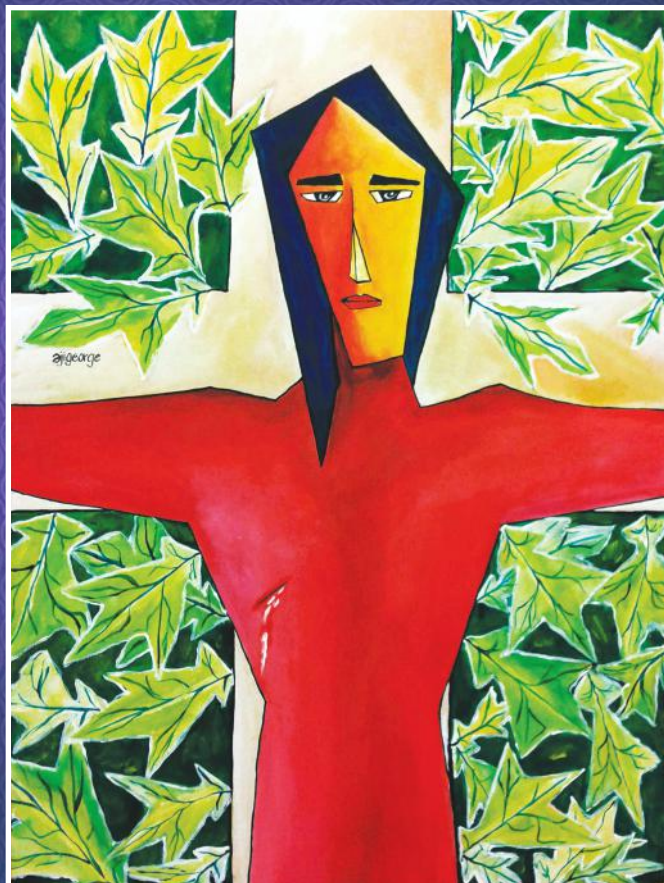


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THE MALANKARA SYRIAN ORTHODOX
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Religion & Spirituality



The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary

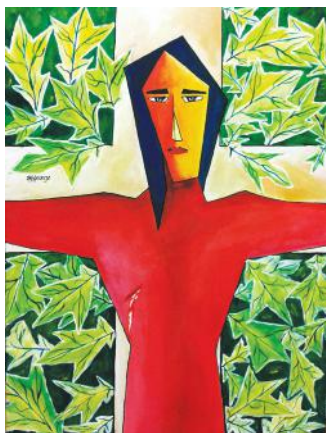
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about the cover painting...

Jesus is the fruit of The Fig Tree

Ajiyan George

Acrylic on canvas | 60x45 | 2013

It is generally believed that, the fruit which resulted in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden was plucked from a Fig tree. The Cross on which Christ was crucified for the repayment of all the debts of humanity was also made out of a Fig tree.

In the creation story, there are two trees in the Garden of Eden; the 'Tree of life' and 'tree of knowledge of good and evil'. The First Adam tasted the fruit from the 'Tree of knowledge of good and evil' taking up the burden of Sin, while the New Adam, Christ, saved humanity by sacrificing his life on the Cross - the "Tree of life".

On his way to Bethany, Jesus cursed the Fig tree for not bearing any fruits. This signifies the spiritual barrenness of people covered with plenty of branches of religious practices and assimilates the fact that Jesus is the fruit of the fig tree-the Tree of Life.

Editorial

Spirituality is the higher evolution of human being. It is an attempt to appreciate the strength and weakness of one's own self and a conscious effort to engage in the unconscious evolution of life.

One of the most remarkable religious trend that is visible in India, and perhaps in the world today, is the emphasis of materialistic spirituality rather than virtuous spirituality. Over the years, value based spirituality has given way to material based and opportunistic spirituality.

In modern times the word spirituality is a confusing one and it points to many different conceptions. And there are so many opinions about 'what is spiritual'. The philosophical and technical meaning of 'spiritual' may vary, but it is actually an experience of being born again, renewed, and revived. It gives new hopes for a bright future ahead. In this regard, the new edition of Hekamtho attempts to address the various issues in Religion and Spirituality.

It is a fact that we live in a religiously plural world and each of us interacts with people of other faiths rather than our own. It couples the need for an Inclusive Christianity that affirms the presence of God's salvific mission in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.

As a known figure in the field of ecumenism and inter-faith discussion, Mor Theophilose Kuriakose Metropolitan emphasis the need and significance of ecumenism in his Bible study, *Called to be United to Witness Christ*, based on John. 17: 20-23. It is a testimonial for 'being together' in the midst of distinction.

The article, *Importance of the Topic Holy Spirit in the Context*

of the Whole Christian Theology by Adai Jacob Corepiscopa, analyses the significance of 'Spirit of God' in various systems of theological assertion.

In the third article, *Armageddon, Holy Cow and Messianism: Conversion of Primordial Metaphors as Political Fetish*, M.P. Joseph gives a detailed picture about the politics behind various opportunistic religious manifestations.

K.P. Aleaz elaborates the inter-relatedness of culture and religion in his article titled, *Gospel From- Within Inter Religious Culture: Some Indian Reflections*. It also critically examines various contextual approaches in mission; Inculturation, indigenization, acculturation etc.

Jerry Kurian in his article, *Theatre as a pedagogical Framework for Theological Education*, illustrates the effectiveness of theatrical approach in theological pedagogy. It substantially underlines the fact that interactive methodology in theological studies has become a necessity.

The last article, *Christian Liturgy in a Postmodern World: Reflections from a Neuroscience Perspective*, by Renjan Mathew elucidates the 'process of interiorization' in experiencing worship. He attempts to explain liturgy especially its peculiarities and qualities from the perspective of neuroscience.

All these articles in one way or other addresses the various issues in present day religious life and emphasis the need to have a clear conscience regarding modernization and materialisation in spirituality. Hence, the need of the hour is to have a very enriching and inclusive spirituality that bears the true fruits of Christian life and this is what christ taught his disciples by pointing at the fig tree on his way to Bethany, reminding us all to bear fruits in our spiritual life.

Fr. Dr. Ajiyan George
Editor

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“Called to be United to Witness Christ”

Dr. Mor Theophilose Kuriakose Metropolitan¹

Bible Study - St. John 17:20-23

20 “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.”

The Text in its Original Context

St. John chapter 17 is generally known as the “high priestly prayer” (the title was first used by a Lutheran theologian David

¹H.E. Dr. Mor Theophilose Kuriakose Metropolitan is the Resident Metropolitan and Professor of New Testament at M. S. O. T. Seminary and a member of the Faith and Order Commission of WCC.

Chytraeus). It is not a prayer for everyday but a part of the farewell discourse of Jesus.

In Judaism (in the OT, Apocalyptic Literature, and Hermetic Literature) it was common for those who are making a farewell speech to conclude with a prayer that God would bless their children or people they were leaving behind (Gn.49, Deut.33, 1 Kings 2:1-12, 2 Bar.48, Poimandres 1:30-32).

The original setting (*sitz im leben*) of the prayer, preferably accepted by the scholars is in the context of the last supper and the materials of the farewell discourse will themselves have been frequently employed in celebration of the last supper.²

Regarding the structure of the prayer much discussion has been taken place but the structural analysis of Schnackenburg is widely accepted. He classifies the pericope into four:

- 17:1-5 Jesus' prayer for the glory of the Son that he may give life to those given to him.
- 17:6-19 prayer for the disciples.
- 17:20-23 prays that all believers may be one or the prayer for the unity of the whole church.
- 17: 24-26 prays that believers may be perfected in the glory of Jesus.³

Analysis of the Text

This section is an expansion of that in v.11 (*"And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one"*),

² Beasley-Murray George R., John, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol.36, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1999, p.294.

³ Schnackenburg Rudolf. "Strukturanalyse von Joh 17" *BZ* 17, 1973, pp.67-78.

prayer for the unity of the disciples. The foundation and the goal of the unity are well expressed in these verses. V.20 begins with a new horizon of Unity. In the previous verses (1-19) Jesus' concern was the disciples only but in v.20 Jesus includes the future believers, who will be the fruits of the labor of the disciples.

In v. 21 the base and the perfect model of unity is projected, *“that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”*. The parallelism in vs.21 and 22, 23 are significant.

v.21	v.22, 23
<i>... that they all may be one</i>	<i>...that they may be one</i>
<i>as you father</i>	<i>as we are one</i>
<i>in me and I in you</i>	<i>I in them and you in them</i>
<i>so that they may be one in us</i>	<i>so that they may be perfect in unity</i>
<i>so that the world may believe</i>	<i>so that the world may know</i>
<i>that you have sent me</i>	<i>that you have sent me.....</i>

The essence and the effect of the unity are clearly expressed in these verses. *“being one”* is the characteristic of the relation between the Father and the Son and it must be the characteristic of the relationship in the community of the believers. The unity between the Father and the Son becomes the ideal model for the unity between the disciples. It is a model and it is an extension from Father and Son to the disciples, (in v.23 it is clearly visualized *“I in them and thou in me”*). The inner coherence and mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son and the disciples make the unity of the disciples perfect and the perfection of this unity leads to mission (*that the world may believe...know...*). The distinctiveness of the unity between the

Father and the Son is that it is mystical on the one hand and it is manifested in mutual love and personal relationship. In the same way the unity among the followers should be mystical in its essence and expressive in its goal, which are the witness and mission.

It is interesting that the statement “*that you have sent me*” twice used in these verses 21-23. The positive effect of Unity of the disciples is that it attests the authenticity of the Jesus’ person, his sending from the Father and his gospel. And the terrible consequence of the disunity will be the scandalizing of the sending of the Son by the Father, credibility of the incarnation of Jesus and his gospel and the very existence of the church itself. In other words the disunity of the disciples affects the image of God, the Father, Jesus the Son of God, and the church. It also blocks humanity from its chance to enter into the church and the communion.

The Implication of the Text in our Context

When Jesus prays that “*all may be one*” he is not referring to the ecumenical problem. The evangelist does not seem to address individual believers or even a divided community. Jesus prays that when his community expands there will be no division or disunity among the members. His attribute “all” implies all the present and future followers.⁴ His intension is to show the mystery of the communion of the followers, the unity that shapes the Christian community on the model of the life of the Father and the Son. For John, unity not to be minimized with good team work or mere harmony among the members of a community but it is more than that. It is the essential character of God. It is His way of being a communion. It is integrally and inseparably rooted in Love. Therefore it is a gift given to the

⁴Kanagaraj Jey.J. *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*. OM Books, AP, 2005, p.562.

Christian community in Christ, to be lived out and extended to others.

Uniqueness of the Unity of which Jesus Spoke about

The Unity of which Jesus speaks about is not a goal but it is a reality. It is not something we have to strive for but to recognize and make a reality in our life. So we are lest not with the responsibility to unite ourselves, but with the freedom to participate the unity that already exists, the unity of the expression and reverberation of the unity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The unity is not uniformity or unanimity. It is the Trinitarian *perichorosis*, the mutual indwelling preserving the distinctiveness of the divine persons. In this model the different socio-cultural elements, traditional backgrounds, plurality and differences of different churches become richness than a threat.

The Missiological Implication of the Unity

The internal unity of the church has to do with an external mission in the world. Jesus' prayer for the unity took place just before his departure. His words "*I am no longer in the world*" should be seen as a preparatory work of Jesus. In other words Jesus wants to continue his mission through his followers, the church, in this world. The church becomes thus the presence of Christ in the world, the image of Christ in the world. His words "*whoever has seen me seen the Father*" and "*I in them and you in me*" indicates that whoever has seen Jesus seen the Father and whoever has seen the church has seen Jesus and thus seen the Father. So the church is the continuation of the incarnation in its mission. Only as we are united in Christ, expressed in mutual love for one another then only we can show the world who Jesus is.

The unity of the church is therefore biblically in obedience to Christ's aspiration and prayer that all may be one.

Theologically, recognizing that the life of the church is grounded in the vision of the life of the Trinity, a life of unity in diversity and sharing. Doxologically, in obedience to God and to the praise and glory of God, who wills that God's people be one. Ecclesialogically, in recognition of the fact that harmful divisions between churches are wounds in the body of Christ and missiologically, the disunity contradicts the will of Jesus and scandalizes the gospel and duplicates the efforts of witnessing Christ in the World.⁵

The present day reality can be portrayed as three dimensional. Inner church or inter church, religious plural and human existential. The multiplicity of denomination and fragmentation within the church families, denominationalism, confessionalism and sometimes the attempts of proselytism, issues based on our theological convictions, missiological understanding, confessional identities, ecclesiastical structures etc. compel us to ask ourselves how far we are able to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity and witness. How far a divided church can be authentic and fruitful in building peace and justice in the society and how can we invite others to be the part of the body of Christ?

