochuthara observes human sexuality as mutuality and he opines that, “Sexuality is not a source of shame or worry or fear or insecurity, but it is a source of joy, intimacy, trust, freedom, security, mutual appreciation and understanding.”²⁰ It is also an expression of interpersonal relationship and equal dignity of man and woman. Subsequently we need to look into human sexuality from different perspectives, i.e., biological psychosocial, behavioral and cultural perspectives. Freud observes sex as a powerful psychological and biological force. He comments that, “something which combines a reference to the contrast between the sexes, to the search for pleasure, to the productive function, and to the characteristics of something that is improper and must be kept in secret.”²¹ In order to understand this more Sadock opines that, “The study of human sexuality deals with everything that relates to or is affected by sex; the organs of sex and their functions; the sex impulses, instincts, and drives; and all those thoughts, feelings and behaviours connected with sexual gratification and reproduction, including the attraction of one person to another.”²²

Moreover sexuality provides a sum total of one’s personality. According to Masters and Johnson, sexuality means “a dimension of personality instead of referring to a person’s capacity for erotic response alone.”²³ It provides an identity and acknowledges the power of being of each individual as male and female. It affirms an attraction towards the people of the opposite sex, a feeling of having an intimate contact and a relationship with the people of the opposite sex. This is positive and affirmative.

²⁰ Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 24.

²¹ Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, James Strachey(Trans), 304.

²² Sadock, *Normal Human Sexuality and Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders*, cited in Kaplan & Benjamin J. Sadock, ed., *Comprehensive Text Book of Psychiatry*, 1295.

²³ Joghnsn , Kolodny & Masters, *Sex and Human Loving*, 5.

3.2 Spirituality of Sex

The Christian attitude to sexuality in the past cannot be said to be very positive. Sexuality was to be used only within marriage as a means of procreation. But when we analyse human sexuality biblically and theologically, we can develop a positive attitude towards it. On the basis of the Genesis account Kosnik et al. opine that “Sexuality is described as willed by God, created as something good, about which human beings need not be embarrassed or ashamed in any way.”²⁴ Both the Priestly and Yahwist accounts of the creation narratives in the book of Genesis assert that God’s creation is good. It clearly portrays the goodness of sexuality and shows that God created this with a definite purpose.

Sexuality is a gift from God in order to bring people from loneliness to relationship, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Thus God created a nuptial community and provided a status of ‘isolation to integration’. Here Yahwist emphasized the need of having mutual love and affection. “The Yahwist narrative shows human sexuality and sexual distinction as willed by God, and underscores the complementarity of the sexes and the social nature of human being.”²⁵ Thus it is our sexuality that demands for a company of the opposite sex and which affirms intimacy and love with others. In fact it is connected with reproduction but when we compare human sexuality with other creatures it has a wider meaning. It has a relational dimension.

In the same way Priestly account shows the creation of human being as male and female. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen.1:27). Here man and woman are created for each other. In view of this St. Cyril of Alexandria opines that

²⁴ Kosnik et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought, a Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 8.

²⁵ Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 23.

“God created co-being.”²⁶ It shows the equality of sexes and the meaning and significance of human sexuality. Here both the man and the woman experience the power of being available to the other person as a sexual partner. This is really willed by God so that man and woman can create a community. Here the mandate is love and for that God created human being in His image. As Paul Evdokimov observes,

A one-personed God would not be love. God is Trinity, one at the same time three. The human being, as a closed monad, would not be His image. The creation account calls woman a “helper meet for man”, more precisely, a “face-to-face”. Scripture does not state that it is not good “to work alone” but “to be alone”, and thus the woman will “be with him”. “One toward the other” forms their co-being; and thus it is from the beginning, *in principio*, that the human being has been a nuptial being, “And [He] named them Man when they were created” (Gen.5:2).²⁷

Thus it is clear that love is the central theme of human relationship and sexuality plays a greater role in this regard.

The Song of Songs depicts that sex is divine and created by God.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine (Song. 1:2). Your two breasts are like two fawns... (Song. 4:5)

My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts (Song. 1:13).

Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your mouth is lovely (Song. 4:3)

This poetic language in fact shows the beauty of romantic love and both man and woman enjoy the other’s body. In line with the narratives of Song of Songs the Syrian Orthodox

²⁶ Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, 117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 115-116.

Marriage service also illustrates the sacredness of sex. Some of the prayers and songs bring this idea,

Lust mongers tried to steal away my feminine purity (virginity)

But in giving your love, I have won their hearts, defeating selfish slavery.

Dancing in love savoring in your ethereal beauty

Lord, Son of my God, receive me, take me on your shoulders.

Lord thou art brighter than Sun and graceful fragrance of perfumes

Endlessly, let me kiss your life giving lips.

Lord see the beauty of me, escort me to your wedding room

*Leaning on your lap let me take sleep full of dreams.*²⁸

These romantic expressions of marital love elevate the relation between the spouse to that of Church and Christ. It precisely shows that human *eros* is a thirst for the divine. Thus Human sexuality is good, divine and willed by God. As Whitehead observes that, “The Good news about sex is that Sex is good.”²⁹ The Christian faith upholds that their bodies are good and holy. As St Paul says “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit”. In the Song of Songs sex is presented as something beautiful, good, and desirable (Song 4:1 ff).

In the New Testament Jesus Christ did not proclaim any new sexual ethics as such, but His teaching on the affirmation on the dignity of men and women is expressed in the case of the prohibition of divorce. Here Jesus gives primacy to the law of love. “... for Him, it was precisely our joy, our holiness as wholeness, human welfare and well-being, that constituted the will of God.”³⁰ Thus, as a responsible Christian it is our

²⁸ Translation from *Malankara Orthodox Sabhayile koodasha Kramangal* (Mal), 116-118.

²⁹ Whitehead & Whitehead, *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy*, 22.

³⁰ Kosnk et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, a Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America, 30.

responsibility to uphold the goodness of human sexuality irrespective of culture, gender and age.

Along with the goodness of sex people appreciate sex as relational as well. Focusing on the quality of the relationship, sex is being viewed as a gift to be exchanged between man and woman. Here sex is appropriately shared in a relationship where there is genuine affection and concern for each other.³¹ Our understanding about sexuality should not be limited to the sexual act; rather it should be understood in its totality. Thus sex is one of the deepest forms of communication between people, especially the people of the opposite sex. This is the foundation of marital intimacy and unity. But we cannot confine this communication to marital life because each individual is a sexual being and his/her sexuality finds its meaning in his/her relations with other people too, though genital intimacy is excluded. Thus sexuality is not something genital alone rather it is an expression and dimension of one's personality.

3.3 Adolescent Sexuality

Human sexuality originates before birth and children are born with genitals that can give them an identity as male or female. From that time onwards they are being taught the meaning of maleness and femaleness by the society. Thus the children learn that they are boys or girls and what behaviours are expected from them as boy or girl. They learn separately what they should do and what they should not do. Subsequently they internalize the difference between the sexes like, clothing, styles of grooming, types of games, and even expression of emotions. This is known as gender- role socialization.³² Normally children learn the gender roles of their society and attempt to relate these roles to their own behaviour and their own identity. Gender roles are deeply involved in sexual feelings and behaviour which

³¹ Cf. Whitehead & Whitehead, *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy*, 30.

³² Cf. Kimmel & Weiner, *Adolescence: A Developmental Transition*, 336-337.

demand intimacy. Apart from sexual identity an urge for intimacy with others starts during adolescence.

In fact making friendship with others is a natural desire of human being whether he/she is young or old. But the intensity of the friendship level differs from period to period. The adolescence friendship level is different from their childhood because it hangs on a weak thread. But they seek for intimate friendship with whom they are attracted and it is mostly towards the opposite sex. “Adolescents have the need for association with the opposite sex. They experience a feeling of intimacy. They wish to present themselves nicely before the opposite sex. This is all common phenomenon.”³³ It is the responsibility of the elders to address this issue positively and provide a rational view of sexuality in life. This is because understanding the adolescent sexuality is something different from marital sexuality. For the adolescents it is precisely a positive drive which provides them an identity as male and female. It also affirms independence and healthy relationship with others. Elders should respect their individuality and give them space to express their emotions.

3.3.1 Intimacy

Human sexuality is associated with intimacy which highlights developmental accomplishments. This intimacy is directly related to *Agape*, which denotes divine love. Loving involves understanding another individual. According to Pope John Paul II, “Love is always a mutual relationship between persons. This relationship in turn is based on particular attitudes to the good, adopted by each of them individually and by both jointly.”³⁴ Here intimacy substitutes love, care and protection. Thus according to Masters and Johnson, “Intimacy is a process in which two caring people share as freely as possible in the exchange of feelings, thoughts and actions.”³⁵ It is an expression

³³ Mohan, *Psychological Foundations of Education*, 324.

³⁴ Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, 73.

³⁵ Joghnsn , Kolodny & Masters, *Sex and Human Loving*, 233-234.

of true love between two individuals and demands our relationship with our fellow human beings.

There are some basic components in the process of intimacy: caring, sharing, trust, commitment, honesty, empathy and tenderness. However, these components do not usually exist separately; rather they are combined together and they strengthen each other.³⁶ Thus intimacy imparts a relationship and brings people together. “It provides a comfortable position as being socially competent, feeling accepted, negotiating mutual needs and establishing connection in a social world.”³⁷ In fact adolescent sexuality assures them sexual identity as well as a healthy relationship with others, especially with the opposite sex.