Unity in Asian Context

Asia has a long history of Christian presence and Christianity. Unlike many other parts of the world, Christianity entered and rooted in the multi-religious soil of Asia. Centuries of co-existence of Christianity with other religions are a reality in Asia. But the factors like growing religious fundamentalism, human rights violations in many parts of Asia, increasing violence against the marginalized and weaker sections in the

⁵ Thomas F. Best, "From Seoul to Santiago: The Unity of the Church and JPIC", Between the Flood and the Rainbow, interpreting the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment(Covenant) to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, WCC, Geneva, 1992, P.129.

society and women, poverty and injustice challenge the churches in Asia are to be reminded of their call for unity and witness. The church needs to be united

- a) *for her own survival*
- b) *for the ministry of reconciliation*
- c) *to give prophetic witness*
- d) *to stand for peace and justice*
- e) *to nurture indigenous mission*
- f) *to ensure the unity of humanity and*
- g) *to preserve the integrity of the whole creation.*⁶

The prayer of Jesus narrated in the gospel according to St. John is the very essence of the ecumenism and ecumenical endowers. On the one hand it is an expression of Jesus' wish and on the other hand a call for action.

Prayer for Unity

*You, the one
from whom on different paths
All of us have come.*

*To whom on different paths
all of us are going.
Make strong in our hearts what unites us.*

*Build bridges across all that divides us;
United make us rejoice in our diversity.*

*At one in our witness to your peace,
A rainbow of your glory.*

*Amen.*⁷

⁶ Mathews George Chunakkara, *Called to be Prophetic in the Oikoumene*, CLS, Thiruvalla, 2014, p.26-32.

⁷ Br. David Steindl-Rast, OSB.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What kind of Unity meant by Jesus in his prayer and what is Jesus' desire for the church community?
 - 2) How can be the unity achieved and practiced in our local parish situations and national and global level?
 - 3) Are we one in Christ for Others?
 - 4) Is diversity a hindrance to be in unity?
 - 5) Can a harmfully divided and broken church give authentic witness in a religious plural world and can it exist to build peace and justice in the world?
-

Importance of the Topic Holy Spirit in the context of the Whole Christian Theology

Dr. Adai Jacob Corepiscopa¹

“The Holy Spirit is not a topic with which the modern world is really familiar with or interested in. And yet there is no other topic, if rightly interpreted could be of greater significance for the world, the world torn by disunity, afflicted by sorrow, driven to bestiality through boredom, a world that finds either life or meaning in life, a world that seek amusement instead of real Joy, loneliness in the crowd instead of real communion and burning passion instead of creative love”². A hint to the significance of this topic is already given in this introduction of Paul Varghese. But the central importance of this topic must be clarified in

¹ Rev. Dr. Adai Jacob Corepiscopa is the Principal of the MSOT Seminary.

²Paul Varghese, “Ich glaube an den Heiligen Geist” in *Die Orthodoxe Kirche und der Heilige Geist* Marburg 1966, 7.

association with the whole Christian Theology. “The reality of the Paraclete stays in the centre of the whole Christian Theology and bears no regionalisation”.³ Therefore here I will try to give a brief overview of the importance of the topic Holy Spirit in the context of the whole Christian Theology.

1. Holy Spirit in Biblical Theology

The Holy Spirit is the answer to the three questions in relation to the Holy Scripture. (a)First of all the question of the origin of the Holy Bible: According to the Christian faith the Holy Scripture contains the Word of God. That is the special feature that distinguishes the Holy Scripture from other written documents. But who has transmitted the word of God in human language to human beings? Through his revelation God gives His own Spirit to the elected believers and the Spirit transmits the content of Revelation in human language to the elected people of God. Therefore we can say that the Holy Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit. “The things that are revealed by God and that are contained and presented in the Holy scripture are transcribed through the influence of the Holy Spirit; for on the basis of the Apostolic Faith the Books of the Old Testament and the New Testament in their entirety with all their parts are considered to be sacred and canonical, because they are written through the influence of the Holy spirit (John 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Peter 1:19-21; 3: 15-16), being God as its origin and the same is handed over to the church”.⁴

(b)Secondly the Holy Spirit is the answer to the question of the content and essence of the Holy Scripture. The language and

³K. Lehmann, “Heiliger Geist, befreiung zum Menschsein – Teilhabe an göttlichen Leben. Tendenz gegen-wärtiger Gnadenlehre” in *Gegenwart des Geistes Aspekte der Pneumatologie*. Ed.W. Kasper (QD 85 Friburg)1979, 202.

⁴ “Dogmatic Constitution on God’s Revelation 3:11. The second Vatican Council” in *LThK* (Suppliment Vol II) 545.

words of the Holy Scripture are linguistic signs, in which the Spirit of God is hidden. The Holy Scripture is not simply words, but verbalization of the Spirit of God, so that human beings can experience the spirit of God by means of human language. So the content and inner essence of the Holy Scripture consists in the Spirit.⁵

(c)Thirdly the spirit is the answer to the question of the purpose and aim of the Holy Scripture. The Holy Scripture contains the living word of God and not dead alphabets and as bearer of the spirit of God the Holy Scripture is not passive and static, but dynamic and lively. This dynamism and liveliness of the Holy Scripture are confirmed by the fact that, when they are read, preached and interpreted the Holy Spirit is transmitted. In short the purpose and aim of using the words of the scripture are mediation and transmission of the Spirit of God to human beings.

2. Holy Spirit in Dogmatic Theology

The aim of the formulation of the Christian dogma is nothing other than the preserving and transmission of the Spirit of God's Revelation. The topic Holy Spirit is therefore is not one among many topics of dogmatic, but stays in the centre of all other themes of dogmatic⁶. Here we have to emphasis the repeated

⁵“The Holy scripture as written word of God is the bearer of the Spirit of God. Compare the relation between word and the spirit” in H. Schlier, *Wort Gottes eine neutestamentliche Bessinnung*, Würzburg:1958, 26-30; *Ibid*, *Grundzüge einer Paulinischen Theologie*; Freiburg: 1978, 200ff; Dilschneider, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, Wuppertal; 1969, 36-38; M Alberts, *Die Botschaft des neuen Testaments II/2*, Zollikon – Zürich 1957, 142f; P. Feine *Theologie des Neuen Testament*, Berlin 1951, 262; H. Berkhof, *Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*, Neukirchen 1968 und vollendende Kraft, *Der Beitrag der Orthodoxen Theologie*, in *Erfahrung und Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Hrsg. C. Heitmann/H. Mühlen, Munich 1974, 214 – 222.

⁶Cf. Lehman, *Heiliger Geist*, 202.

and increasingly loud criticism of “spirit Oblivion”⁷ in Western Theology. “Again and again at present the Spirit Oblivion that is the Spiritlessness of theology is complained and a renewal of the theology of the Holy Spirit is demanded”⁸ There were but individual attempts⁹ to understand the “traditions and doctrines of the Church pneumatologically as realization of the presence of Christ in Holy Spirit”¹⁰ Such an attempt doesn't mean an idealization of their results but signifies on the contrary, that these individual dogmatic formulas are fragmentary signs and witness, in, which and through which we meet the actual (object) Matter of faith that is the reality of Christ, which is present in the Holy Spirit”¹¹ The central and important position of Pneumatology is particularly emphasised in Orthodox Theology and therefore the doctrine of the Holy Spirit stays in the centre of the Theology of the Orthodox churches¹².

3. Holy Spirit in Liturgical Theology

The Holy Spirit comes to the foreground, when we talk about

⁷Cf. W. Kasper, 1979, 7, compare also Y. Congar, “Pneumatology or Christomonism” dan la ttradition Latine In *Ecclessia spiritu Sancto Edocta*, Gennblouts, 1979, 41-63. J. Depnis, “Western Christomonism and Eastern Pneumatology” In: *Clem* 35 (1979) 190-198; Dilschneider, “Die Geistvergessenheit der Theologie”, In *Th LZ* 86, 1961, 255-266; P. Varghese, 7-8.

⁸Kasper, *Aspekte*, 7.

⁹Cf. for example J.S. Drey, *Apologetik* BD I, Mainz 1984, 357 369 ff, 372 ff.

¹⁰Kasper, *Aspekte*, 13.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Cf. P. Evdokimov, *Presence do L'Esprit Saint dans la tradition Orthodoxe*, Paris 1977; N.A. Nissiotis, “Die Theologie der Ostkirche” in *Ökumenischen Dialogue*, Stuttgart 11968, 19ff; 64ff; 145ff; M. Fatey, “Sohn und Giest.Theologische divergenzen zwischen Constantinopel und western”, In *Cone* (D) 15 (1979) 505-509; Dupius, *Western Christomonism* 190-198; W. Hrniewioz, “Der Pneumatologische Aspekte der Kirche aus Orthoddoxer Sicht” In: *Cath* (M) 31 (1977) 122-50; R Erni, *Die Kirche in Orthodoxer Schaaau*, Freiburg.

liturgy and sacraments.¹³ The life of the Orthodox Church, if rightly understood, can be summarized in the two concepts-Spirit and Liturgy. Especially the sacramental Theology of the orthodox churches is closely related to Pneumatology, because the spirit is understood as the real accomplisher of the sacraments.¹⁴ The liturgical celebration of the Christian community is the historical moment of receiving the Holy Spirit and also the moment of experiencing the presence of God. The climax of all the sacraments is the Epiclesis (calling of the Holy Spirit) and thereby external symbols are filled with divine content (that is the Holy Spirit). Therefore the reception of the sacraments is in the first place receiving of the Holy Spirit. For example according to the New Testament baptism is new birth out of water and spirit.¹⁵ The adoption of the Christians as children of God through baptism is actually realized through possession of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Also the Holy Spirit is the divine “energy” that comes down and transforms the Eucharistic bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ.¹⁷ According to the Orthodox standpoint the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit is the climax of a sacrament especially of the Eucharistic celebration.¹⁸

4. Holy Spirit in Moral Theology

The Christian life is in short a life in the Spirit. The spirit of God is the divine power that empowers the believers to lead a

¹³Cf. Evdokimov, presence 97 ff; Nissiotis, *Die Theologie*, 232 ff.

¹⁴Cf. K.H. Kandler, *Abendmahl und Heiliger Geist*, In *KUD* 228 (1982) 215-227; Wagner, *der Heilige Geist* 221.

¹⁵Cf. John 3:5; Evdokimov, *Presence* 97 f; Berkof, *Theologie*, 76-96.

¹⁶Rom 8:15, Gal. 4:6

¹⁷Wagner, *Der Heilige Geist* 221, Justifies the crucial role of the Spirit in the Sacrament through the following quotation from Cyril of Jerusalem: “Everything, that is touched by the Holy spirit is blessed and transformed”.

¹⁸Wagner, *Der Heilige Geist* 221; Kandler, *Abendmahl* 215 ff, Nissiotis, *Theologie* 126 ff.

Christian ethical life.¹⁹ There was a “moral revolution” when the immoral gentiles at that time received the Holy Spirit after their conversion and adopted new life style. Especially the letter to the Ephesians makes it earlier and also the letter to the Galatians.²⁰ Everyone, who possesses the Spirit of God, is led by the Spirit. The life of the Christians was an expression of the work of the Spirit of God. The Christians as possessors of the Spirit of God are free from external force, because they do good out of the inward urge of the Spirit.

Apostle Paul had no doubt that the ethical and moral life of the Christians completely depends on the Spirit. A summarized overview is given in Gal 5:16-25. The change in way of life through the spirit occurs in two phases: The first phase is the refusal of the flesh and the works of the flesh. “Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5: 19-21). The second phase is the realization and adoption of the fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christians. “But the fruit of the Spirit is Love, joy, peace, forbearances, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Gal 5:22-23)”.

5. Holy Spirit in Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology is a topic that inseparably belongs to pneumatology. This is proved by the third article of the creed of

¹⁹H.B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament. A Study of Priitive Christian Teaching*, London 1921, 175; W. Rainhard, *das wirken des Heikgen Geists in Menschen nach den Briefen des Apostel Paulus*, Freiburg 1918, 63-65.

²⁰Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Hth K IX) Freiburg 1977, 364ff)

the church.²¹ The out pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the crucial moment in which the birth of the church was manifested.²² Two facts have become apparent here: firstly the Holy Spirit acts as the creator of the church or as *Spiritus Creator* of the church. Secondly, because the Spirit has come down upon the church He acts as the soul of the body of the church. Thus the Holy Spirit is not only the creative power behind the birth of the church, but also its essence.

The church is defined with term “sacraments”²³ or “Sacrament of Salvation”.²⁴ Recently this definition has been deepened and specified using the expression “Sacrament of the Spirit”²⁵ and thus the Pneumatological dimension of the church was brought to the forefront. As sacrament of the Holy Spirit the church is the “sign and instrument of the Holy Spirit”.²⁶

In the theology and in the life of the Orthodox churches the

²¹J. Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, Munich 1968, 277; “Here the text of our creed sets us a task: the doctrine of the church has to find its origin in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and its gifts”.