4. Christian Education

Education is the most vibrant factor of human development. Though we speak about the need for education, the fact is that common people are not very much aware about the meaning and significance of true education. In fact the purpose of education is to draw out the full potential of the individual. “The word ‘educate’ comes from the root word ‘*educare*’ which means to bring out that which is dormant and hidden.”³⁸ Thus true education asserts to bring out the full potential of an individual to its maximum extent. Saxena says, “Education is the full development of all the innate powers of a child.”³⁹ It involves the whole humankind and provides harmonious all-round development of the individual. Every human being has physical, mental, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. Thus development and drawing out of all these dimensions are the functions of true education.

When we discuss about education, religious education especially Christian Education has a key role to play in nurturing

³⁶ cf. Joghanson, Kolodny & Masters, *Sex and Human Loving*, 236.

³⁷ Montemayor, Adams & Gullotta, ed., *Psychological Development During Adolescence: Progress in Developmental Contextualism*, 95.

³⁸ Paulus, *Introducing Christian Education*, 1.

³⁹ Saxena, *Philosophical and Sociological Foundations of Education*, 11.

an individual. It is the responsibility of the Church to take care of the Christian Education programme in the Church. This is obviously one of the most important missions of the Church because upbringing the fellow believers in Christ is the responsibility of the Church. According to Vimala Paulus, “Christian Education is the harmonious all-round development of the individual stressing the means of helping persons grow in the pattern of Jesus Christ. This would enable individuals to lead true Christian lives, following Christ’s teachings and in full obedience to Him.”⁴⁰ Thus the purpose of Christian Education is to help people to attain knowledge about Christian values and which would make them prepare their lives in accordance with the life and deeds of Jesus Christ.

The responsibility of Christian nurturing is the main task of the Church. In this regard sex education is important for emotional and social development of an individual and which should be addressed to the people of all ages according to their need. However adolescence is the prime period in which an individual is being given proper sex education in its fullness.

4.1 Proposing Sex Education for Adolescents

Sex is a matter of inhibition in the Indian society and is a less discussed matter. Young people are totally ignorant about the true aspect of sexuality and may have a lot of confusion and misconceptions in this matter. In fact today as a result of technological advancement, children are more exposed to pornographic literature. It has been found that the majority of adolescents acquire information from friends and from pornographic literature and this leads to confusion and misconceptions about sexuality. According to Dixon, “Pornography deeply harms the young person for the images stay in the mind. There have been so many young people who have confessed that they were so addicted to porn that they could no

⁴⁰ Paulus, *Introducing Christian Education*, 2.

longer differentiate porn stars from their mothers and sisters.”⁴¹ This may cause serious consequences in their later life. Moreover the constant emphasis on sex, ignorance of true facts and lack of the right attitude can create unhealthy curiosity which can lead adolescents to sexual experiments.

In India the rate of teenage pregnancy is increasing day by day and teenage pregnancy has become a disturbing factor.

The major reasons that lead to teenage pregnancy:⁴²

- Teens of the present day live in a magical world where they have access to whatever they want.
- They are easily carried away by the modern trends and find it no problem to have sex at an early stage.
- They adore movie celebrities and what they do on screen; imitating them is considered ‘kool’ .
- Dating is emerging to be an obligatory custom and having sex is regarded as the crucial part of it.
- It has been observed that most of the boys develop unwanted behaviours like smoking, drinking, and drug abuse at their teenage, which prompts them to negative and unknown paths.

Here, dealing with adolescent sexuality is a great challenge for the Church and the family. The Church should take an initiative to propose a sex education curriculum for its members and this should be imparted at home as well. At this juncture we cannot differentiate the responsibility; rather both the Church and the Christian families should be mutually responsible for this programme. Meanwhile, the Church should take the initiative to up-bring a common Christian sexual spirituality so that each family may be able to handle a uniform sex education programme for our youth. In this regard the main focus should be given to the adolescents because they often feel insecure and try to overcome this by covering their inadequacies.

⁴¹ Dixon, *I' M a Teenager Pls Understand Me*, 71.

⁴² <http://indianblogger.com/teenage-pregnancy-a-grave-issue-in-india/>

Thus, sex education becomes an integral part of education for living which includes self-awareness, personal relationship, human sexuality, sexual behaviour of adolescents and sexual morality. Mahanty observes adolescence sex education as,

An education programme designed to provide learners with adequate and accurate knowledge about sexual development and behaviour of individuals with biological, psychological, social, cultural, and moral dimensions. Although human sexuality forms the core of adolescence education, it is a function of the total personality that includes the human reproductive system and process, sexual relationship, attitude towards and interest in the opposite sex. Adolescence education thus embraces the biological, psychological, social, ethical and cultural aspects of sexual behaviour of adolescents.⁴³

Trimbos defines sex education as, “the guidance of children into maturity.”⁴⁴ According to him, sex education is a part of our general education and helps an adolescent to attain full sexual maturity. In fact a true adolescent sex education would help an individual to grow into maturity and would help him/her to understand his/her sexuality and maintain proper respect for others as sexual beings. Here the adults can help their adolescents to channelize their sexual energy positively and creatively through a proper awareness programme.

4.1.1 Parents and Sex Education

In the Indian culture many parents are not aware of the need of providing proper Sex Education to their children, especially to adolescents. Some of them are of the opinion that boys and girls acquire sex education automatically and they don't need any guidance in this regard. Many parents have the feeling that Sex Education develops a child's curiosity and create an over-concern about sex and a few argue that this may lead to experimentation

⁴³ Mahanty & Mahanty, *Family Life Education: Adolescence Education*, 35.

⁴⁴ Trimbos, *Healthy Attitudes Towards Love and Sex*, 16.

and irresponsible sexual behaviour. Some parents are aware about the necessity of Sex Education but they are unable to give them adequate help to meet the situation. At the same time a few parents do provide excellent guidance to their children.⁴⁵ Trimbos opines that sex education is the job of parents. According to him, “Bringing up children is a responsible and onerous matter, and it is certainly nothing to be ashamed of for anyone to cast around for a little extra information about the details of the difficult job parents are expected to do.”⁴⁶ Therefore, it is obviously the responsibility of parents to impart sex education for their children.

In fact many parents are not able to provide proper sex education and our educational curriculum also does not address this issue positively. As a result of this our children face innumerable difficulties in their lives. It is also generally observed that men and women feel shy about expressing their views frankly before each other. The main reason behind this hesitation is mostly the lack of proper awareness about human sexuality.

“Sexual education in the home should begin as soon as the parent deems their child mature enough to handle the subject matter. During late pre-adolescence, at around nine to eleven years of age, the child should be learning about their bodies and reproductive systems and what changes are going to occur or may have already started to occur within their bodies. Many parents are not comfortable with talking to their children about this, unfortunately, and the result is that many young adults are confused about their bodies, do not know how their body works.”⁴⁷

The important aspect here is that boys and girls must be properly educated about their physical maturation during adolescence. Mostly girls are very disturbed when menstruation

⁴⁵ Cf. Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 21-24.

⁴⁶ Trimbos, *Healthy Attitudes Towards Love and Sex*, 18.

⁴⁷

begins for the first time. If they are not properly oriented about the cause of this, it may lead to fear or false notions. For example, some have the false idea that they have got some wound somewhere inside their body or some unwanted things are happening in their life. Perhaps it may lead to mental worry and physical disturbances during menstruation. In the same way boys also undergo mental pressure and may not be able to understand the process of sexual maturation during adolescence.

In this regard it is the responsibility of the parents to prepare their girls to face the first menstrual period. Especially mothers can make them excited by and take pride in being feminine. The best time for discussing this matter with the child is before the onset of menstruation. It, moreover, broadens the relationship between parent and the child and provides a feeling of security. This is the time most girls expect the presence of their mother for emotional support and expect their privacy to be respected. Later on, the mothers can address the process of fertility and pregnancy along with sexual morality which would help them to realize the responsibility of human sexuality. This kind of relationships would encourage them to raise more questions which may consequently come to their mind. Besides, the parents can also recommend them to refer some scientific works about puberty which are readily available.

In boys, sexual maturation generates curiosity, surprise, pleasure, embarrassment, guilt and confusion. Mostly it demands them to know more about sexuality which provides pleasure to them. They are negatively influenced and believe that the only purpose of sex is individual enjoyment. They seek sexual fantasies which end up with masturbation. Thus true sex education would help the boys to see sexuality as rational and relational.

Sex Education is not just giving some information, rather a guidance to acquire maturity. It is a process in which a child has to become a fully human adult. According to Sigmund Freud

maturity consists of one's ability to love and work. Here love inevitably includes the ability for sexual love. It gives an acceptance of our own impulses, not as something bad and shameful, but as something normal and natural. It also provides a control of those impulses in accordance with our own sense of values, the rights of others and the norms of society.⁴⁸ The increase in sexual drive and the mysterious feelings are obvious in adolescents. Thus they need to have a successful integration of sexual and other aspects of love. This is the responsibility of the adults who are directly related to the adolescents, to provide proper advice and guidance at critical periods. Thus family is the nucleus of Sex Education.

Apart from family, schools and colleges must give more attention to the problems of young people and organize programmes in personality development and sex education. Sex education involves our bodies and their functions, our feelings and impulses and our expressions and dimensions of our personalities. This is a very delicate subject and it should be dealt with carefully, otherwise it may cause them to have distorted ideas. It should also include the meaning of love and how one relates to friends, especially with those of the opposite sex.