²²J. Panagopoulos, “Die Urchristliche Prophetie: Ihr Charakter und ihre function”, in *Prophetic vocation in NT and Today NT*, S (Hrsg J. Panago Poulos, Leiden 1977, 12; Kasper, *Aspekte* 19.

²³Cf. “Dogmatische Konstitution über die Kirche 1:1, the second Vatican Council”, In *Lexicon for Theologies un Kirche* (Suppliment Volum I) 157; M. Bernards, “Zur Lehre von der Kirche als sakrament, Beobachtungen aus der Theologie des 19 und 20. Jahrhunderts” In *Mth Z* 20, 1969, 29-54; L. Boff, *die Kirche als sakrament in Horizont der Welterfahrung*, Paderborn 1972, Y. Congar, *Un Penple messinique. L’ Eglise Sacrament du Salut. Salut et Liberation*. Paris 1975.

²⁴J. Ratzinger, “Kirche als Heilssakrament” In *Zeit des Geistes* (Hrsg. J. Reikerstorger), Wien 1977, 59-70

²⁵Cf. W. Kasper, “Die Kirche al Sacrament des Geistes” In W. Kasper and G. Sauter, *Kirche Ort des Geistes*, Freiburg 1976, 13-55, H.G. Koch, “Neue Perspectives der Theologie des Heiligen Geistes” In *Herkor* 30, 1976, 458-459. M. Kehl, “Kirche Sacrament des Geistes”, In *Gegenwart des Geistes* (QD 85) (Hrsg. W. Kasper), Freiburg 1979, 155-180.

²⁶Kasper, *Aspekte* 18

Pneumatological dimension of ecclesiology is strongly emphasised.²⁷ First of all the Holy Spirit comes as the eschatological gift of Salvation for the realisation of the eschatological salvation and then the church emerges as the place of the presence of the Spirit and of the Salvation.

6. Holy Spirit in Christology

The person of Jesus Christ is the unique centre of Christian faith and the essence of Christianity is to be understood from this centre. “With him, alone with this name or with this lively historical person and His work the essence of Christianity can be outlined or the *proprium christianum* can be defined”²⁸. In western Theology the Christology is very well explored, but quite often at the expense of pneumatology.²⁹ Strictly speaking, Christology and Pneumatology are closely connected.³⁰ Considering the close relation between these two topics we must emphasise both the topics equally and one or other topic should not be emphasised at the expense of the other. In the following aspects the importance of the theme Holy Spirit in relation to Christology can be presented:

1. Holy Spirit and the expected Messiah: The root of the New Testament concept of the close relation between the Spirit and

²⁷“Erni Die Kirche in Orthodoxer Schau”, In *US* 36, 1981, 226-241; Nissiotis, *Theologie* 64–85; Hryniewicz, *Der pneumatologische Aspekte*, 122-150.

²⁸A. Nossol, “Der Geist als Gegenwart Jesu Christi”, In *Gegenwart des Geistes* (Hrsg. W. Kasper) (QD 85) Freiburg 1979,132.

²⁹Kasper, *Aspekte* 12.

³⁰W. Schmithals, “Geisterfahrung als Christus erfahrung”, In *Erfahrung und theologies des Heiligen Geists* (Hrsg.C.Heitman/H.Mühlen) Munich 1974, 101ff; Berkhof, *Theologie* 14-33; Kasper, “Jesus der christus, mainz 1974, 296 ff; O.A. Dillschneider, die Notwendigkeit nuer Antworten auf neue Fragen. Auf den Weg zum dritten Glaubensartikel: Ich Glaube an den Heiigeen Geist”, In *Erfahrung und Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Hrsg. C. Heitman/H. Muhlen). Munich 1974,157; Nossol, *Der Geist* 132-154; Koch, *Neue Perspektiven* 459.

Messiah has to be sought in the Old Testament idea of Messiah³¹, because in Old Testament the possession of the Holy Spirit is presented as special qualification of the Messiah³².

2. Jesus as receiver of the spirit: The synoptic gospels report that Jesus received the Holy Spirit by baptism³³. Immediately after receiving the Holy Spirit came the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God. According to Rom 1:4 Christ is enthroned by the Spirit of Holiness as the Son of God.

3. Jesus as bearer of the Holy Spirit: According to Luke Jesus is the bearer of the Spirit of God³⁴ and he starts his public ministry filled with power of the Spirit.

4. The risen Christ as giver of the Spirit³⁵: In John 20:22 the risen Christ is introduced as the giver of the Holy Spirit. For Apostle Paul the Spirit of Christ is identical to the Spirit of God and believers must possess the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9).

5. Identification of Spirit and Christ: "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). The identification does not happen in relation to persons, but in relation to functions.³⁶

6. Christ and Paraclete: In the statements about Paraclete in the

³¹Schmitals, *geisterfahrung* 101 ft; for the close relation between Spirit and Messiah in OT R. Koch, *Geist und Messiah*. Beitrag zur biblischen theologie des AT, Wien 1950; M.A. Chevellier, *L'Esprit et le Messic dans ie Bas Judaisme of le Nouveaau Testament*, Paris 1958; J. Klausner, *des the Messianic idea in Israel*, New York 1955.

³²Three places in Isaiah, which were taken into New Testament indicate it Is 11:1 – 1, Peter 4:14; Is 42:1- Mt 12:18; Is 61:1-Lk 4:18.

³³Mt. 3:16 f; Mk 1:10 f; Lk 3:21f.

³⁴Lk 4:1,14,18; 10:21.

³⁵Cf. Berkhof, *Theologie* 19; Schmitals, *Geisterfahrung*, 102.

³⁶I. Hermann, *Kyrios und Pneuma. Studium zur Christologie der Paulinischen Haupt briefe*, Munich 1961,140; Berkhof, *Theologie* 28. The risen Lord works always in Spirit.

Gospel of John the close affinity between Christ and Spirit is clearly recognizable.³⁷

7. According to Apostle Paul you can know and confess Jesus as Lord only by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

8. On the basis of the Theology of Revelation, according to Karl Barth the Spirit is the “Subjective reality of revelation” and Jesus is the “Objective reality of revelation”.³⁸

On the basis of the close relation between Spirit and Christ we can rightly speak of a Pneumatological Christology³⁹ and the plenty of statements of the NT justifies such a comprehension. A pneumatological Christology is also the only solution for the Christological crisis and the problem of misunderstanding in relation to different Christological definitions.

7. Holy Spirit in Soteriology

It is after all not possible to speak about Christian Salvation without reference to the Spirit of God, because the Spirit of God itself is the Gift of salvation,⁴⁰ which comes down through Christ to the Christian believers. In the Spirit of God or in the Spirit of Christ is Christian Salvation realized and brought to the present. What the believers receive as gift of salvation through believing in the Gospel is according to the Apostle Paul the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2). Also Luke presents the Holy Spirit as

³⁷Cf R.E. Brown, “The Paraclete in the fourth Gospel” in *NTS* 13 (1966) 113-132; Ibid, The Paraclete in the light of Modern Research in *St Ev* 4 (1968) 158-165; U.B. Müller, “Die Paraklet vorstellung in Johaannesevangelium”, in *ZTh K* 71 (1974) 31-77; Schmithals, *Geist erfahrung* 114; Nissiotis, *Der Geist* 142.

³⁸Cf. Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* Vol I/2 16-17. This definition of Karl Barth cannot be emphasised, because the Spirit is also an “objective” reality of revelation and an objective factor for salvation.

³⁹Cf. Berkhof, *Theologie* 21; Koch, *Neue Persoektiven* 459; Nossol, *Der Geist*, 134ff.

⁴⁰Cf. Schmithals, *Geisterfahrung*, 102ff.

eschatological Gift of Salvation (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4). Holy Spirit is the actual and concrete gift of salvation, which the believers received through the work of Salvation of God in Christ. The Holy Spirit that the believers possess is the first instalment of the future inheritance.⁴¹ A life in the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit means therefore foretaste of the realization of the eschatological salvation in history.

8. Holy Spirit in Ecumenical Theology

The unity of the universal church is given in advance in the unity of the Spirit of God (Eph. 4:3). The one Spirit is cohesive power of the body of Christ, namely the Church (Eph. 4:4). If the ecumenical efforts seek unity in diversity, they must begin with the rediscovery of the given unity of the church in the Spirit of God. The one Spirit is the "Source of Unity".⁴² From this central source flows out the diversity and the Spirit unifies the diversity to Unity. From the Unity of the Spirit we move towards the unity of the church. The Apostolic creed is an obvious evidence for the priority of the Pneumatology over ecclesiology.⁴³ Immediately after the confession of faith in one Spirit appears the confession of faith in one church. Ecclesiology belongs to Pneumatology and therefore the solution for ecclesiological problems should be sought in Pneumatology.⁴⁴ The diversity in churches" is richness of the one

⁴¹Cf. 2 Cor 11:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14; Rom 8:23.

⁴²Cf. J. Achimiuk, "die Gemeinschaft des Heiligen Geists – Quelle der Einheit der Kirche" in *Gemeinschaft des Heiligen Geistes heute – Trinität, Kirche, Schöpfung. Bericht der Studienkonsultation der KEK 24-28 März 1981, Cardiff, Grossbritannien* (KEK Studienheft Nr.13) Genf 1981, 49.

⁴³Cf. Rättinger, *Einführung* 275 ff; Kasper, *Aspekte* 19.

⁴⁴According to Kasper, Kirche as sacrament 47f the renewal of Pneumatology has greater importance in ecumenism. Compare P.49: Out of the renewal of Pneumatology comes the impulse for the solution of the present ecumenical stagnation.

spirit.⁴⁵ In one Spirit we can see at the same time the unity in diversity and the source of diversity in Unity.⁴⁶ The theme Holy Spirit became more relevant in the context of the loud criticism against the Western Theology. The problems of Scientific Theology have been pointed out by J.S. Drey⁴⁷ already in the last century. “Instead of dialectical Specialization or pure grammar or with word rummaging philology he encourages a theology that touches the inner intuition and that seeks not only for individual special themes but also for the organic co-relation of the whole”.⁴⁸ In our century H.U. Von Balthazar brought this criticism repeatedly to our consciousness⁴⁹. We can perceive a certain “Spiritlessness” in the Theology. This spiritlessness of theology is the result of “Spirit – oblivion”⁵⁰. In the context of the criticism of “Spirit Oblivion” of Western Theology, it has been accused for overemphasising Christology which is “Christo-monism”.⁵¹ If there is a Theology of Holy spirit in western theology, it is according to Berkhof⁵² suffering under two types of criticism:

⁴⁵Cf. *Einheit in Geist – Vielfalt in den Kirchen. Report of the VIII Plenary assembly of the CEC on 18th - 25th October 1979 Crete* (Ed CEC Geneva) 62-64.

⁴⁶Cf. Kasper, *Die Kirche als sakrament* 49ff.

⁴⁷“Revision des gegenwartigen Zustandes der Theologie”, in *Geist des Christentums und des Katholizismus* (Hrsg. J.J. Geiselman) Mainz 1940, 85-97.

⁴⁸Kasper, *Aspekte* 8f; Kasper, *Summaries*; J.S. Drey, *Criticism against Scientific Theology*.

⁴⁹Cf for example Theologie und Heiligkeit in Kasper, *Verbum Caro. Skizzen zur Theologie I*. Einsiedeln 1960, 195-225.

⁵⁰Kasper, *Aspekte* 7ff, Dilschneider, *Die Geistvergesenheit* 255 ff.

⁵¹Congar, *Pneumatologie* 41f; Dupuis, *Western Christomonism*, 190 ff; Varghese, *Ich glaube* 7; H.J. Pottmeyer, “der Heilige Geist und die Kirche. Von einer Christomonistischen zu einer trinitarischen Ekklesiologie”, in *Der Lobpreis des Dreieinigten Gottes in Heiligen Geist*. 1600 Jahre Bekenntnis von Nicaea – Konstantinopel (Tut St 2/81) 45 ff.

⁵²Berkhof, *Theologie*, 37f.

- 1) In the Catholic Theology the work of the Holy Spirit has been strongly institutionalized⁵³ and therefore His work has become static. So the most important aspect of the Spirit namely dynamism and freedom are lost to a great extent.
- 2) Contrary to that in the protestant Theology the work of the Holy Spirit has been individualized⁵⁴ and an introvert theology was developed in which the unity of the Spirit and the Universal outlook of theology are lost.

The orthodox Theology summarises the work as well as the experience of the Spirit with the expression “Communion of the Holy Spirit”. There in the institutional and individual aspects of the experience of the Spirit is included, but without any overemphasis of one over the other. The church is according to orthodox point of view, in the first place the communion of the Holy Spirit and Christian existence is an existence in the Spirit. It is high time that the Christian Theology rediscovers the significance of the Holy Spirit in the relation to the whole Christian Theology. It is not only a responsibility, but also a challenge for the Christian Theology as well as for the Churches.

⁵³Ibid,37.

⁵⁴Varghese, *Ich glaub* 8; Berkhot, *theologie* 37

Armageddon, Holy Cow and Messianism: Conversion of Primordial Metaphors as Political Fetish

Dr. M. P. Joseph¹

Students and practitioners of faith live in a precarious time in history. A nuanced slogan or rather, a poster statement that has captured the public consciousness reads: “Religion is not a solution, but is the problem.” This cliché is fast gaining legitimacy at the present time. To be a faith oriented person entails public shame. Explicit expressions of faith, including religious dress codes and public pronouncements are looked upon with disdain and suspicion. This is because religion and faith are conceived as the reason behind the majority of society’s social ills, which includes slavery, racism, gender

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hierarchy, war, and fundamentalism. In recent years, terrorism and violence has assumed a new face, the face of a devote faith practitioner. To be faithful is to be intolerant, and for religious people, the existence of another person is seen as a threat; the other person is seldom perceived as a reason for the witness of their faith.

According to a New York Times assessment, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant follows a distinctive variety of an Islamic tradition, believing that following the right path to the Day of Judgment informs public action. The group's action are perceived as devoid of all humanity and logic, however, for them, the actions are a carefully considered commitment towards returning the social relations to a legal environment that the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed as the ultimate goal of history, the apocalypse. The statements made by the leaders of ISIS reflects these religious overtones; in September 2015, Sheikh Abu Muhammad, the chief spokes person of Islamic state called on the Muslims in the Western countries to find an infidel and "smash his head with a rock", or "destroy his crop" to honour the true Divine. This biblical sounding punishment, stoning and crop destruction, similar to that of the Joshua narrative, is an expression of the faithful communities' commitment to an unchanging religious language that offered meaning for their life. That doesn't signal to a notion that the use of archaic religious language stems from the absence of any active exposure to our modern scientific world and its rationality. That is far from the truth. One of the masterminds behind the September 11 attacks was a graduate from the technical university in Hamburg, and was reported to have shopped at Wal-Mart and dined Pizza Hut, icons of modern neo-liberal capitalism, hours before the attack. This is a strange combination: even when exposed to and influenced by the modern scientific rationality and its ethos, faith practitioners are informed by a language derived from the rudimentary and

metaphoric language used to express ancient wisdom. The Islamic State, as they pronounce, awaits the arrival of the army of Rome in Dabiq, Syria where they will be put to death signaling the countdown to the final apocalypse. This view is similar to the vision propounded by President Regan through his reading of the Biblical account of Daniel and Revelations. Regan's exegetical journey through the apocalyptic literature assisted him to the political concentration of the concept of Armageddon and through that he situates himself with other faith practitioners who married scientific wisdom with primordial metaphors.

Religious discourse in India in the recent past denotes another extreme form of the unexpected marriage noted above. While billboards around the world advertise "an incredible India" marching towards modernity, the reality is that at present, the life of a cow is better protected than the life of a human being. People are hunted down on suspicion of hurting cows. While accelerating its movements towards a total subsumption to the logic of finance capitalism, the Indian state allows the permeation of an obscurantist wisdom to engulf its cultural and religious ethos. Logic of finance capitalism offers primacy and right to life only to those who participate in the market; and that is the reason for the marginalization of the poor and the weak; and yet the cow assumes priority over humans in this new breed of capitalism. There are countless examples of this type of a strange cohabitation of rudimentary and modern culture in the present society. Buddhist monk Asin Wirathu, who is also known as a Buddhist Bin Laden or at times as the Burmese Bin Laden, is simultaneously hailed as a true child of Buddha by the cultural minister of Myanmar. Monk Wirathu spearheaded the campaign against the Rohingyas, and labeled Islamic mosques as enemy bases. Monk Wirathu invokes ancient readings of the Pali text to rally support for his treacherous act of making a

people without citizenship, without any birthrights and in practice, make them believe that they are non-persons.

Depicting these actions as political manipulations of an interest group is a rather simple answer to locate the reason for the prevalence of such groups in various religious outfits. There is more than that. Of course, political manipulation of religious faith is a significant aspect, and such manipulative tactics have devastated many communities. Soumaya Ghannoushi, a British - Tunisian writer and expert in Middle East politics writes in a column in *Middle East Eye*:

Why do Iraq's Sunni and Shia kill each other today when they didn't years ago? Why were they able to coexist before, but find that impossible to do today? Every Iraqi tribe and family numbers both Sunni and Shia. They intermingled, intermarried, lived not only side by side but under the same roof, often sharing the same bed. This was the case even under Saddam's despotic rule. Then and before, for centuries Iraq was one of the world's most diverse places, a veritable mosaic of religions, ethnicities, sects and denominations, Muslims, Christians, Sabians, Yazidis, Sunni, Shia, Kurds, Turkmen all peacefully shared the same space.²

Notably, during Saddam Hussein's rule, the second person in the political hierarchy was Tariq Aziz, the trusted Vice President and the public face of Iraq who was also a devout Christian, active in the denominational and ecumenical circles.

"This was Iraq before", writes Ghannoushi . "It isn't Iraq today, since the American/British invasion and Bremer's transitional authority, which destroyed Iraq's political order,

²Soumaya Ghannoushi, "Religion Is Not to Blame", *Huffington Post*, October 29, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soumaya-ghannoushi/religion-is-not-to-blame_b_8417720.html

substituting it for one grounded in sectarianism and ethnic factionalism. National identity was broken asunder, the common torn apart, only narrow group affiliations remained. In the chaos that followed, every splinter group wanted to seize all, leaving the rest with nothing. Forming the security and police forces in the new Iraq along sectarian lines poured oil over fire, equipping one faction with the tools it would later use in its quest to exterminate its rivals.”³ According to Ghannoushi, the fault is not of Shias, Sunnis or other religious groups, but of Bush and Blair. Bush and Blair invoked the traditional religious myths to create a fervent religious environment that demanded its followers to reorder their social relationships based on their traditional religious identities. The reordering of society also went along with the construction and manipulation of the myth of “messianism”, a conviction on the part of the believers that they are called to be saviors of the world. The believers have a call or a mandate to save the world from the evil. The savior syndrome do function along with the claims of absolutism; a claim of being the custodians of absolute truth, absolute morality or absolute political system.

The myth of absolutism however, operates with the counter myth of demons, the Satan. Unfortunately in the invigorated political context created by neo-liberal casino capitalism, where values of competition and aggressive thrust for the accumulation of wealth assumed a status equivalent to the gospel imperatives, absolutes and demons were identified in the religious and ethnic space and the war between these forces is elevated to the realm of virtue. The language of war thus became the moral instruction, and the murder of innocent civilians was legitimized under the ideology of messianism. Besides, the language of absolute and demons encourage the violent entry of the believers into the religious and political space of the others.

³ Ibid.

Thus, within the religious language, lie the values that promote hatred, violence and war. While blaming political manipulators, religious students are challenged to revisit the use of the respective religious language in order to create communities of peace and reconciliation. This is one of the foundational theological tasks.

As Paul Tillich observed, “when the [traditional] theological truth of yesterday is defended as an unchangeable message against the theological truth of today and tomorrow”⁴ fundamentalism arises, and to Tillich fundamentalism entails an anti-theological moment. Conversion of religion as a political front to reorganize economic and social relations of the people stems from this anti-theological moment that Tillich expounded.

Aloysius Pieris offers a nuanced interpretation to define the theological task. Building on the observations of Raimon Panikkar, Pieris suggests that there are three moments involved in the evolution of the religious wisdom; (i) the primordial experience, (ii) the collective memory of the primordial experience and (iii) the interpretation of the collective memory of the primordial experience in a given time and space.⁵ The third moment is the theological moment and the truth lies in this interpretative moment. The memory on which the theological task is founded is also an interpretative moment in specific time and space. The existence of four gospels with four accounts of the primordial experience of the liberating story of Jesus reinforces the interpretative character of the memory. The evangelist John wrote his account for a specific community that adopted a different interpretative grammar compared to Luke or

⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation, Being and God*, Vol.1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3.

⁵ Aloysius Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation: An Autobiographical Excursus on the Art of Theologizing in Asia*, (Gonawala-Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: Tulana research Centre, 2013), p. 10-14.

Mark. However, the truth becomes relevant in the third task when the memory is interpreted by the Church for its communities. And this third task is an ongoing process that remains pertinent, not only to unravel truth but also to prevent the danger of the memory (which is an earlier interpretation) from becoming the concrete absolute.

When communities cease from the theological task of interpretation, the Islamic State's ideology appears to be the most legitimate and sincere appeal of faith. In the absence of interpretation, religious memories transmute itself in the role of the primordial and will be considered as an unchangeable corpus of the past. Fundamentalists often disregard the fact that memories are interpretations of the primordial within a cultural society, and presented in the metaphors and symbol systems of respective societies. What we call the gospel, or the primordial memory of the incarnation, is an affirmation of, and at the same time a critique of the prevailing culture. The fact that the stories of incarnations and the symbols used for explaining it are entirely adopted from the cultural milieu of first century Palestine is a statement to affirm the importance of culture. Gospels verify that the culture has the potential to bear the incarnation of the Divine within a specific cultural context. At the same time, incarnation in a cattle shed is a divine rebuke of the prevailing culture where divinity was equated with power. The concept of Davidic lineage for incarnation was a cultural construct of the monarchic kingdoms to reinforce the idea that the divine cohabits with state power, or with rulers and kings, and this grandeur status was annulled by the gospel narratives. The incarnation narrative thus stands in any attempt to be little the interpretative moment, and warns that holding cultural constructs (the memories) as ultimate expressions of truth runs the danger of becoming a fetish, and Incarnation warrants the need to unpack the foundations of the cultural construct that brought the memories of the primordial.

The Birth Narrative of Jesus: A Counter Cultural Moment

The birth narrative of Jesus depicts the role of power in the construction of culture. In the theological discourse, especially in Asia, culture is embraced without sufficient critical enquiry, and thus, dictated by those who have the resources and power to construct culture.

Culture, as Raymond Williams observed, is often perceived as a “noun of process” and also as a “metaphor of human development”.⁶ As a noun of process, it denotes a process of interaction of people with nature. It as well denotes a product of the process, pineapples from a pineapple garden. As Williams pointed, the meaning of culture has shifted from the noun of a process to a metaphor, meaning that “we often think of culture not as the process and product of what people do to nature, [which result in products like a pineapple], but what happens to people themselves. Culture is a metaphor for a kind of cultivation that occurs to people through their practices, language, communities, and doctrines. Where culture once meant how one tilled the soil; today it has more to do with how persons themselves are tilled.”⁷

As a metaphor, culture functions as a societal instrument to maintain continuity in time and comprehensiveness in scope. Every society takes elaborate pain to seek immortality through culture and thus transmit its ethos, traditions hierarchies and else through the institution of culture. As a metaphor, culture objectifies metaphysical doctrines which though has specificity of meaning, but maintained through the creation of symbol systems. Say for example, “God is my Shepherd” is a metaphor to objectify the metaphysical principle of a compassionate

⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 25

⁷D. Stephen Long, *Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2008) p. 8-9.

caring Divine within the cultural ethos of an agrarian society. It does not entail an absolute that modern ranch owners who rear cattle for meat markets to witness the values of God. Similarly the term “Kamadhenu” depicts the symbol of a cow, which indeed was the primary source of life in agrarian economic structures. Similar images and metaphors are present in all cultural traditions.

But when the metaphor resists contextual interpretation, the cow assumes the place of an eternal mother, or all ranch owners are seen as representations of the divine. The use of culture as a noun runs into the danger of being dogmatic, rejecting the theological function of searching the meaning of the primordial experience in time and space.

A metaphor belongs exclusively to its own specific times, and gain meaning in its comprehensive or collective usage, like the metaphor God is my shepherd. When independent meaning is assigned to the words within the metaphor, it becomes a deception of the metaphysical meaning it represents. In the absence of interpretation, what Pieris defined as the theological task, metaphor becomes tools for manipulation. The metaphoric representation of the Kamdhenu in agrarian context, hence, has led to the banning of beef and has mutated to become a political tool both to garner political solidarity on religious terms and to demonize the political opponents on the basis of their eating habits.

Primordial wisdom comes to us as symbol systems, rich in meaning, but warrants contextual interpretation. In the absence of contextual interpretation of the symbol systems it falls into the danger of being dogmatic and thus anti-human. Metaphor is used to describe what is not definable. God is a reality that our language cannot speak of. Thus theology needs to account for, as Thomistic philosophy reminds, the differences between speaking about God and that about which we speak. This applies

not only to the Gospel imperatives but also of the church tradition. Confession of the Church that “believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth...believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...” is a metaphoric construct that human language is incapable of expressing. But when it is translated without interpretation, it assumes the nature of an ideology that rejects the spiritual abilities of women who cannot become mothers without losing their virginity.

Pieris reminds us that the exodus narrative, so central to the self-definition of people and God, cannot be reduced to a simple story of a group of people physically escaping from Egypt to a state of national sovereignty; “rather it was an indescribable in-depth experience of the impossible taking their place right in their presence thanks to an awesome encounter with Some One revealed as YHWH whom the later generations would call affectionately “God of Womb-Love” (*El-rahum*) and God of Unconditional Love (*El Hanum*)”.⁸ Language about God, similar to the language about Kamadhenu is a metaphor to describe what is not definable in human language and thought forms.