Home is the pioneer centre for providing Sex Education and it starts from the day a child is born. When a baby is born he/she is being given an identity as boy/girl. From that time onwards his/her gender identity begins to form, which gradually grows to maturity. Lichtenberg, discussing about the feelings of human sensuality and sexuality, gives special reference to the behavioural aspects of new born babies. According to him, "These are indications that each baby has patterns of activity and potentiality for bodily enjoyment and sexual excitement that will give an individual casting to the masculinity or femininity of his or her boyness or girlness."⁴⁹ Thus family plays a greater role in imparting sex education for our children which transforms them

⁴⁸ Cf. Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 19.

⁴⁹ Lichtenberg, *Psychoanalysis and Motivation*, 236.

to maturity. Let us look in to the comments of D'Souza: "The purpose of Sex Education is the transfiguration of a boy child into manhood and a girl child into womanhood. Sex Education is intimately bound up with the whole of education for life and maturity; it has an impact on body, emotions, mind and heart."⁵⁰ It gives a vision about the maturity of life, it provides roles and relationships with which adolescents are expected to act in the home and in society. It provides moral values and responsibilities of an individual.

We can conclude that parents are the ones who can understand their children more than anybody in this world and should realize that parenting adolescents is an art. Dr James Dobson discussing about the role of parents on the basis of certain studies conducted among the adolescence in United States. According to him, "There is no sex education programme, no curriculum, no school, or institution in the world that can match the power and influence of this kind of parental involvement."⁵¹ Thus parents are ultimately responsible for raising and educating their children.

4.1.2 Church and Sex Education

Church as a whole can go in line with the above discussed proposal for imparting sex education at home. Moreover it is the responsibility of the church to equip its members to handle this topic very effectively with their children. Church can become a main resource for providing a family oriented sex education programme. Communicating the true meaning, nature, purpose and the morality of human sexuality is important in the ministry of Christian education. It is the responsibility of the Church to propagate an appropriate sex education programme for its believers in different age groups. Bishop Reuss, in his book *Modern Catholic Sex Instruction*, is suggesting the role of Pastors in communicating the proper view of human sexuality. According

⁵⁰ D'Souza, *Sex Education and Personality Development*, 55.

⁵¹ Dobson, *Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide*, 151.

to him, “Pastors must point out the parents’ grave responsibility for the sex education of their children. They must help parents to fulfill this duty or (if necessary, and with the agreements of the parents) instruct boys themselves and see to it that girls will be given proper instruction by a suitable (female) teacher or youth leader.”⁵² He proposes that this communication of the proper view of human sexuality should be provided to children in different age groups, according to the need. Dobson opines that, “...the Christian church is in the best position to provide support for its members, since it is free to teach not only the anatomy and physiology of reproduction, but also the morality and responsibility of sex.”⁵³

In fact the Church can play a major role to correct the unfortunate practice of the believers with regard to sexuality and teach them to have a positive attitude towards it and equip them to handle it very effectively in the context of the Church’s life and programme. It could be handled at the crucial transition period of their life such as birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, parenthood, middle age and old age. This is the time they seek to grapple with new understandings of self and relationships. Sex education should help them to respect themselves and others. This would enable them to understand the gender difference and also help them to remove all kinds of prejudice they have about sexuality. Often the church has failed to address this issue. As a result people are not being properly oriented to the spirituality and morality of human sexuality.

Christian sex education should enable our adolescents to lead a Christian way of life. Here the responsibility of the Church is to propagate the Sexual ethics to the adolescents. Wetzel proposes a curriculum for the American adolescents where most of them are engaged in premarital sex and most of the sex educators emphasise a contraceptive and safe sex-based approach.

⁵² Reuss, *Modern Catholic Sex Instruction: A Practical Study of Sexuality and Love*, 54.

⁵³ Dobson, *Raising Children*, 112.

According to him, "...Abstinence-only sex education is somewhat effective in improving attitudes and behaviour among teenagers, while contraceptive-based health care and sex education are not."⁵⁴ This abstinence-only programme intends that pre-marital sex is wrong and highlights the virtue of Christian life. The Church should focus on an abstinence-only sex education programme for its adolescents on the basis of the Bible and the Doctrines of the Church.

Imparting Christian sex education in each parish is a need of today. This is one aspect of the purpose of Christian education in general. In a normal parish community we have classes, seminars and retreats for the spiritual as well as temporal rejuvenation of its believers. But many times we knowingly or unknowingly avoid discussing human sexuality and its purpose. The only place where the Church addresses this subject is premarital preparation course. This is not the case of all the Churches. Some Churches conduct seminars and classes on the above subjects for the people of different age groups. We need to have a uniform Christian sex education curriculum for different age groups and this should be dealt with rationally and without any hesitation. The whole purpose of this is to create positive attitudes towards human sexuality and to make people affirm that sex is good, sacred and willed by God. Adolescence is the prime time for providing Christian sex education.

Christian Sex Education is not something different from normal sex education. Here we have to incorporate the sex education with its divine purpose so that the adolescents can achieve a mature moral life. Felix Podimattam's comment on the meaning of sex education is relevant in this regard. According to him "Sex education is to train a boy to develop in himself to the fullest all of the gifts which God gave him as a male, and to train a girl to develop in herself all of the gifts God gave her as a

⁵⁴ Wetzel, *Sexual Wisdom: A Guide for Parents, Young Adults, Educators and Physicians*, 228.

female.”⁵⁵ Here true sex education helps a boy/girl to realize his/her identity and in this way we can say that it leads to maturity. Maturity is nothing but one’s ability to love and work. Love necessarily includes the ability for sexual love. Thus a true Christian Sex education can help an adolescent to lead a healthy and moral life, which would enable him/her to lead a true Christian life, following Christ’s teachings and in full obedience to Him.

In the Indian context sex education also assures self-defense and how to avoid becoming victims of sexual abuse. Sexual deviations also must be discussed with our adolescents and we must convince them that it is against the will of God and the natural law. In this regard the purpose of human sexuality must be taught in the light of the theological position of the Church. This is because nowadays sexual perversions are being reported very frequently and in most of the cases children and adolescents, irrespective of gender, are becoming the victims of these evil activities. Thus it is the responsibility of the Church to help its younger generation to lead a Christian way of life.

4.2 Some Tips to Parents for Imparting Sex Education

1. Admit that sex is positive and affirmative

Parents should educate their children about the spirituality of sex, that is, Sex is good, sacred and willed by God. We can use the biblical and theological position of the Church as a tool for making this position possible. Here the whole intention is to have positive approach towards sexuality and to help them to grow as children of God.

2. Make Boys and girls aware about their sexual maturation

Make sure that our children know about the physical changes that occur during puberty and consider it as something normal. Approaching sexuality is easier with girls, because we can start with menstruation. With boys, talking about wet dreams

⁵⁵ Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 19.

and ejaculation is far more troubling. Even then the parents have to address this and make them aware about the bodily changes.

3. Girls and boys require different instructions

In a family atmosphere, sex education should be given individually. Special care should be taken by parents to address boys and girls separately. This is because the changes and emotional levels vary from person to person.

4. Define sex as relational rather than an act

Sexuality is good and sexual expressions also should be well mannered. This is something to be developed. Having an attraction towards the opposite sex is something normal but our sexual orientation and behaviour could be developed according to the will of God. Children should feel that sex provides an identity to them and love constitutes their relationship with others.

5. Listen carefully to children's comments

Listening is one of the most important skills that the parents need to have. How well they listen to the children have a major impact on the quality of the relationship among them. Thus, with regard to the sexual aspects of the children, parents are supposed to listen carefully to their feelings, address positively to their concerns and respond favourably to their emotions. Each generation has different sexual expressions and put forward values which suit them more. Parents should begin to learn today's language and norms and then they should know where to start.

6. Teach them about Sexual Morality

Leading a moral life is the prime responsibility of a human being. Moral attitudes and responsibilities related to sex are to be discussed and properly communicated to the children by the parents. Podimattam opines that it is the responsibility of the parents to put morality on the sexual discussion table. According to him, "Linking sex with morality might mean talking not only about right and wrong but also about the value of delayed

gratification; the rewards of sex within a long-term relationship and the imprudence of putting aside one's own or one's partner's emotional needs."⁵⁶ Self-control is the powerful tool for realizing human responsibility and this could be achieved through moral teachings.

7. Both the father and mother are important for sex Education

Both father and mother are equally responsible for sex education. It helps if boys can hear from their fathers about what is appropriate and what's not, and the same way girls can learn their mothers. Girls need their mother's support and care during their puberty period.

8. Father and mother should be a role model for their children

A model relationship between parents and children in the home can be a platform for sex education. The children learn the value of love, care and trust and in turn they share the same with their fellow human beings. Here the responsibility of the parents is to teach their children through their life that, sex is a gift which they have received from God through their parents.

9. Teach appropriate names for sexual organs and other associated matters

In Indian culture we don't use appropriate name for sexual organs. Though we have proper names in each regional language, common people are not comfortable using it. As a result of that the language which we use is not commonly accepted and therefore being considered as something bad. If we are not comfortable with those names in our native tongues, we can use the English language for communicating about sex and its related matters.

10. Make use of all recommended sources

Theological and scientific studies on Human Sexuality, articles and newspaper stories can be used as tools for proper sex

⁵⁶ Podimattam, *Sex Education*, 29.

education. Use everyday opportunities to comment and listen to opinions from our young adolescents. The sex talk is an ongoing educational conversation.

Conclusion

Breaking the conspiracy of silence about human sexuality is the need of today. Here Christian spirituality has a key role to play to educate their faithful to develop a positive attitude towards sexuality because Christian spirituality enhances the sacredness and goodness of sexuality. In line with its spirituality it is the responsibility of the Church to propose a systematic study programme so that the elders in the family can have a uniform curriculum to impart sex education at home. Here the question is who will take the lead to introduce this system? One thing is sure that this is more effective in the family than any another space. But the family needs to be educated in such a way that they know what to teach, how to address the issue, and when it is to be addressed. So if a Christian family is equipped to manage the above said issues we can gradually have a positive approach towards sexuality.

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Church amidst Diversity: The Liturgy, Exclusion and the Embrace

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Introduction

When we talk about the Orthodox Church's mission, the liturgy is proper place to begin. Though it may sound counter-intuitive, the liturgy is at the heart of a cosmic vision, which encompasses a movement to all without discrimination.² For

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² For Orthodoxy, 'the liturgy' is a term that commonly stands for the holy Eucharist. In this sense, 'The Liturgy after the Liturgy' recognises as the dictum for the mission definition of Orthodox Christianity around the world with different Eucharistic connotations. Originally the idea of "*liturgy after liturgy*" as a category of theological debate has been proposed by Archbishop Anastasios, the bishop of Albania in his liturgical sermon to a group of Christian Union of Scientists in 1963 in Athens. In which he expressed the relation between 'liturgy, *koinonia* and *diaconia*.' See Archbishop Anastasios: *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 95-96. Also see Ion Bria, "The Liturgy after the Liturgy" *International Review of Mission*, 68, no. 265, (1978): 87-86. Later, Ion Bria, a Romanian Orthodox priest and an ecumenical

Orthodox ecumenical theologian, Ion Bria, ‘the liturgy’ transforms, taking shape in the local public milieu to identify with the struggles of politically marginal communities, taking on flesh in hostile contexts.³ It is this process, the ‘liturgy after the liturgy,’ which extends the church’s mission from the ecclesial boundary to the wider social contexts. The liturgical context includes all of God’s people irrespective of their social, cultural, economic, gender or political circumstances. The space of the liturgy is all-encompassing, and negates any and every drive to exclusion.

This paper examines the practical impact of Bria’s model for mission in the Indian social context. It recognizes the contextual debate on the theology of margins in India and its meaningful engagement in the development of a contextual Orthodox mission theology. By “listening to some thoughts of early teachers of the church,”⁴ this conversation identifies the significance of reading the early Asian teachers of the church.

Context

To begin with the historical settings of the Orthodox tradition within the diverse social context of India, it is possible to establish arguments for the liturgy in relation to some support of existing cultural structures. For example, according to K. M. George in agreement with several other scholars, “Indian Christianity maintained naturally the uniqueness of its Orthodox faith while in social and cultural matters, it was fully inculturated in the indigenous Indian context.”⁵ Though the language of the

theologian has promoted this statement in the ecumenical circles, bringing its mission perspectives. Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1996), vii.

³ Ion Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy,” 87-90.

⁴ The common notion of ‘early teachers’ is the Patristic fathers. Jayakiran Sabastian introduces a new methodological reading for Asian context with a critical the lens of ‘early teaches’ of Asian theology. Jayakiran Sabastian J, “Why Should Asian Theologians Read Texts of the Early Teachers of Faith?,” *Asian Christian Review* 2, no. 1 (2008): 29–42.

⁵ K. M. George, Petros Vassiliadis, Niki Papageorgiou and Nikos Dimitriadis, “Mission among Other Faiths: An Orthodox Perspective,” in *Orthodox Perspectives*

“indigenous Indian context” might indicate a comprehensive account of the people of the land, in this context it refers to the philosophical-spiritual-ethical context of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It is this “philosophical-indigenous” group, which gives “support” for the spiritual-ethical ethos of Orthodox Christianity in India.⁶ That is quite a claim so let me unpack it a little.

It is important to differentiate between matters of faith, worship, spirituality and church organization, on the one hand, and the relation of this religious body to social and cultural matters on the other. In terms of the Orthodox Church and its faith, it retained its Eastern character, but in terms of its social forms it followed the prevailing patterns in the largely Hindu context.⁷ This argument from George sees some commonality between the Orthodox and Hindu life within an ethical context determined by caste structures of the society. Insofar as this Orthodox Christianity is integrated into the same social system, it reflects the same “caste” divides of Indian society. George understands this as an accommodation to the need for “sheer survival.”⁸

It is possible perhaps to illustrate something of the concern by reference to the few Orthodox bishops who attempted to engage socially and religiously with those on the social margins, particularly the Dalits in Kerala during the latter part of 19th century.⁹ While this may appear to be constructive move, it was

on Mission, Petros Vassiliadis, ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 200.

⁶ K. M. George, et al., “Mission among Other Faiths”, 200.

⁷ K. M. George, “Canons of Culture in Orthodox-Protestant Relations”, *The Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 4 (1999): 378.

⁸ K. M. George, “Canons of Culture in Orthodox-Protestant Relations”, 378.

⁹ The later part of 19th century witnessed a mission movement of Geevarghese Mor Gregarious also known as Parumala Thirumeni and Pathros Mor Osthathos, among the Dalits. Both the bishops have evangelized and embraced more than 30,000 members from Dalits communities. However, a large majority of those who have embraced Orthodox faith have been discontinued due to the continued caste practice within the church. In this process, there were hardly any theological attempts were

not well integrated with the subjectivity of both the communities. The resulting friction produced significant questioning the missional characteristics of this tradition.

Ion Bria's account of Orthodox mission, read from this perspective fails to attend to this shared cultural ground. In other words, while one might base mission in a social embedding of the liturgy, if that culture in itself embodies unjust social structures, then 'the liturgy after the liturgy' might itself be turn against margins who are set outside from the central social systems based on caste, class, gender. It is in this context, 'the liturgy after liturgy' needs redefinition based on the contextual realities and its faith confessions. A way forward is to look to set this question of Orthodox mission and the liturgy within a Christological framework.

The Liturgy and Christology

As a general statement, the Orthodox Church has not taken seriously its own Christology, the backbone of 'the liturgy,' in its interactions within the Indian context. The theology of Orthodox 'Eucharistic liturgy' is not limited to an event of 'Eucharistic constitution.'¹⁰ Rather, it cyclically enacts the birth of Jesus, his life, ministry, crucifixion, death, resurrection and the eschaton in the celebration of each Eucharistic liturgy. This combines both 'transcendental and immanent' categories of Christological expression. Eliminating either side of these elements would jeopardize the wholeness of the 'Christ event.' The economy of

made to mutually engage their subjectivity and experiences. See Mathews Mor Severus, *Eastern Theological Visions* (Malayalam) (Kottayam, Kerala: M.O.C. Publication, 2000), 144-147; P.P. Varkey and K.V. Mammen, *Pathros Mor Osthathos: A Prophet Like Revolutionary*, trans. Punnoose U. Panoor (Kottayam: Kerala, Kottackal Publishers, 2012). 28-41. Apart from these Bishops, testimonies and studies of various scholars confirms it. See also Ananthakrishna Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians* (Ernakulam: The Cochin Government Press, 1926), 208; George Koilparampil, *Caste in the Catholic Community in Kerala* (Ernakulam, Kerala: St. Francis De Sales Press, 1982), 154-168.

¹⁰ The constituting words of blessings of the bread and wine, commemorating the first Eucharistic event that Jesus had initiated at the upper room.

Triune God in the Orthodox liturgy and its uniqueness falls on the celebration of the ‘Christ event,’¹¹ combining the transcendental and immanent natures inseparably. This being said on a theological level, when it comes to how it has found expression on the Indian social context of the margins, this liturgy has tended to highlight the transcendental element, divinity alone. This, in turn, has informed the development of a ‘transcendental other’ over against an ‘immanent other’ much like that within orthodox Hindu tradition. This ecclesial deficit of the Orthodox movement to the margins stems from the lack of proper attention to the immanent nature of God, which is an inseparable category of the ‘Christ event’ in the Orthodox liturgy.

Non-Chalcedonian Christology, Body and Inclusiveness

From the time of its entrance into the Indian context, the Antiochean School of theology has shaped the Orthodox tradition. This affirms a non-Chalcedonian Christology that proclaims the ‘inseparability’ of ‘transcendent/divine and immanent/human’ nature of Christ. This school does not emphasize one nature over the other, but maintains the two as ‘inseparable.’

Theologians have challenged the ‘transcendental epistemology’ common within Western Christology and its seeming inability to respond to the social realities of the margins in India. For instance, Y.T. Vinayraj, in one of his articles “God and the Other: Relocating Mission in the Context of Margins,” radically challenges the “Western logic of ‘oneness’ and the transcendent other.”¹² He argues that ‘oneness’ creates a monarchic political order and power. It is such power that creates hegemonies over ‘the marginality.’ Vinayraj condemns all notions that concentrate power in ‘oneness,’ especially as its only aggravates the complexities of ‘margins/Dalit otherness,’ and fails to affirm their identity and subjectivity. This non-affirmation

¹¹ Baby Varghese, *West Syriac liturgy: Liturgy, Worship and Theology* (England: Ashgate, 2004), 54-55.