When the metaphor to describe “God of Unconditional Love” malformed as a noun, god was enslaved within religion and its structures of doctrines, which formed the necessary framework to maintain the hierarchical structures of religious traditions. Missionary traditions of conversion from one religion to another were a direct consequence of this conversion of metaphor to define indefinable into a definitive noun.

However, metaphors are not free of a class bias. The question is who has the right of agency to construct the metaphors, or symbol systems and the agency to interpret it within a given time and space? According to Walter Benjamin, a Jewish

⁸Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 16

cultural critique, a correct political position or a specific social location implies a particular cultural product. In his essay titled *The Author as Producer*, Benjamin writes:

Since Plato, the question of the writer's right to exist has not often been raised with the same emphasis; today, however, it arises once more. Of course it only seldom arises in this form. But all of you are more or less conversant with it in a different form, that of the question of the writer's autonomy: his freedom to write just what he pleases. You are not inclined to grant him this autonomy. You believe that the present social situation forces him to decide in whose service he wishes to place his activity. The bourgeois author of entertainment literature does not acknowledge this choice. You prove to him that, without admitting it, he is working in the service of certain class interests.⁹

Culture is not something that relates externally to relationships of production but is a particular aspect of relations of production. Intellectual or cultural producers are a subtype of productive labour.

Thus, Culture is not an abstract force that floats around in space and settles upon us as a disembodied structure, instead, culture is created within a network of social relations involving communities of people. A society build on slave labour invariably constructs a racist culture, coupled with elaborate forms of mythologies, behavior patterns, social organizations, values systems and what Niebuhr has identified as the total process of human activity. But once created, culture becomes a defining social process in which men and women define and shape their lives, and the norms of behavior are constructed for

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, Translated by Anna Bostock and Introduction by Stanley Mitchell (London: Verso, 1998), p. 85

future generations. It implies that culture is a social construct dialectically depended on the means and forces of production. As Marvin Harris observed, a specific means of production reifies an economic structure which in turn determines the social relations. And the social relations became foundational for individuals and the collective social self to develop a world view which is communicated through cultural expressions and belief systems.¹⁰ Economic systems seek justification through cultural productions and directly corresponds to the worldviews generated out of it.

Antonio Gramsci's thesis on culture reiterates this observation. He convincingly argues that the dominant groups in society, including the ruling class maintain their hegemony by securing the spontaneous consent of the subordinate groups¹¹, such as women in patriarchal societies, blacks in a racially oriented systems, workers in an exploitative working environment; through the negotiated construction of an ideological consensus which incorporates all groups, dominant as well as the dominated groups. That construction will be cherished as treasured wisdom of that community. In Gramsci's term, the spontaneous consent created by the dominant group will function as the commonsense, where common sense is a cultural universe that is used to reproduce hegemony of the dominant class such as the reproduction of the male dominance through symbolic reproduction of symbol systems.

A Theological moment therefore is not just situating the importance of cultures as dialogue partners of the primordial experience of the divine, but discerning the social functions of the respective cultural productions and its class character.

¹⁰ Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1979) p. 55.

¹¹ Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, (Routledge, London, 1995) p. 165.

Against the given wisdom, the dominated also construct cultural creations. For example, the mask dances of the Minjung in Korea or the Nadanpattu of the Dalits in India are expressions of these counter-cultural constructions of the subalterns. The subaltern cultural constructions, molded through an alternate historic process, offer a conception of the world as a counter theory to the dominant view. They are however, subversive productions; subversive in the sense that these productions consciously identify the hegemonic character of the prevailing culture and subvert it through alternate symbolic constructions. The narrative that tells the birth of a messiah in cattle shed, a narrative that was issued to identify “the way” by the early church is a subversive text. Crucifixion of the “king of Jews” outside the city gate, the spatial domain of the untouchables to die is a subversive text.

The non-persons can archive and reproduce their consciousness through a series of negations, which ultimately, negated their life. In those negations lie people’s spirituality. In these negations of social structures and values, the dominated express their vision of life and the meaning of the divine in their life. Those people’s spiritualities are the real dialogue partners in our theological task.

Gospel From-Within Inter religious Culture: Some Indian Reflections

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It is the contention of this paper that culture is integrally related to religions and hence any discussion on gospel and cultures in effect means a discussion also on gospel and religions. The first section is on the ecumenical context wherein this fact has not yet been given proper prominence. The second section reflects on gospel as emerging from—within the Indian inter-faith context. Diverse religious experiences have to contribute to the very content of gospel and hence Inculturation, Indigenization and Contextualization are noted to be defective approaches in theologizing. Also suggestion is given for a

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progress from Inclusivism to Pluralistic Inclusivism in theology of religions for the emergence of the new in the experience of the gospel, through receiving contributions from other religions. Further it has been pointed out that the gospels of other religions also have to be affirmed as significant by Christians.

1. The Ecumenical Context of the Discussion

(a) An emphasis on sensitivity to identity and particularity

Ana Langerak, director of WCC's Programme Unit II, and the one responsible for the co-ordination of the conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil from 24 November to 3 December 1996, in identifying the background of the theme 'Called to One hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures' points out that though the issue of gospel and culture has been on the ecumenical agenda for decades, it was the Vancouver assembly (1983) that formulated it more precisely, relating it to evangelism and calling for a theological understanding of the relation between the gospel and cultures. Canberra assembly (1991) gave this concern new urgency pointing to some of the key inter-related issues involved such as theological method, authority, 'criteria', the normativeness of history, etc.²

The eschatological vision of reconciliation and unity suggested by the phrase 'called to one hope' (Ephesians 4.4), according to her, needs to be restated in view of our current awareness of pluralism and diversity. Today we have a sensitivity to identity, culture, and particularity and as a Christian from Latin America she can only view the meaning of the recent 500th anniversary of the conquest and evangelization in the light of that sensitivity. 1992 engaged her and people like her in a process of re-reading history and of listening to the

²Ana Langerak, "The Significance of the Salvador Conference Theme", *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXIV, No. 334, July 1995, p. 238.

voices of those who had been ‘covered over’.³ A networking organization of indigenous Christian community leaders brought out a collection of articles voicing sharp criticism of the mission process that most indigenous communities had been subject to and giving expression to a distinct, recently developing indigenous Christian theology. Today this organization has an important institute on ‘the study of sacred traditions of AbiaYala (America)’.⁴ But the tragedy is that many of the Latin American Christians’ own origin, culture andcosmovision have been forgotten by them and they have been substituted for by Christian fundamentalist formulas. So there exists a doubly sinned-against situation of the indigenous communities that express their faith only in terms of saving individual souls from perdition.⁵

The point Langerak wants to bring out regarding the issue of gospel and culture from her own Latin American context is, an of us have to come to terms with the factor of the legitimate ‘otherness’ of the other. Very often we overlook or deny ‘the other’. For example the conquest of Latin America resulted in direct genocide; Spain turned the other cultures and persons into objects covering up their original identities. There was a total contempt for the cosmovision and myths of the original inhabitants.⁶ The challenge before us is to change this situation and the conference theme is going to help us in this regard to affirm diversity and ‘otherness’ in the experience of the gospel. “... We can go expectantly to those who are different from us, knowing that through God’s active presence among them, we can expect insights, values and wisdom that are vital for the common good. In this sense cultural diversity is as much a

³*Ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶*Ibid.*

treasure to be safeguarded for the world as biodiversity.”⁷ Salvador is the centre of one of the principle Afro-Brazilian religions, *Candomble*. The very recognition of this religion by Christians would be a great thing. The venue chosen is thus particularly significant for the considering of the ‘otherness’ of the other.⁸

(b) The limitations of the four foci

The point we would like to underline here is the perspective of Langerak clearly brings out the integral relation that exists between religion and culture; culture at least in the third world is religious culture. We have to affirm religious pluralism and the right of other religions to exist as ‘the other’, as a preliminary step in the experience of the gospel. But the tragedy is that this integral religion-culture relation is not given any significance in the four foci around which Christopher Duraisingh wants the exploration of the theme ‘Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures’ to take place namely (i) authentic witness within each culture; (ii) gospel and identity in community; (iii) local congregations in pluralistic societies and (iv) one gospel-diverse cultures.⁹ Interestingly there is a subtheme ‘local congregations in pluralistic societies’, but unfortunately here the concern is just to help Christians to live and witness among people of other faiths. Duraisingh says “In the light of the integral relation between religion and culture, it is important to consider ways in which Christians at the local level are helped to live and witness among people of other faiths”.¹⁰ If our interest in other religious cultures is limited to a mere Christian witness

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Cf. Christopher Duraisingh, “Editorial: Looking towards Salvador”, *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXIV, No. 334, July 1995, pp. 203-209.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 207.

in the context of them, that would be a negation of God's presence in them enriching the gospel of God in Jesus as well as a continuation of the colonial mission agenda of a sectarian gospel. The reluctance to include other religions in our discussion on cultures shows both 'Western Christian ignorance' and 'Imperialist Christian arrogance'. So the suggestion from countries like India would be not only that the aspect of religious cultures should reflect in all the four foci suggested by Duraisingh, but also a fifth sub-theme has to be added which may be formulated something like 'Gospel as emerging from-within Inter-Faith Culture'. An attempt is made below to outline some of the concerns of such a sub-theme from a specifically Indian context.¹¹

2. Gospel as Emerging From-Within the Indian Inter-Religious Culture

(a) A non-dual religion-culture relation

First of all, we should know that culture is a comprehensive term which includes not only the patterns and modes of external behaviour but also basic postures, values, beliefs and worldviews which find expression in art, music, literature, philosophy and religion.¹² The most important feature of Indian

¹¹For a detailed discussion cf. K.P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture*, Calcutta: PunthiPustak, 1994; "Gospel and Culture: Some Indian Reflections", *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 36, No. 2. 1994, pp. 54-70; Vol. 37, No. 2, 1995, pp. 64-75.

¹²TN. Kunnunkal, "Our glorious heritage and challenges of the future" in *Composite Culture of India and National Integration*, ed. by Rasheeduddin Khan, Ahmedabad etc., Allied Publishers, 1987, p. 168. Cf. A.K. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, New York, 1952; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York : Harper, 1973; V.K. Gokak, *India and World Culture*, Delhi: SahityaAkademi, 1989; D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975; Gabriele Dietrich, *Culture, Religion and Development*, Bangalore: Centre for

culture is its integral relationship with Indian religions.¹³ Each culture develops a vision of reality and religion is the principle which enlivens this vision. The relationship between religion and culture is advaitic.¹⁴ The cultural symbiosis and the composite culture of India are the outcome of an on-going interaction between Indian religions.¹⁵ Consequently gospel and cultures in the Indian context means gospel and Indian religions. So if the purpose of this international study on gospel and cultures is to ignore other religions by giving emphasis on other cultures minus religions, it has no relevance for India. The challenge of India is to let the interrelation come about between gospel and Indian religions.

(b) The Hermeneutics in Question

Regarding the particular pattern of this interrelation it is to be noted that religious pluralism as an important hermeneutical context of India will decide the content of the emerging gospel from India. Diverse religious experiences will contribute to the content of the gospel. The gospel is not preformulated, but is in the process of formulation from within the plurality of hermeneutical contexts. Understanding the gospel of God in Jesus is a continuous integrated process involving humans and God simultaneously in a non-dual way. Knowledge of anything is an immediate existential knowledge formulated in the very knowing process. In our knowing-process there exists nothing

Social Action, 1978; Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Penguin, 1972.

¹³Cf. C. Raja Gopalachari, *Our Culture*, 5th Edition, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981.

¹⁴R. Pannikkar, "Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism from the Perspective of Interculturation" in *Religious Pluralism. An Indian Christian Perspective*, ed. by KuncheriaPathil, Delhi : ISPCK, 1991, p. 269.

¹⁵Cf. Rasheeduddin Khan, (ed.) *Composite Culture of India and National Integration*, op. cit.

externally ready-made that can be adapted, indigenised, incultured or contextualised.¹⁶

1) *The Inadequacy of Inculturation*

Inculturation goes against the Indian vision of integral relation between religion and culture resulting in cultural symbiosis and composite culture. This is because it separates religion and culture and then tries to take in some cultural aspects, after Christianising these.¹⁷ It is in order to counter-act this wrong notion that the role of our hermeneutical context of religious pluralism is being taken into serious consideration. What really happens is, the hermeneutical context decides the content of the gospel of God in Jesus and this can be called the gospelation of the context as against the contextualisation of the gospel.¹⁸ Consequently the understanding of the gospel emerging from different Indian religious contexts has to be seriously and carefully identified. For example, the Vedantic Christology¹⁹ as well as the Dalit Theology²⁰ deserves our consideration. These become the gospel of Indian religious culture.

¹⁶Cf. K.P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from eattkara's Thought*, Calcutta: PunthiPustak, 1997.

¹⁷Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, pp. 52-53; 83-85.

¹⁸K.P. Aleaz, "Experiencing the gospel", *Chronicle*, Calcutta : Bishop's College, 1988, pp. 31-42.

¹⁹Cf. K.P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta*, Delhi ISPCK, 1996; *An Indian Jesus from iaiticara's Thought*, Calcutta :PunthiPustak, 1997; *The Relevance of Relation in Sarikara'sAdvaita Vedanta*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1996; *Jesus in Neo-Vedanta. A Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity*, Delhi Kant Publications, 1995; "The Gospel in the Advaitic Culture of India: The Case of Neo-VedanticChristologies", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Sept. 1993, pp. 10-19.

²⁰Cf. M.E. Prabhakar (ed.), *Towards a Dalit Theology*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1988; A.P. Nirmal, (ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, Madras: Gurukul, 1990; *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, Madras: Gurukul, 1990; John C.B.

2) *Indigenization and Contextualisation as Defective*

Terms like localization, acculturation, indigenization or contextualization have to be rejected because they imply the following misconceptions: the gospel is external and alien to us; revising the language of the unchanging gospel is what is needed; there is a dichotomy between message and context; and we can judge our religious traditions from inside and those of others from outside.²¹ Further, Indigenization is a contradiction in terms because it is an artificial attempt to make indigenous that which is not indigenous. It implies that Christian theology which is foreign has to be translated in India. Theologically it is also branding God the Creator as a foreigner to our country and culture.²² Thus it becomes

Webster, *The Dalit Christians. A History*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1992; James Massey, *Roots. A Concise History of Dalits*, Delhi/Bangalore: ISPCK/CISRS, 1991; A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, (ed.), *The Dalit Desiyata. The Kerala Experience in Development and Class Struggle*, Delhi/ Bangalore: ISPCK/CISRS, 1990.

²¹Cf. Christopher Duraisingh, "Indian Hyphenated in Christians and Theological Reflection Part 1. A New Expression of Identity" *Religion and Society*, No. 4, Dec. 1979, PP. 95-101; "Part II Alternate Vol. Modes of Theologising now Prevalent in India", in *Religion and Society*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, June 1980, pp. 81-101; "Reflections on Theological Hermeneutics in the Indian Context", in *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 31, Nos. 3 and 4, July-Dec. 1982, pp. 259-78; "Reflections on Indian Christian Theology in the context of Indian Religious Reality", in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. 14, No.3, Sept-Dec. 1982, pp. 176-87; "An Interpretation of Theological Methods in Asia Today" in *African and Asian contributions to Contemporary Theology: A Report*, ed. by J.S. Mbiti, Bossey: Ecumenical Institute, 1977, pp. 42ff.

²²Cf. Arvind P. Nirmal, "Some Theological Issues Connected with Inter-Faith Dialogue and their Implications for Theological Education in India", in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XII, No. 2, July-Dec. 1980, pp. 107-129; "Theological Implications of the term "Indigenous" in *Dialogue in Community—Essays in Honour of S.J. Samartha*, ed. by C.D. Jathanna, Mangalore: The Karnataka The Research Institute, 1982, pp. 169-77.

obvious that the gospel of God in Jesus has to emerge from the plural religious hermeneutical contexts of India in which case a creative emergence of the new is expected in the experience of the gospel.

(c) A growth from Inclusivism to Pluralistic Inclusivism

So the question how various cultures and religions will understand Jesus in their own way is the real question. What are their contributions in identifying the new meanings of Jesus is the question. It is these new meanings which represent the gospel of Indian culture. For this is to materialise there is an urgent need for the articulation of a viable theology of religions. The theoretical basis for the defective approach of Inculturation is Inclusivism. Inclusivism affirms the salvific presence of God in other religions while still maintaining that one's own religious faith is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God. Inclusivism accepts the divine presence in other religious faiths, but rejects them as not being sufficient for liberation apart from one's own faith. All the truth in other religions belongs ultimately to one's own faith, which is its fulfilment.²³ The standpoint of both the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church reflected in many of the official documents is Inclusivism and hence a re-examination of perspective is called for.²⁴

From Inclusivism we have to grow into the standpoint of Pluralistic Inclusivism. Pluralistic Inclusivism inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths

²³Cf. Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford: Basil Black-well, 1986, pp. 80-139; J.N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, London: Oxford, University Press, 1913; Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, London: Dayton, Longman & Todd, 1966.

²⁴K.P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1994, pp. 99-176

contributing to its conceptual content and on the other hand inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfilment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths.²⁵ Pluralistic Inclusivism enables the emergence of the gospel of God in Jesus from-within the diverse religious cultures of India. It enables the paradigm shift that is taking place in Indian Christian thought regarding the understanding of truth-statements from absolute, static, monologic or exclusive ways to de-absolutized, dynamic and dialogic-in a word: relational ways.²⁶ Pluralistic Inclusivism stands for Indian dialogical theologies which encourage the relational convergence of Indian religions,²⁷ through the new meanings that emerge in the understanding of the gospel from within the Indian hermeneutical context.

(d) The significance of the gospel/s experienced by people of other faiths

But the first step needed from the Christian side is to affirm the right for the other to exist as the other; to give the people of other faiths the assurance that we no more have the intention either to destroy their faith experiences or provide distorted

²⁵Cf. K.P. Aleaz, "Religious Pluralism and Christian Witness —A Biblical Theological Analysis", in *Bangalore Theological forum*, Vol.XXI, No.4 and Vol. XXII, No. 1, Dec- March 1990, pp. 48-67.

²⁶Hans Kung and David Tracy (eds.), *Paradigm Change in Theology*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991; Leonard Swidler, (ed.), *Towards a Universal of Religion*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 7-13; Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions. The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993, pp. 182-207.

²⁷Cf. K.P. Aleaz, "Dialogical Theologies. A Search for an Indian Perspective", *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 6, No 2, October 1992, pp. 274-291.

interpretations of them.²⁸ Indian Christian Mission has the responsibility after seeking forgiveness for the damages done in the past to assure our Extra-Christian brothers and sisters that we will no more be un-Christian destroyers and manipulators. In other words the gospel of God in Jesus stands for the affirmation of the gospel/s as experienced by people of other faiths. After such affirmation only we need think of the interrelation of different experiences of gospel/s for a relational convergence of them. Such an affirmation is significant because it transforms Christian mission as to proclaim the liberative elements in other religious traditions, when such elements are destroyed by vested interests.²⁹ Christian mission is to proclaim the liberative elements in other faiths and the gospel of God in Jesus emerges gloriously in the context of such a proclamation. Christian mission is to seek forgiveness for the damage done to other religious experiences by destruction and misinterpretation and the gospel of God in Jesus emerges gloriously in the context of such repentance.

After such a step it is legitimate to ask the question ‘is there any way to arrive at the one gospel of the one God/Reality through an interrelation of the different experiences of gospel/s’. Gospel as understood by other religions³⁰ has to come in interrelation with gospel as experienced by Christian faith. Each experience will help other experiences to emerge in a fuller novel creative way. From such interrelation results the strife for the one gospel of the one God. ‘One hope’ can emerge only from such a strife for an interrelated one gospel.

²⁸K.P. Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion. Study Experience and Interaction*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1995, pp. 267-269.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 264-267.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 248-256.

3. Conclusion

The following are the conclusions at which we are arriving at: (a) As religion is an integral part of culture, in discussions on gospel and cultures, discussion on gospel and religions has to become an important aspect. (b) Our hermeneutical context of religious pluralism decides the content of the gospel of God in Jesus. Diverse Indian religious experiences will contribute to the very content of the gospel. (c) Inculturation, Indigenization and Contextualization of the gospel involves a wrong methodology as it artificially separates religion from culture as well as conceives gospel as preformulated, external and alien to us. (d) In theology of religions from Inclusivism we have to grow into the standpoint of Pluralistic Inclusivism for receiving theological and spiritual contributions from other living religious faiths in the very experience of the gospel. (e) Though our strife is for the experience of the one gospel of the one God/Reality in the vision of a relational convergence of religions, gospel is as experienced by people of other faiths have to be affirmed as significant, as a primary step.

Theatre as a pedagogical framework for Theological Education

Jerry Kurian¹

Introduction

Theological education is a critical component in the development of a minister, teacher, facilitator and social worker. The form of education followed is to equip various people in different capacities which are in some way or the other connected to the church. But is theological education different from other forms of education? Is the present system of education enough to make students good servers of people in the future?

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The framework of education and learning has been the same for the past few decades. Barring the fact that technological advances have led to the use of computers and other gadgets for learning, have theological colleges and seminaries been able to break the traditional framework of learning where the teachers are the sole authority and the student always listens? There are definitely different ways of teaching whereby students prepare presentations and ask questions during the lecture. But is this enough to bring about a process of education where we teach in the same manner as we preach?

This paper is an effort to suggest that each one of us is a body of expression, theatre and performance. Everyone is capable of providing and contributing to the process of mutual learning. A model which presents itself before us is theatre as a framework for theological education. Theatre and especially the theatre of the oppressed and people's theatre become a way of changing the way we learn and share knowledge, information and experiences.

Theatre

The word theatre comes from the ancient Greek word *Theatron*, which means seeing place. "In his book 'The Empty Space' director Peter Brooks states that all that is needed for theatre to occur is an empty space and someone to walk across that space while someone else watches. Theatre requires only a space, a performer and an audience. Story, character, spectacle, costumes, lights, scripts and sets are all unnecessary."² Theatre should not be limited to a building or constrained space where only the privileged can sit and watch a performance. Rather, theatre should be seen as an expression which can be expressed anywhere and everywhere.

² William Missouri Downs, Lou Ann Wright, Erik Ramsey, *The Art of Theatre. Then and Now*, Third Edition, Wadsworth, Boston, 2013, p.p. 14,15.

According to John Brown, theatre is a social performance, a progressive experience and one that mirrors nature.³ The idea of theatre is not just to work around a script but to work around and inside reality. "In traditional Western theatre, the written drama scripts the theatrical event. And we can map them sequentially. Performance, in the sense of live art, emerged out of fine art and experimental theatre; some claim that Performance now displaces drama/theatre."⁴ Theatre has moved from the exhaustive and expensive stages to the waysides and footpaths, it has the potential from being an art form to a form which pervades all aspects of our life. Augusto Boal quotes Lope de Vega "theatre is two human beings, a passion and a platform"⁵ and "Theatre is the passionate combat of two human beings on a platform".⁶ So "Theatre denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance".⁷

Theatre is a powerful expression which can help in several ways including theological education and in the church as well. Popular theatre in India is not exclusive and just for a few. Jacob Srampickal gives a host of characteristics of popular theatre. Theatre is a live experience- live participation.⁸ Theatre is indigenous to the rural masses. "It originated among rural masses and so can be used to express their ideas, hopes and visions." Theatre helps further cultural explorations into the

³John Russell Brown, *What is Theatre?: An Introduction and Exploration*, Focal Press, Newton, 1997.

⁴ Simon Shepherd, Mick Wallis, *Drama / Theatre / Performance*, Routledge: London, 2004, p. 2.

⁵ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, (Translated by Adrian Jackson), Routledge, London, 1995, p. 16.

⁶ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, (Translated by Adrian Jackson), Routledge, London, 1995, p. 16.

⁷ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, (Translated by Adrian Jackson), Routledge, London, 1995, p. 16.

⁸ Jacob Srampickal, *Voice to the Voiceless. The Power of People's Theatre in India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1994, p. 19.

psyche and value systems of people. As an educational tool, theatre can help deepen the powers of comprehension and memory. Srampickal⁹ says theatre can

- Help initiate an action-reflection-action process which can lead to change.
- It can illuminate issues in a simple, direct and challenging way.
- If it grows out of the community, it can reflect the community with a high degree of accuracy.
- Since it relies on indigenous facilities, it is cheap.
- Since its structure is simple it can be managed by one and all.

Drama

“Drama is an art form that explores human conflict and tension. It generally takes the form of a story presented to an audience through dialogue and action. The story is conveyed using the elements of the theatre: acting, costumes, props, scenery, lighting, music, and sound. Drama has an emotional and intellectual impact on both the participants and audience members. It holds up a mirror for us to examine ourselves, deepening our understanding of human motivation and behaviour. It broadens our perspective through stories that portray life from different points of view, cultures, and time periods.”¹⁰ Drama is ill defined and ill used usually in our context saying there was high drama in the college, meaning there was a situation which brought about the attention of everyone in a particular place.

⁹ Jacob Srampickal, *Voice to the Voiceless. The Power of People's Theatre in India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1994, p. 19.

¹⁰ ZodwaMotsa, *The Missing Link in siSwati Modern Drama in Pre-colonial and Post-colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa*, LokangakaLosambe and Devi Sarinjeive (eds), New Africa Books, Claremont, 2001, p. 33.