¹² Y.T. Vinayraj, “God and the Other: Relocating Mission in the Context of the Margins,” in *Intercessions: Theology, Liturgy, and Politics* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2015), 97.

begins with the notion of ‘Dalit body’ in India. According to him, the Orthodox Hindu tradition denies the sacredness in the Dalit body, whereas the ‘Western theological epistemology offered transcendence to the Dalit body.’ However, both these traditions did not consider the absence of transcendences in the Dalit bodies.¹³

While taking his argument seriously in this discussion of mission and the margins in Indian context particularly from the Orthodox perspective, I argue, that in today’s social context neither Orthodoxy nor the Western theological schools in India have sufficiently recognized the in-depth expression of the non-Chalcedonian theology, one of the earliest Asian theological expressions of Christian theology.¹⁴ For instance, by fusing the Constantinian imperial notion of ‘oneness’ with the Romanised Western church it equates the ‘imperial oneness’ with the ‘transcendental one.’ The Antiochean School, by contrast, has not only opposed the secular imperial attempts, but equally all the hidden imperial agendas that attempted to incorporate early Christian theology into their imperial political interests. Basic to this was the Christological commitment to maintain as inseparable the transcendental and immanent nature. Any reduction from this position was anathematised like that of the argument of Eutyches.¹⁵

¹³ Y.T. Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 8.

¹⁴ From second century, Ignatius of Antioch, Aphrahat (third century), St. Ephrem (fourth Century), John Chrysostom (fourth century), we see the clear expression of Christ’s inseparable divine and human nature. From fifth century, (after the council of Chalcedon) it has been more powerfully expressed by Philoxenus of Mabbug, Severus of Antioch, Jacob of Serug, John of Tella and Jacob of Baradaeus in the fifth to seventh centuries. On the other hand, it is also to be noted that within the Antiochian School, a few teachers over emphasised the Christ’s human nature like Theodore of Mopsuestia, Deodore and Nestore, and which was anathamized by the Antiochian School (the non-Chalcedonian tradition).

¹⁵ V.C. Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 13 (1968), 38-39.

As stated, one key argument from of the Antiochean School considers Christ as the same substance with us, one as ours but without any sin. Such thinking is evident in the ‘nature of the body of Christ’ language that arose in the non-Chalcedonian camp. It is communicated through the polemic letters between Severus of Antioch and Julian of Halicarnassus.¹⁶ The non-Chalcedonians never diminish Christ’s humanity and its corresponding relation of ‘same substance with us.’

All the non-Chalcedonian leaders have affirmed that in His incarnation God the Son united to Himself manhood animated with a rational soul and of the same substance with us, that he endured in reality blameless passions of the body and the soul, and that there was no confusion or mixture of the nature in Him.¹⁷

This opens the possibility of discussing the identification of God’s body without reductions, which accompany the discussion of the immanent body associated with the Dalit body. V.C. Samuel, who develops the non-Chalcedonian theology of Incarnation, affirms this move to identify God’s body with the body of humankind except the nature of sin. Such a position, due to the inseparability of two natures, does not detract from the transcendental nature of Incarnation. Because ‘matter’ provides a space to engage the ‘transcendental’ within the scheme of the ‘immanent,’ the non-Chalcedonian theology of incarnation avoids the binary of ‘transcendent’ and the ‘immanent other.’

According to Severus of Antioch, a non-Chalcedonian theologian (sixth century), the material comes within the scheme of transcendental reality. The material body, by extension, cannot function far from the transcendental knowledge. In one of his

¹⁶ Severus of Antioch, one of the most prominent teachers of the non-Chalcedonian school has explained this in his polemic letters with Julian of Halicarnassus. For the detailed study, see Yonatan Moss, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (California: University of California Press, 2016). Also see V. C. Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1977), 126-29.

¹⁷ V.C. Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church,” 46.

letters to Caesaria the Hypatissa, Severus writes about the relation between the material and the divine intervention. He says,

But God, the Maker of all and perfect in craftsmanship, both brought the material of everybody from that which did not exist and added the form; and, if you speak of fire or of earth, or of air or of what, or of the sky and the sun and the moon and the other sars, he both formed the material of all of them out of non-existent things, and the form was devised for them in different ways at the moment that they came into being, and he is both the Maker and the adorer of the shapeless material of the bodies, in that he differentiated it into the various forms of bodies.¹⁸

The question of the material body that includes also Dalit body is given a different interpretation in these theological suppositions. According to Severus, the material that constitutes the body is not free from the transcendental touch. This carries two implications. First, the Dalit body or the body of margins, which is like any other material body, cannot be a material of ‘social othering’ or ‘social marginality.’ Second, whether the *brahmanical* hermeneutics accepts the Dalit body as part of the transcendental body or not, for Severian theology, the Dalit body is inseparably a part of the transcendental scheme without forsaking the immanent scheme.

Eucharistic Liturgy and Christological Scheme

Severus affirms the transcendental-immanent Christological scheme in his writings on the Eucharistic liturgical prayers. He writes “he to the body (incarnation), and while he has taken the body, and was born; he becomes completely like us.”¹⁹ It tells us how Severus understands the body of Christ and its corresponding relation to each human body. For him, if Jesus’ body was

¹⁸ *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch: From Numerous Syriac Manuscripts*, trans. E.V. Brook (England: Oriental Orthodox Library, 2005), 207.

¹⁹ See the Eucharistic text of Severus of Antioch. For details Samuel Yesu Athanasius, Konatt Mathen, and Kuriakose Corepiscopa, eds. *Trilingual Eucharist Service Book* (Cheeranchira, Kerala: Mor Adai Study Centre, 2008).

incorruptible, or superhuman before His resurrection then the purpose of incarnation happens on magic or supernatural level. Severus considered the position of Julian – “the body of our Lord was incorruptible, not merely after the resurrection, but from the moment of its conception in the womb of Virgin” – as heretical.²⁰

For Severus, this argument remains within the overall non-Chalcedonian theology of incarnation, in which at no point in time of the Christ event the divine or human were separated from the other. The incarnational scheme until Christ’s death and after his resurrection is to be seriously emphasised in celebration of every Eucharistic liturgy. Accordingly, the Orthodox liturgy, after the recitation of the constitutional words of the blessings of the bread and wine, invites every participant to proclaim the purpose of the Christ event with two specific occurrences namely, commemorating Jesus’s death and confessing his resurrection and followed by the affirmation of the eschaton. In one of the commentaries of Syrian Orthodox liturgical prayers, Moses Bar Kepho [ninth century], comments that “in addition to the fact that it (the Holy Eucharist) pardons your sins, when you perform this mystery you do two things: First you commemorate my death; secondly, you confess my resurrection.”²¹ Further, the commemoration of ‘death,’ he continues, is subjected to the victory over death to all material bodies alike, without any separation.

Thus, according to the Orthodox liturgical theology in India, the body of the margins, particularly the Dalit body overturns the existing interpretation of “Hindu-Orthodox tradition that affirms the absence of divine presence in Dalit body.”²² Categorically, it comes under the transcendent-immanent scheme of ‘the liturgy.’

²⁰ V.C. Samuel, “The Manhood of Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church,” 43.

²¹ Connolly and Codrington. *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy, By George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bar Kepha: Together With the Syriac Anaphora of St James and a Document Entitled the Book of Life*, trans. R. H. Connolly and H. W. Codrington (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913). 57

²² Y.T. Vinayraj, *Dalit Theology After Continental Philosophy*, 7-8.

In the actual practice of liturgy, minimizing or overemphasising any category of this scheme does not fulfill the missional characteristics of the liturgy itself. It seems, for a practical purpose, that voices have already been raised for a serious inclusion of the subjective interactions with the “Dalits and the margins” among the Indian Christians.²³ This turning is mandatory for the “all encompassing nature” of Orthodox theology. As K. P. Aliaz, another theologian from Orthodox tradition states, theologizing starts with the people in pain. Failure to be involved with Christ where people are in pain leads to a lopsided theology and involvement, not to incarnational theology.²⁴ In this sense, Mor Geevarghese Coorilos, an Orthodox ecumenical theologian suggests that the church meets God among the margins, where the victims of oppressive and life-denying forces threaten the agency of God’s life-affirming mission.²⁵ It is argued here that there is an urgency in the practical inclusion of non-Chalcedonian Christology in the living context of social margins.

Conclusion

Based on the strength of the Orthodox Eucharistic liturgy and its Christology, the Orthodox mission theology must bring a new turn in the social context of margins. Imaging the liturgy as an agent of ‘exclusion’ for the ‘sheer survival’ needs to be reconceived as the ‘embracing’ of all bodies in the Indian social context. The liturgy unconditionally prescribes the ‘metaphoric embrace’ at the very beginning of the ‘every anaphora’ and this

²³ In the pro-oriente regional symposium held in 1993 at Kottayam, Kerala, Fr. K.V. Saji, a Jacobite Syria Orthodox priest expressed the above view. See Krikorian, Mesrob K. *Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Christology in the Tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2010), 183-84.

²⁴ K. P. Aliaz, “Urban Industrial Mission: Ecumenical Reflections,” in *Mission Today Subaltern Perspective, Mission-Evangelism Studies; Vol.2* Jesudas M. Athyal ed., (Thiruvalla, Kerala: CSS, 2001), 167-68.

²⁵ Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos, “Mission Towards Fullness of Life,” *International Review of Mission* 103, no. 1 (2013): 46.

point to the transcendental and immanent communion of all. This embrace, according to Moses Bar Kepha is a means for the transformation of all social divisions such as those between God and humans, people and the peoples, and the soul and the body.²⁶ This interpretation of Bar Kepha supplies a liberating lens in the socio-political and religious context in India. In terms of daily practice, the liturgical embrace in the Orthodox liturgical tradition in India can often be a matter of mere ritual. Understood according to this theological and liturgical significance, however, the embrace must find expression in a social embrace given the Christian commitment to inward-outward associations. In doing so, in the Indian context of margins, the Orthodox liturgy is liberated from its 'attributed ritualism' to praxis-oriented mission towards the mission expression of Bria. From this perspective, one must affirm K.M. George's recent suggestion that all forms of human creativity, all created reality, needs to be Eucharistic in the cosmic liturgical context.²⁷ Orthodoxy must confess that this inclusive community is not limited to particular contexts alone, but achieves its goal in the cosmic reality as it is claimed in its theology. This means that the liturgy aims to practically 'embrace to transformation' not only the community that participates in it, but also the entire creation in its fullness.

²⁶ Connolly and Codrington, *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy*, 40-41.

²⁷ George, K.M., "Towards a Eucharistic Missiology: An Orthodox Perspective," in *Towards a Eucharistic Missiology: An Orthodox Perspective*, Bijesh Philip and Jogy C. George, eds. (Nagpur, Thiruvalla: St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary & CSS, 2016),16.

Monasticism Today

Fr. Kuriakose Kollannur¹

Purpose and Challenges

Monasticism has been an integral part of the Christian spirituality. The various expressions of the monastic life, from the strictly coenobitic², as the one conceived by Pachomius or the one conceived by Basil, to the rigorously hermitic, as with Antony or Macarius of Egypt, correspond more to different stages of the spiritual journey than to the choice between different styles of Spiritual life. In any form, whatever path they take, they are all based on monasticism. Monasticism was not seen merely as a separate condition, proper to a specific category of Christians, but rather as a choice for all baptized, according to the gifts offered to

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² Cenobitic (or coenobitic) monasticism is a monastic tradition that stresses community life. Often in the West, the community belongs to a religious order and the life of the cenobitic monk is regulated by a religious rule, a collection of precepts.

each by the Lord. Monasticism is a pneumatic continuity and a living witness of the evangelical counsels.

This paper gives a detailed account of the Characteristics, purposes and Challenges of Monasticism today.

Monasticism, the Heart of the Church

The development of monasticism as an order of the Church corresponded to the idea of monastic life as a kind of sacrament: a sign of the coming of the Kingdom. Monasticism may be called the heart of the Church, the hidden part far from the eyes of men which beats to the rhythm of Christ's Name. Two important characteristics of Syriac monastic life are of great importance to the Church in its spiritual life: the emphasis put on hermit life and the daily reading and meditation of Scripture.³ The meditation of Scripture which should be the basis of all Christian life, was such an integral part of the monk's life in ancient Syriac monasticism that it takes on an almost liturgical and ritual aspect.

Monasticism guides and participates in the Church's mission of salvation with regard to the world. This can be seen in the great mission work undertaken by the Greek monks to the Russian lands and later by the Russian monks to Alaska. There is, however, a concern with regard to the openness of monasticism to the world, and it must be warned against: the work done by monasticism in the pastoral, educational, social and charitable fields has its limits. If it does not remain within these limits, it becomes unfaithful to its specific function and its special service in the Church for the world - to be a sign of eschatological hope⁴.

In ancient Syriac monastic tradition the coenobitic life was seen principally as a simple preparation for the solitary life. There later came into existence communities of monks living a common life. The life of fellowship and having all things in common, like the Apostles, the celebration of the liturgical offices together are

³ I. PHILIPS, *Monasticism, the heart of the Church*, 17-19.

⁴ J. MOFFITT, ed., *A New Charter for Monasticism*, 41.

also signs of the coming of the Kingdom: a sign of fellowship between the brothers which shows Christ's fellowship with his flock, serving each other in humility as Christ served his Apostles. The monastic life in Indian Christian heritage is also a witness to that particular form of life. The Syriac tradition being so rich in its monastic heritage and ideals is the oldest and most venerable form of Christianity in this country. The great strengths of living in a monastic community is to learn how to forgive without hesitating, to learn to love others more than oneself: all our Churches can learn from this experience of God's grace. Monasteries can be humble guardians and witness to this life of prayer so essential to the life of Christ's Church.⁵

Monastic life as a Service of the Church

In hard times the anchorites and ascetics abandoned their cells and monasteries and went into the cities to aid the faithful and to confirm them in their religion, to help those bear oppression with patience and in steadfast faith. When heresy arose, they departed to preach to the faithful and to preserve them from the mistaken beliefs of the heretics and to give them a firm hold in the orthodox faith that was entrusted to them by the holy apostles and the Church.

Saint Anthony - the father of monasticism and the star of the desert - acted thus, determined not to abandon his connections with the Church. His cooperation with the Church was a good example for monks to emulate. During the wave of oppression that was instigated by Maximinus (305-318), he left his cell and went to Alexandria with the intention of suffering a martyr's death for the sake of Christ. There he visited confessing prisoners, comforting them and encouraging them to remain firm in their faith unto death. When the followers of Arius killed the Church Fathers and believers in a great wave of persecution, Saint Anthony visited Alexandria a second time in 355 to defend the true faith, to comfort the confessors, to visit the prisoners, and to

⁵ I. PHILIPS, *Monasticism, the heart of the Church*, 19.

exhort them to remain firm in their faith⁶. Mor Aphrem the Syrian for his part founded a church choir composed of young girls from Edessa, which sang works that he had both written and put to music, and which served to strengthen Christian doctrine and refute heresy. The beginning of orderly liturgical life in the Syrian Church is regarded as being his work. It should also be mentioned that when famine broke out in Edessa in the winter of 372/373, when many of the inhabitants died of hunger, Mor Aphrem visited wealthy citizens of the city, collected alms from them and distributed them among the poor. Furthermore, he established houses in which he set up 1300 beds. They served as hostels for the old and infirm under his personal care⁷.

The Nobility of Monasticism in the Church

Although celibacy arose outside the Church, monasticism became a significant force within the Church. It is more than prayer, fasting, the practice of asceticism, and keeping vigil. It is more than knowledge and learning. In the eyes of society, the monk is thus the bearer of sublime tidings, the teachings of the Gospel, which he lives in truth, practices in perfection, and offers an example to humanity. Thus monastic life has performed an invaluable service for the Church. Moreover, the development of the Church is assured in a way with the flowering of monasticism, as St. Athanasius wrote: "If monasticism and the priestly ministry grow weak, the entire Church weakens."⁸

The monasteries have been beacons of religion, learning, knowledge and a lasting token of culture and civilization. Monks and nuns have offered a good example for all mankind. The daily life of the monastics has been a clear demonstration of the true promise of Christ to all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy, for he will give them relief if they follow him and bend their

⁶ COREPISCOPA K. MOOLAYIL, Ed., *A Collection of Articles by His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas*, 116.

⁷ COREPISCOPA K. MOOLAYIL, Ed., *A Collection of Articles*, 117.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Cfr. MOR IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS, *Monastic Life in the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*, 17.

necks to his yoke and learn from him to be gentle and humble-hearted, for his yoke is good to bear, his load is light (Matt. 11.30). His divine instructions, which are the instructions of perfection in the Christian life have been put into practice by monks and nuns, and they were happy on Earth and have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, for they have worshipped God in spirit and in truth, and they have deepened knowledge of religion and of the world, doing humanity a great service. These monasteries have given the Church and the world outstanding scholars who have produced great works. Their pens have given birth to famous works in the fields of theology, philosophy, languages and other disciplines and branches of knowledge.

Monasteries are incorporated in the Ecclesial community

The Church is a kind of sacrament, or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. Man was made and the Church constituted for the union of men among themselves and for their union with God and the supreme bliss of man. Man made in the image and likeness of God must seek and discover him, respond to his call and realize with him in knowledge and love, in adoration and praise, in dedication and service. This man must act, not only as an individual, but as a member of the community of men. A community is united with God in the risen Christ through the Spirit and as such it is a sign and instrument of mankind's union with God, dedicated to the adoration of the triune God, standing as the witness to man's supreme goal and essential duty.

The relation between the Church and monasticism can also be illustrated by the fact that monasteries are evident signs of the authentic community life that characterizes the Church. The primitive Church provided an example of community life when the multitude of believers were one heart and one mind and found nourishment in the teaching of the Gospel and in the sacred

The monastic life is not a ministry nor a particular function different from the sacerdotal or married state; it is based not on a particular sacrament; what is specific about it is that it is situated not in the order of the sacramental signs, but in that of the realities of grace signified by the sacraments, it is simply the place where by through the means of sanctification, one may be gifted the fruits of life in the Spirit. That is why monasticism is truly the heart of the Church, whose whole mystery, it in some way recapitulates. The monasticism constitutes the most interior aspect of the ecclesial tradition and is a model for every Christian.

Monasteries with better incorporation in the Church

The Church is engaged today in all-round and deep-level renewal. Since the fate of monasticism, through the centuries, has been associated with that of the Church, an imperative condition for its continued and better integration in the Church is a program of updating and renewal of monastic life. The monastic life, developing as it did from the eremitical life, is always in some way a *fuga mundi*, a flight from the world. As a *fuga mundi*, monastic life has an essentially eschatological dimension. It is an anticipation of death and resurrection, of transits through which all are destined to pass, and through which we must pass with Christ if we are to enter into eternal life. In the atmosphere in which eremitical and monastic life developed, martyrdom was regarded as the supreme form of Christian death, the most perfect configuration to Christ, the most perfect imitation of Him. Monasticism was a substitute for martyrdom. It thus aimed at the consummation of Christian life.

The current appearance of monasticism has often made of liturgy a theatrical performance with flowing cowls, hooded heads and ethereal chanting - much of which came from a romantic, medieval cloister worship, rather than a deep-felt liturgical sensitivity to what was meaningful for the spiritual life of the participating monk.