In literature, the word drama defines a **genre**, or style of writing. **Drama** is a play that can be performed for theatre, radio or even television. These plays are usually written out as a **script**, or a written version of a play that is read by the actors but not the audience. This is where theatre comes in. Drama, as in a play, is meant to be performed on a stage in front of an audience at the theatre. So, drama refers to the script, while the word **theatre** is the performance of the script.

History of theatre in India

The history of theatre in India can be traced back to the 1st century. Sanskrit drama and theatre were in vogue as can be seen with the treatise called *Natyashastra* which talks of acting. This was then followed by village based theatre, bhakti tradition theatre, theatre with the coming of the British, independence era theatre and more contemporary theatre. Theatre now in India which is more people oriented can be called people's theatre, street theatre and folk theatre.

“In the Bronze Age (4000 B.C.- 2000 B.C.) both India and China had mythological dramas and popular performers invoking the Gods in song and dance. India produced a better drama than China 700-800 years ago.”¹¹ But early forms of theatre were also elitist. But further village based and bhakti tradition theatre broke this trend. This was then followed by people's theatre. KeesEpskamp says “Local forms of performing arts can be regarded as the root of popular theatre in India. Religious and commercial forms of performing arts, including narrative ballads and puppetry can be distinguished. They have a limited number of subjects- either religious, social or romantic- and have long been used as educational media. Social themes

¹¹George p. Kernodle, *The Theatre in History*, University of Arkansas, Arkansas, 1989, p. 41.

have been especially prominent through the ages, with protest songs and plays raising a voice against social oppression.”¹²

BadalSircar (Also known as Sarkar)

Theatre, especially popular theatre has to owe some bit to BadalSircar. His third theatre was and is very popular because it chose to go to the people instead of bringing people to halls and auditoriums. After independence, people's theatre became very popular. The factors of the popularity were high unemployment among the youth and corruption in public life along with a host of social evils and how theatre at the time handled this.¹³ In the 1960's Sircar's Third Theatre became successful. Sircar was clear that he wanted people to change their thoughts and acts.¹⁴ He knew about the dichotomy of proscenium theatre and traditional rural theatre and strived for the theatre of synthesis. Audience participation was a key element and the street plays in India were called 'Fringe' theatre in other parts of the world, and 'Happening' in the U.S.¹⁵

Methodological considerations: Brecht, Freire and Boal

a. Bertolt Brecht

Epic Theatre proposed that a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action

¹²KeesEpskamp, *Theatre for Development: An Introduction to Context, Applications and Training*, Zed Books, New York, 2006, p. 55.

¹³NiveditaTandon, *Street Theatre in India. BadalSircar's Contribution in the form of the Third Theatre in Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama*, NeeruTandon (ed), Atlantic, New Delhi, 2006, p. 104.

¹⁴NiveditaTandon, *Street Theatre in India. BadalSircar's Contribution in the form of the Third Theatre in Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama*, NeeruTandon (ed), Atlantic, New Delhi, 2006, p. 105.

¹⁵Nita Jain, *Audience Participation in Street Plays in Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama*, NeeruTandon (ed), Atlantic, New Delhi, 2006, p. 96.

before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. Brecht thought that the experience of a climactic catharsis of emotion left an audience complacent. Instead, he wanted his audiences to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside. For this purpose, Brecht employed the use of techniques that remind the spectator that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself. By highlighting the constructed nature of the theatrical event, Brecht hoped to communicate that the audience's reality was equally constructed and, as such, was changeable.

One of the most important techniques Brecht developed to perform epic theater is the "alienation" effect.¹⁶ The purpose of this technique was to make the audience feel detached from the action of the play, so they do not become immersed in the fictional reality of the stage or become overly empathetic of the character. Flooding the theater with bright lights (not just the stage), having actors play multiple characters, having actors also rearrange the set in full view of the audience and "breaking the fourth wall" by speaking to the audience are all ways he used to achieve the alienation effect.

As with the principle of dramatic construction involved in the epic form of spoken drama amalgamated or what Brecht calls "non-Aristotelian drama", the epic approach to play production utilizes a montage technique of fragmentation, contrast and contradiction, and interruptions.

"Each scene, and each section within a scene, must be perfected and played as rigorously and with as much discipline as if it were a short play, complete in itself.

¹⁶Harold Bloom, *Bertolt Brecht, Bloom's Major Dramatists*, Chelsea, Broomall, 2002, p. 13.

Without any smudges. And without there being the slightest suggestion that another scene, or section within a scene, is to follow those that have gone before.”¹⁷

Brecht advised treating each element of a play independently, like a music hallturn that is able to stand on its own. Common production techniques in epic theatre include a simplified, non-realistic scenic designoffset against a selective realism in costuming and props, as well as announcements or visual captions that interrupt and summarize the action.¹⁸ Brecht used comedy to distancehis audiences from the depicted events and was heavily influenced by musicals and fairground performers, putting music and songs in his plays.

b. Paulo Freire

Freire wanted people to have the ability to think by themselves. He called this critical consciousness. This would lead them from being an object in society to becoming a subject who was in control of their own lives.¹⁹ The banking concept of education was criticized by Freire who said that this was a one way model of teaching students. Teachers would deposit their knowledge onto haphazard students who were mere objects and not active participants in the education process.

Freire tries to explain his stand in the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” He argues for a different approach to education in which the students cease to remain as objects who do not identify with the process of education.²⁰ Freire criticizes the

¹⁷Betty Nance Weber, Hubert Heinen (eds), *Bertolt Brecht, Political Theory and Literary Practise*, University of Georgia, Georgia, 2010.

¹⁸Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht*, Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 65.

¹⁹Ronald Edward Smith, *Theatre of the Oppressed and Magical Realism in Taiwanese and Hakka Theatre*, p. 78.

²⁰AfonsoGumucio-Dagron, Thomas Tufte (eds), *Towards a Theory of Communication and Social Change. Anthology: Historical and*

mainline actor who keeps the audience at bay. Instead he argues for an actor who involves the audience and who can be part of the process of theatre where only problematization should happen. “The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and recreate, in their power to transform the world.”²¹

Freire’s pedagogy was to have an education system for people which they could make sense of, articulate and even design. Theatre can also be likewise where the audience does not remain spectator but goes beyond. The audience does not buy what the actor sells but tries to chart their own route using their own understanding of the situation. Augusto Boal was perhaps not just a close friend of Freire but openly admits to have been influenced by the writing of Freire as well. His theatre of the oppressed takes a lot of inspiration from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

c. Augusto Boal

Augusto Boal was one of the most influential theatre educators of the modern era. His framework owes a lot to Paulo Freire. Boal came up with the idea “Theatre of the Oppressed” and it is very much close to Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” Like Freire, Boal sought to bring about a framework for theatre which would have the audience as equal participants of the process. Boal is of the opinion that theatre is

Contemporary readings, Communication for Social Change Consortium, New Jersey, 2006, p. 179.

²¹Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2000. 2014 (Reprint), p. 48.

pedagogic.²² His unique contribution is in the form of the forum theatre and simultaneous dramaturgy. In it “We destroy the work offered by the artist in order to construct a new work out of it, together.”²³

Boal looked deep into the reality of the spectator and differentiated it as spect-actor. He believed that both the actors and the audience brought about meaning from the performance and the audience transformed into the actor and made their own contribution to the performance. In Boal’s own words “So theatre does not exist in the objectivity of bricks and mortar, sets and costumes, but in the subjectivity of those who practise it. Actor and spectator can be two different people, they can also coincide in the same person.”²⁴

Augusto Boal’s admitted influence from Freire also extended to his dependence on Hegel and Brecht as well.²⁵ Boal developed the poetics of the oppressed, looking at everything from the perspective of the people and those at the receiving end of an oppressive system. “Aristotle proposes a poetics in which spectator delegates the power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case a catharsis occurs, in the second an awakening of critical consciousness.”²⁶

²² Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, (Translated by Adrian Jackson), Routledge, London, 1995, p. 7.

²³ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, (Translated by Adrian Jackson), Routledge, London, 1995, p. 7.

²⁴ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, (Translated by Adrian Jackson), Routledge, London, 1995, p. 19.

²⁵ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto Press, London, 2000 (New edition), p.p. 83-115.

²⁶ Jacob Srampickal, *Voice to the Voiceless. The Power of People’s Theatre in India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1994, p. 27.

A three pronged process can be identified. The forum theatre brings about an opportunity to destroy what is written already and to script a new beginning, alternative or path. The simultaneous dramaturgy urges the audience to suggest the route the script must take. It brings out the experiences and lives of the audience. The final step is to then make this a vocation whereby the practise of theatre is turned into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions. Three main branches of Theatre of the Oppressed then become educational, social and therapeutic. All of this is facilitated by a joker, which is an oxymoron and the opposite of what we think. The joker is a significant player who knows to maintain his/her distance and facilitate the discussion at the same time.

Pedagogy in Theological Education

Teaching methods in theological education are limited so far to the class room pyrotechnics of the old. Lectures, paper presentations and assignments are effective but are in no way close to being liberative from the perspective of thinkers and theatre personalities like Sircar, Brecht and Boal. Those who think alike with Freire can argue that the education system in theological colleges is very much like the banking concept where knowledge is deposited by the teacher. There is nothing credible to suggest otherwise. Experiments will be taking place but the system as such still remains very rigid and far from liberative. Joshva Raja says “The present practice of theological education does not provide enough space for the students to express the religious and social meanings with which they join the college. The process of learning depends much on the top-down model. It is campus and class-room based.”²⁷ There is a

²⁷Joshva Raja, *Relevant and Effective Theological Education in the Twenty First Century* India,

scope to discuss other pedagogical models which can be followed in such a scenario.

Theatre in the bible and churches

There will be an opposition to using people's based theatre as a pedagogical framework due to some concerns. One, the bible does not make use of theatre and drama as a means of communicating God's message. Why then should a theological college take it seriously? Two, Sircar, Brecht, Freire and Boal can be seen as left leaning artists. How can the church embrace leftist thinking?

Kuruvilla George strongly argues that the "Fourth gospel throws light on a dramatic element in Jesus' ministry. In the fourth gospel Jesus not only performs signs, but also engages in symbolic actions like cleansing the temple, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and washing of the disciples' feet. They are prophetic and symbolic means of showing forth the dimensions of new life available to human kind in Christ both at individual and corporate levels. All these actions have the making of a great drama."²⁸ Theatrical frameworks can be made out from gospel accounts and biblical stories.

Boal was inspired in no less part by liberation theology in South America while thinking and evolving the theatre of the oppressed. Shannon Craigo-Snell talks of the disconnect between the church and people leading to people staying away from the church even though the church is the best place to be in.²⁹ It is also important to note that theatre is not just playing a

<http://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1128&context=asburyjournal>, accessed on October 10, 2014.

²⁸Kuruvilla George, *From People's theatre to people's Eucharist: Recovering the Drama of Christian Worship*, ISPCK, Delhi, 2002, p.p. 140, 141.

²⁹Shannon Craigo-Snell, *Theater, Theology and Bodily Hope*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, p.p. 3-4.

few skits in theological colleges and churches but goes much beyond that.

Theology is the study of God, human beings and the cosmos and their relationship with each other. Theatre in theological education has to be put into perspective. Theatre in theological education is to use theatre as a means of teaching, learning, grading and being human and feeling complete as a creation of God which allows everyone to be what they are and play the role that God has given them. Every person is a body and mind of fullness and creativity of God. Every person becomes an act, a character and a true being. In this way theatre in theological education is not to say that theatre will be encouraged in a theological campus but to say that it will become a framework of learning, teaching and grading and a framework of pastoral ministry as well. It will also be a way of doing away with all forms of violence and discrimination. Both learners and teachers will find a way of becoming confident, themselves and respectful of others and themselves.

Feast of fools

The Feast of Fools is the name given to a specific feast day celebrated by the clergy in Europe, initially in Northern France, but later more widely. Its later reception history has considerably obscured modern understandings of the nature and meaning of this celebration, which originated in proper liturgical observance, and has more to do with other examples of medieval liturgical drama. But interestingly Max Harris points out that “On 12 March 1445 the faculty of theology at the University of Paris issued a letter to the prelates and chapters of France. We feel compelled, they wrote, “to describe how much we abhor and how much we execrate a certain kind of merriment, which is

called by its organizers the Feast of Fools.”³⁰ Further “Now called the Feast of Fools, they were still being celebrated during Christmas week in churches, in consecrated places, and by persons set apart for the service of God.” What was in all probability a celebration of theatre in all the sacred spaces of the church was discontinued around the 16th century.

Uses of theatre in theological education

Performance

Theological colleges and churches are brought to the level of having to perform well whatever they happen to do in their given spaces. Shannon Craigo-Snell calls our attention to the possibility of empty churches. Snell then continues to talk about performance as taking place at a particular time, that it is an interaction and there is doubleness.³¹ The possibility of future ministers talking in empty churches is one that theological colleges have to look seriously at. Performance at a particular time, interacting with others and getting into the role of another and thereby experiencing doubleness can make ministry more fulfilling and bring in more people.