In general, we must try today to make the monastery a sign that will be authentic, that is, meaningful, sincere and therefore effective – a sign of the kingdom of God. The monastery should be a finger pointing to the transcendence of God, remaining men of God's love, of its imperiousness, of the totalitarian demands that this love, devouring and purifying, makes in man. As a consequence the monastery has a role to play today that is peculiarly relevant. There is so much stress on the demands, the values and the validity of life on earth that we must not forget that there is a world as we experience it will not last forever, and in consequence we must use it as though we used it not⁹.

The poverty of the monastery will have to take into account the total life of the surroundings: the conditions of life of the nation in general and of the neighbours in particular. Friendly relations with the people of the neighbourhood, an aspect of hospitality, a virtue traditionally associated with monasticism, is also part of the practice of poverty. The authority and obedience - a crucial question in the Church's life today. The religious obedience originated in the master-disciple relationship between an experienced anchorite and a young aspirant for life in the desert. Today even the master-disciple relationship is a doubtful basis from which to begin reform. When this relationship originally developed, the master was indeed a *magister* and had much to teach that the young man did not know. Today education is more widespread: specialization is a necessity. It often that in many spheres a monk knows more than his abbot.

Regarding the reform of Divine Office, the office should be so arranged that it will not be too long. There could be fewer psalms, for instance, and more pauses. In every area of liturgical life it is essential to introduce into the rites themselves more frequent and longer pauses if the liturgy is not to degenerate into mere ritualism. It has been well said that a liturgy without silence is a liturgy without future. If the Office were thus simplified and

⁹ 1 Cor. 7/31.

made easier to assimilate, it would become again what it originally was, the prayer of the Church. It is improper to think of it merely as prayer for the Church recited by those deputed for the purpose.

The Monastic Family

The monastic community life is patterned on that of Disciples around the Master. Christ is the true head of the community. Faith brings the monk to Him, through the Holy Spirit, for strength, guidance, support, inspiration and courage. But the Master is visibly represented in the midst of His disciples by a human person, the Father Abbot.¹⁰ The Abbot,¹¹ chosen from among the monks by vote, is an older and more experienced priest who is capable of administering the affairs of the monastery and taking care of the spiritual and material needs of the monks. All the monks obey him according to their vow, in a spirit of faith and under his direction they carry out the work that needs to be done for the common good.

Monasticism and liturgical life

Goal of the liturgy is the sanctification of human and the glorification of God. All other human activities are to be subordinated and directed to liturgy. Monasticism faithfully follows the Divine Tradition, and the liturgical life occupies the central position in it. One of the main contributions of monasticism is in the realm of liturgy. Monks have been mostly the authors of liturgical compositions and prayers. Many of these prayers were formulated from the depth of spiritual experience and theological insights. The liturgical celebration was the outcome of profound ecclesial life and inspired by the biblical and patristic sources.¹² The monks' love for psalms and their availability for prayer and spiritual guidance made the people turn to them for spiritual guidance and inspiration.

¹⁰ T. MERTON, *The Monastic Journey*, 9.

¹¹ *Abbot* means Head of the Monastery or House.

¹² X. KOODAPUZHA, *Oriental Churches and Monasticism*, 189.

The first monks were often devoted to psalmody, without solemnities, but silent prayer was almost always the preferred thing. The monastic life is in direct touch with that which constitutes the very heart of the liturgy. Some monastic traditions showed a lack of interest in certain expressions of liturgical life. The witness of ancient monks is that prayer with tears and compunction of heart do not go well with chanting and liturgical solemnities – these were meant for people in the world¹³.

Vatican II teaches: “Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fountain from which all her power flows... The liturgy in its turn inspires the faithful to become of one heart in love when they have tasted to their full the paschal mysteries; it prays that they may grasp by deed what they hold by creed”.¹⁴ The eastern churches which are called rightly monastic celebrate their liturgy in all solemnity with lengthy duration and repeated invocations. This helps gradual identification with the mystery that is celebrated. In the liturgy, elements reveal their own nature as a gift offered by the Creator to humanity.

Monasticism and Spirituality

Monasticism was an attempt to revive and regenerate the strength and salient features of the early apostolic community life, where individuals worked for the community, which in turn sustained the individuals in true spirit of Christian love and justice. The tide of worldliness, negligence of disciplines, lack of true worship, deterioration of true Christian faith and lack of love in the Christian Church demanded a re-established structure for a model Christian Community. Many individuals went to the desert to practice this ideal Christian life. Church Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Naziansus, Dionysius the Areopagite,

¹³ A. LOUF OCSO, *The Message of Monastic Spirituality*, 32.

¹⁴ *Vatican II, Liturgy*, No.10.

Augustine of Hyppo were some who tried to grasp and propagate this type of Christian life.¹⁵

Monasticism became a movement, incorporating all the community aspects of spirituality that existed in the apostolic Church. Gradually, monastic communities with qualities like simplicity, holiness, obedience, hard work, fraternity, love, justice etc., were developed in the Church. Later, these monastic movements flourished well in different parts of the world and served as a source of power for the Church. The true spirituality could be maintained only in a community life, where qualities like love, justice, equality, discipline, service to humanity and worship of God were properly understood and effectively practiced.¹⁶

Monasticism and Ecumenism

A divided Christianity is a counter witness to Christ. Jesus prayed for unity, harmony and love among his followers and made it a precept so that the world may believe. Ecumenism is a common pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This pilgrimage has for its destination a common fatherland wherein to bloom in harmony, as Disciples of Christ. Ecumenism cannot be at the cost of fidelity to Christ and the way shown by Him. Ecumenism has no private concern to nurture, and no establishment to protect. Its only goal is God's Kingdom and everything else is subordinate to this goal.

Monasticism as a bridge between the Eastern and Western Churches and monasticism from its beginning was one of the most efficient and enduring agents of universal Church unity. Monasticism is the full application of both the general anthropological need for a disciplined life-style to rise above the heavy weight of human life, and of the call to imitate Christ. At

¹⁵ This approach highlighted the God-Man vertical spirituality, but ignored the horizontal man-to-man relationship, thus neglecting the application of spirituality in societies and communities (C.C CHERIAN, *Christian Spirituality - An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 18).

¹⁶ C.C CHERIAN, *Christian Spirituality*, 19.

the same time, these deep anthropological and basic Christian roots are often the fundamental common ground for its active ecumenical impact. The monastic writings and experience were most important exchange between the different Churches of East and West. The true monasticism is an ecumenical channel, and at the same time the expression of its deepest dimension of sharing with God, the Supreme Beauty, is the love for the beauty of life¹⁷. Monasticism becomes bridge not only between the Christian Churches, but also between Christian and non-Christian monasticism. This cosmic anthropological dimension of monastic ecumenism has been too little developed but could become very promising in the future.

Ecumenical movement is an invitation to involve us in the divine revolution of the reign of God in our hearts, a radical *metanoia* of surrendering ourselves to the will of God.¹⁸ It is a spiritual revolution that Jesus Christ proclaimed as *Kingdom of God*. This revolution is the content of His Gospel. Monasticism is a common heritage for all the ancient Churches both in the East and the West. These Churches have the Gospel and Holy Tradition for their foundation. All the Churches share the earliest Christian tradition. The writings of the great fathers of monasticism have permeated all the Churches. The Palestinian, Syrian, Mesopotamian, Persian, Egyptian, and Basilian monastic branches are from the same root though they are manifested in different places in harmony with the cultural and spiritual background of the people around them.¹⁹

Monasticism and Angelism

At the present moment, there is a tendency in calling everything of a monastic or contemplative nature, *angelism*. The word seldom defined, but it is commonly so used as to include under its meaning pessimism, dualism, anti-humanism or anti-

¹⁷ A. BONIFACE, *Eastern Monasticism*, 36.

¹⁸ X. KOODAPUZHA, *Oriental Churches and Monasticism*, 192.

¹⁹ X. KOODAPUZHA, *Oriental Churches and Monasticism*, 192.

incarnationalism and Platonism²⁰. To discover what *angelism* properly refers to, one must go back to the sources of monastic tradition. When one does so, no conflict between angelism and humanism is discovered. Generally speaking, the reference to angels does not serve the purpose of contrasting two natures, that of a pure spirit and that of corporeal beings, nor does it remove man - and the God-Man - from the conditions of time and space; its purpose is to illustrate the present state of redeemed mankind by a comparison with that of the blessed who share already fully in God's glory.

In monasticism, as in the tradition of the Old and New Testaments and of later Judaism, and among those influenced by this literature, the function rather than the nature of the angels is important. And in our time historians influenced by philosophies deriving from Aristotelianism raise problems which the ancients hardly touched²¹. The monks spoke of the angels, the obsessive insistence on chastity which became so marked later on angelism.

Monasticism Today

The monastic life is a life of renunciation and total, direct worship of God for his own sake. Is this still to be regarded as something a reasonable man will undertake in the 21st century? Is it simply an escape from life? Is it a refusal of fellowship with other men, misanthropy, evasion, delusion? As a response to these questions, Patrick Hart observes,

The monk is not concerned with himself so much as with God, and with all who are loved by God. He does not seek to justify himself by comparing himself favourably with other people: rather, he sees himself and all men together in the light of great and solemn facts which no one can evade. The fact of inevitable death which puts an end to the struggles and joys of life. The fact that the meaning of life is usually obscure and sometimes

²⁰ J. LECLERCQ, Trans., M. DODD, *Aspects of Monasticism*, 151.

²¹ J. LECLERCQ, *Aspects of Monasticism*, 152.

seemingly impenetrable. The fact that happiness seems to elude more and more people as the world itself becomes more prosperous, more comfortable, and more confident of its own powers. The fact of sin, that cancer of the spirit, which destroys not only the individual and his chances of happiness, but whole communities and even nations. The fact of human conflict, hate, aggression, destruction, subversion, deceit, the unscrupulous use of power.²²

A monk has made this surrender, knowing what it costs, knowing that it does not absolve him from the doubts and struggles of modern man. But he believes that he possesses the key to these struggles, and that he can give his a meaning that is valid not only for himself but for everyone else. That meaning is discovered in faith, though not in arguments about faith. Certainly faith is not opposed to reason. It can be shown to be rational, though it cannot be rationally 'proved'. But once one believes, one can become able to understand the inner meaning of one's belief, and to see its validity for others. Both this belief and this eventual understanding are special gifts of God.²³

Purposes of Monasticism

1. Overcoming Imperfections

All monasticism has its mainstay in theological convictions that life in society cannot generate the spiritual consummation stipulated by the religion's founder. In some traditions, especially in those of South Asian provenance, the true "self" is held to be clogged and concealed by imperfections by sin, ignorance, or other theologically suggested impediments. The ego with which the layperson and the seeking neophyte identify is not the true self, which must be discovered or uncovered. Barriers differently conceived as matter, individuated mind, or a soul-mind aggregate defiled by sin, ignorance, and perversion must be broken through,

²² Brother Patrick Hart, ed, *Thomas Merton: The Monastic Journey*, 4.

²³ Brother Patrick Hart, ed, *Thomas Merton: The Monastic Journey*, 5.

or a veil lifted, so that the true self, the primordial spirit, may shine forth. In most traditions this breakthrough is held to be unattainable through a conventionally good life in society, and thus a new approach must be sought. The body and the mind, which are part or the entire impediment, have to be controlled, disciplined, and chastised; hence, monastics advocate either asceticism or a set of psychophysical practices that differ radically from the normal routines of life.

2. Spiritual Perfection

The quest for spiritual intensification is elitist even when, as within Christian monastic orders, humility is required. Withdrawal from society is necessary because the instrumentalities of perfection cannot normally be acquired and activated in the surroundings of everyday life. Intense contemplation, often accompanied by physical rigours, constitutes ascetic practice i.e., prayer, worship, incantation, propitiation, and various forms of self-abasement or self-inflation. Monastics pursue all these forms of orthopraxy in enormously varied forms and degrees.

Present-Day problems in Monasticism

In some Churches, the forms of prayer are in full process of renewal. The use of the living language, which represented a minimum, a first condition, is henceforth within reach of all who wish it. For example in Catholic Church, the structure of the Divine Office is in course of transformation, and the experiments being carried out are already yielding good results. And much more than that, the conditions of all prayer in common-theological, philosophical, psychological, sociological and even economic are being reconsidered in the light of recent acquisitions of Christology, ecclesiology and biblical and patristic studies, as well as of phenomenology and other schools of contemporary thought. We are still only at the beginning, but it is full of promise.

The institutional structures are also in the process of being transformed. In each institute, constitutions are being revised. The participation of representatives of community in its own government²⁴ is little by little being introduced almost everywhere, in accordance with a demand of the Council. The length of the mandate of superiors is no longer what it used to be. Collaboration between the different orders is being intensified. Nuns are gradually coming to take their destiny into their own hands; the legislation concerning enclosure is being modified. The relation between motherhouses and their foundations of every kind is moving in a direction to ensure that the latter may have the necessary help, but also autonomy. The lay brothers and sisters who came into being in the West during the Middle Ages are now a thing of the past. It is gradually being accepted on all levels-theological, psychological and even institutional-that the priesthood is not tied to the monastic state. In every way, structures are being renewed so as to return to tradition over and beyond recent historical forms. There are many problems facing monasticism in the present day.

There are many reasons behind the emergence of Monasticism as an institutional form. Since the fourth century witnessed the fast growth of monasticism in its strict sense, it is reasonable to consider this movement as a reaction against the degradation of quality of the Christian life. After the last persecution, when Christianity became the state religion, peace and tranquility ruled in the Church, and there was some sort of laxity among the fervent believers. Till then in the early church the martyr represented an ideal. Many were fervent enough to have earnest desire to become a martyr. After the end of the persecution this ideal was no longer attainable. In effect it was replaced by the ascetic, whose rigorous life was often regarded as martyrdom. In the case of ascetic the human persecutor earlier

²⁴ Regimen is the word used in the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life, no. 14.

was replaced by a demon. If we consider ascetics as the heirs to martyrs, we can realize the sense of their austere life. They simply tried to carry out the norms of Christian life in pre-Constantine time. During that time, to be a Christian was a matter of seriousness. Hence ascetic life was in reality not a parallel track, but an attempt to be firm on the right way of living in the Church and to keep fidelity to Gospel values.

1. The identity crisis

Today each of organizations within the Church has to query its own identity. The great religious orders and groups of orders are querying their aim and their position within the Body of Christ; monasticism cannot escape the challenge. The monks is not even a religious, he is in no way specified, and thus he can do everything, and in fact in many places he does do everything, in the same way that others do it. Neither are his activities specific nor is the style of life they determine. Other people, more demanding, tend to think that certain separation from the world, a major part of the day given over to prayer, a stricter asceticism, and activities determined by these facts are characteristic of the monastic state and distinguish it from other forms of life in the Church.

2. Monasticism in a changing society

One of the aspects of the present day crisis in monasteries is that certain monks within their ranks query their *raison d'être*²⁵ in the name of contemporary anthropology and sociology and of theological considerations. It is also insisted upon more and more today that the relationship of man and God is lived in the relationships with other men. One can only save oneself in helping to save them, in having had “experience of one’s neighbour in love”. The community as such must have a spiritual life, and not, or not only, each one of the individuals who make it

²⁵ A person’s *raison d'être* is his/her purpose or reason for living. It’s why he/she do things. In French, *raison d'être* literally means “reason for being”, and in English it means about the same. Someone’s *raison d'être* is the most important thing to them.

up. The more personal each one is, that is to say, the more he differs from others in his nature and grace, the more he will contribute to the wealth of the whole. He will stay himself and he will develop for God and the Church in the measure that he gives and receives.

Conclusion

The Christian monastic theory has always been a synthesis between permanent elements, primordial ones, those that come from the Gospel and constant monastic tradition, and cultural elements, historical ones bound up with determined moments in evolution. The general conception of the world, of society and of the place that monasticism has within it has been modified more or less according to the times; it has known more or less lengthy periods of stability. It is now undergoing rapid and profound change. Monastic theory must, then, be constantly revised. We must avoid fixing it once and for all, but we must also avoid making it lose, in the course of its development, certain of its essential factors. And it is not easy to practice this discernment and this updating in a tie when the knowledge we have of both the Gospel and monastic history is undergoing change and, we may say, progressing.

One of the forms of monastic asceticism is that of accepting the fact that the theory of monasticism, the justification that monks have for their life, remains constantly insufficient, subject to revision and transformation. Let them never enjoy an absolute speculative security, but let them have confidence. The progress of their spirituality and of the forms of their existence entails a certain risk, which they must accept in the Holy Spirit. The charisma that was, and remains, at the origin of their life will allow them to continue to be within the Church, instruments in God's service and for the universal expansion of his work among men.

The relevance of monastic movement was less significant in

organized institution so monastic life and ascetic life is significant for Christian churches in India. Before monasticism was well organized as we see today, in India especially in Kerala, St. Thomas Christians organized their life both spiritually and materialistically. The early Fathers who sacrificed their life for the church became the seed of the church we see today.

It is difficult to trace out the beginning of a systematic organized monasticism. Transition of time, change in administration, and change in liturgy, domination in administration both in political and spiritual field all influenced the monastic life that we have accepted. Marthoma Christians (St. Thomas Christians) received the traditions of various Church Fathers who came to Kerala during different time periods. The Antiochean, Persian, Chaldean, Western Portuguese, British, Protestant traditions all influenced the Christian church in Kerala. Both Eastern and Western monasticism influenced the Christian churches in Kerala as we see today that the monastic movements of St. Thomas Christians is linked with, either Eastern or Western monasticism. Almost all Apostolic Churches in Kerala follow either eastern monastic rule or western monastic rule but a transition of time affects today's monastic life and Christian monasticism.

The modernization, modern thinking and heretics led to the declension in the Christian values of the church. Unfortunately, both Christian monastic institutions and Ashrams become silent instead of raising the Christian values. The people are living a luxurious and comfortable life in the modern world, so they hesitate to lead a sacrificial and suffering life. The means of monasticism such as celibacy, obedience, poverty, sacrifice, sufferings and humility is on the path of detachment even from the Church.

If the Church wishes to bring about a change in the present situation, it must promote monastic movements, share Christ's

dedicated Christian life in our Christian families. Though change is relevant, we must not deviate from Christ. We must hold firm to Christ's way of life. Let us mould up a generation in the path of love, humility, sacrifice, sharing and devotion through the Christian Monasticism.

The Church in India will have to learn to appreciate the contemplative life and come to recognize the value of monasticism. We may confidently hope that God will grant the age-long but always vigorous and sappy stem of Christian monasticism to shoot over our land a fresh and young branch with thick foliage, bearing abundant fruit. A day will come - no matter how long hence - when God will give the Indian Church an Antony or a Benedict who will make Indian monasticism come into its own and give it a form at once traditional and new, adorned with the purified spiritual splendor of its past legacies. But it is already time that the children of the Church in India realize their obligation in this regard and prepare to gird themselves up humbly but steadily for the hour appointed by God.

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