Increasing the quality of theological education

New methods of teaching can bring about more and renewed interest in theological learning. Spontaneity and improvisation bring about a clearer picture for those involved in the learning exercise.³² Both facilitator and learner benefit out of this. There are also students who are gifted in several ways. Having one

³⁰Max Harris, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2011, p. 1.

³¹ Shannon Craigo-Snell, *In Praise of Empty Churches in Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the faith*, Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (eds), Cascade Books, Eugene, 2014.

³²Ruth Illman, W. Allan Smith, *Theology and the Arts, Engaging Faith*, Routledge, New York, 2013, 120.

way of teaching and grading does not account for these varied gifts. Theatre offers an opportunity of not just facilitating but grading differently as well.

Realising the self

This is the most important learning exercise one could undertake and yet our theological and other education systems do not have much space for that. Theatre helps one understand not just who she/he is but to make sense of the world we live in and the people we have to relate with. Edward Bond explains theatre as the process which teaches us responsibility through creative imagination.³³

Theatre as a Transformative Encounter: Presence³⁴

Communication is imperative and we cannot but communicate. But communicating to someone is an elaborate expression of our human self which can be possible when we transform ourselves. There may be many mind barriers which we have to do away with before we undertake any conversation. Theatre helps in this preparation and undertaking. Theological education can also benefit immensely through such transformative encounters.

Theatre as a Human and Divine Enterprise: Incarnation³⁵

In theatre a story becomes incarnated in real space and time by real people. The actors become the story. In a theological setting we can relive biblical stories as experiences of the present. These are experiences which offer human beings a chance to relate better with God and God's people.

³³Edward Bond, *The Hidden Plot, Notes on Theatre and the State*, Bloomsbury, London, 2000, p. 69.

³⁴Todd E. Johnson, Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred, Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*, Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 65.

³⁵Todd E. Johnson, Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred, Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*, Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 56.

Theatre as Corporate Enterprise: Community³⁶- The authors of *Performing the Sacred, Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* quote the work of Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas who says that “to be a person means being able to face another; to exist means to exist in relationship.”³⁷ This makes use of the understanding of God as trinity being in relationship with each other. Theatre in theological education can bring about community in its truest sense. We don’t look away anymore, because looking away could mean we don’t like the other person or we don’t want to accept the injustice against the other person but have no answer for the injustice! Theatre brings us face to face and seeks relationship.

Conclusion

Bringing theatre into existence in theological colleges for a variety of purposes can bring about an exciting change in the way theology is experienced in theological campuses and churches. It also paves the way for learning which will be mutual and experiential. How we work out the details of theatre as a pedagogical framework for theological education will take more deliberations and dialogues to figure out. Till then we can in the least bit try to bring about smaller incursions into the curriculum and way of teaching and learning.

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³⁶Todd E. Johnson, Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred, Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*, Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 61.

³⁷Todd E. Johnson, Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred, Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*, Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2009, p. 62.

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Appendix

(The paper starts with a skit which is a dialogue between a student and teacher.)

Teacher: Why don't you do anything like I tell you to?

Student: But sir, I thought of acting out my presentation.

Teacher: Acting. Do you think you have come to an acting school? Do you think what we do here is a joke?

Student: No sir. Don't get me wrong. I have come here to become a pastor. I want to be the best pastor there is.

Teacher: Ha... ha... Do you think you can do that? Look at your grades! You have to be cut out to become a pastor. It is not an easy job.

Student: But my grades are okay. They are not great. But I feel I don't get the grades I deserve.

Teacher: That is true. I think the low grades you have are much higher than they should have been.

Student: Don't make fun of me sir. I try my best. My point is that you can grade me in a different way.

Teacher: Different way? And what way is that? Not grade you at all? Or giving you the freedom to put your own grades?

Student: No. But I also have something to contribute. I have something to say. Why don't you listen to that?

Teacher: All that you can say is rubbish. And then do a bit of acting. Rubbish. This is a theological college. We make pastors not actors. If you want to act, you can go to an acting institute.

Student: I heard that you used to act well sir. You were a talented person.

Teacher: Who told you that?

Student: I have my sources. Why are you trying to hide it?

Teacher: Why? Because I was always told to hide it. I loved acting, expressing myself and learning about others while doing it. It was the most liberative thing to do.

Student: Why did you stop then?

Teacher: I had to move on. Acting didn't get me grades. It only got me reprimands in the end. Acting is just extracurricular. What is outside the curriculum is outside. People will come and appreciate you while your fellow students use that time to study their notes and write exams. While we internalize our dialogues and let our heart speak, they will mug up their notes and write treatises during the exam.

Student: Can't you change all this? Isn't there someone who understands?

Teacher: Many may understand. There is an actor inside everyone you know. But no one will come out with it and support it and give grades for it.

Student: Can't you use it in your classes then?

Teacher: I can I guess. But then I will have to handle the drama that follows.

Student: I feel relieved having talked to you. I never knew teachers would understand students like me.

Teacher: We are all actors. Small and big, but all actors.

Student: Can you allow me to act out what I feel in your class? Just like an exam by showing you what I have learnt and how I feel?

Teacher: I guess you can. But I still can't give you grades for it!

Student: I don't want the grades. I just want to act. I want to express myself. I want to show what I have learnt. I want to break all the walls that have prevented me from speaking to those around me.

Teacher: Well, let us act between ourselves. You can be the teacher and I the student.

(The student gets into the character.)

Student: Don't make noise. Sit down I say.

Teacher: Yes sir. Can I say something?

Student: You can say whatever in your room. Not here. This is my space.

Teacher: But sir. I thought you were someone who would share your space with me.

(Both look into each other's eyes.)

Student: I will share the space and my role with you. Speak, act, express yourself. That is why you are here.

Teacher: Thank you teacher.

Student: You are welcome. Now act out what you learnt today.

Teacher: (Grabs the student by his hand.) I learnt that there is no difference between us. We are all humans. You have something to say just as I have something to say. Let's...

Student: Let's break down these walls. Let's break them down.

Christian Liturgy in a Postmodern World: Reflections from a Neuroscience Perspective

Fr. Dr. Renjan R. Mathew¹

Theology deals with so many intangibles that neuroscience finds it almost impossible to study as such. The only way in which neuroscience can comfortably approach theology is to confine itself to the study of sensations, perceptions, cognitions, emotions and behaviors of the ‘so called’ religious or spiritual experiences. Even here, however, there are many pitfalls. There have been many attempts to scientifically study and analyze human behaviors, which come under the purview of religious and spiritual experiences, utilizing the available modern scientific tools including brain imaging. We live in a postmodern world where the postmodern world view is inseparably implanted and impelling all spheres of human life, not limited to our perspectives, intelligence, philosophy, science and religion. The subjective and radically relative postmodern

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world view of truth helps us to reach beyond the typical neuroscience scientific framework by liberating and deconstructing the traditional understanding of religion, spirituality and behaviors. However, as such a postmodern world view is emerging and yet to prevail, we are handicapped with the tools of modernity. Accepting this limitation, this is an attempt to understand liturgy especially its peculiarities and qualities in a postmodern world, and to reflect on certain postmodern qualities of liturgy from the perspective of currently available fund of knowledge of neuroscience.

Understanding Liturgy

The term liturgy, which is today exclusively used in a cultic sense, has a prehistory, connected with its etymology in classical Greek. The Greek *Leiturgia* is a word composed of two roots, *leit* (public or pertaining to the people) and *ergon* (action or work). Thus the composed word has the meaning work (action or undertaking) for the people. But taking into account the secondary or the shade meaning of the term, it can be also translated as public action² Literally, *Leiturgia* means an action of the people, and more particularly the service which the Christians renders to God in faith and obedience.³

However, liturgy is not a concept that can be easily defined. Eastern churches including the Orthodox churches made little effort to define liturgy, as it is well integrated into their life, practices and witness. They propagated “liturgy after liturgy”, to emphasize the unceasing act of worship in their faith and life, that reaches beyond the limitation of time and space. The West naturally tried their best to define and understand the concept of liturgy. “Liturgy is an outstanding means by which the faithful

²Pathikulangara, Varghese. *Introduction to Liturgy*, Denha Services, Kottayam (2005) p.13.

³Ibid, p.13.

can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ in the real nature of the true church” (Vatican II).⁴

LucaianDeiss says, “Jewish liturgy was the womb from which the Christian liturgy was born”⁵. Both Jewish and Christian worship consists of reading of scriptures, interpretation of scriptures, thanksgiving, hymns, and prayers. Christian church added an important element to these, the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper. Eucharist was the center and culmination of Christian fellowship. It can be said that in the Christian liturgy or the very act of Christian worship, the believers experience the presence of the risen Lord: they experience the communion with the Lord and among themselves.⁶

Liturgy comprises the whole group of symbols, chants, and actions by means of which the church expresses and manifests her religion towards God.⁷ It was through signs and symbols that Christian faith was imparted to the worshipping community. Earthly worship is the sign of participating in the heavenly worship. Liturgy or the act of worship of the church is the medium through which the believers take part in the heavenly liturgy, along with angels and arch-angels and all the heavenly host. Through the visible signs and symbols the believers involve themselves in the heavenly worship.

In summary, liturgy has its tangible (visible) and intangible (divine, philosophical and invisible) components. As mentioned in the introduction, neuroscience has to limit its scope by focusing on the public acts, behaviors, rituals, the signs and

⁴Pope Paul VI, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium Solemnly* (1963) p.2.

⁵Deiss, Lucian. *Springtime of the Liturgy*, Collegeville (1979) p.3.

⁶Kuttiyil, G. Mathew. *Liturgy of our times*, CSS, Thiruvalla (2010) p.23.

⁷Cf. Guéranger, Dom. *The Liturgy of the Hours: According to the Roman Rite*, Volume 1, Catholic Book Publishing Company (1975)

symbols, the sensory and perceptual background in which the act of Christian liturgy is celebrated in the community.

Understanding the Postmodern World

Those who closely follow all the developments of the church in recent years have frequently heard the term postmodernism. Postmodernism is a cultural shift that is already dramatically affecting the worldwide church. Defining postmodernism is difficult but is best understood in contrast to modernity, its cultural predecessor.

The modern period was influenced by the Renaissance in which learning reached new heights, and a new worldview based on scientific knowledge, rationalism, human intelligence and objectivity was developed. In simple definition, postmodernism is “a reaction against an earlier modernist principle by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style or by carrying modernist styles or practices to extremes”.⁸

While modernism represented a hierarchical order or control, postmodernism represents the lack of control or hierarchy. The lack of centralization is the foundation for the idea of postmodernism. Stanley Grenz, in his definition on postmodernism says, the phenomena of postmodernism mark the end of a single, universal worldview.⁹ The postmodern view of truth is thus both radically subjective and radically relative. It is radically subjective because what is held to be true depends on who perceives it. Enlightenment modernism believed that reality existed independently of our observations; with the proper instruments, we can observe reality as it is. Postmodernists reject this assumption and argued that nothing

⁸Segler, Franklin and Bradley, Randall. *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice (3rd Edition)*. B & H Publishing Group (2006) p.92.

⁹Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan (1996) p.11-12.

can be known as it really exists, but only as someone observes it... Because human knowledge is severely limited and completely subjective, truth is therefore also radically relative. Many postmodernists argue that what we think is true is socially constructed, created as a result of political decisions by the group designed to achieve or maintain power over others.¹⁰

On the religious front, the Reformation transformed the hierarchical, single-truth, universal one-church world into multiple theological perspectives, each based on 'objective truth'. Theological innovations prepared the way for new liturgies and worship forms. The invention of the printing press disseminated literary works and religious writings and made them accessible to larger groups of people.

Franklin Segler and Randall Bradley formulate a list of characteristics that define the postmodern person:¹¹ Reintroduction of traditional or classical styles with a new twist or in combination with other elements and perspectives, rejection of self-centeredness, lack of true center, emphasis on community, lack of absolute truth, lack of central hierarchy, lack of meta-narrative, embracing globalization, emphasis on personal perspectives, narration and stories, multiculturalism, celebration of the local in contrast to the universal, rejection of rational discovery, illusion of reality, pluralism, tolerance, pragmatism, institutional suspicion, just-in-time knowledge, authenticity, identity, honesty and working together in small groups are some of the listed characteristics of a person living in the postmodern era.

Although postmodernism is a cultural shift, according to Brian McClaren, the majority of people born in the West since

¹⁰Redman, Robb. *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church*, Wiley, San Francisco (2002) p.133.

¹¹Segler, Franklin and Bradley, Randall. *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice (3rd Edition)*. B & H Publishing Group (2006) p.95.

1960 will exhibit dominant postmodern characteristics.¹² As the world is globalized, there is no reason to believe that the East is immune to the postmodern characteristics. Anyone who is sensitive to the paradigm shifts in literature, philosophy and scientific perspectives happening all around the world, and its repercussion on faith, practices and theology cannot overlook the impact of postmodernism on Christian liturgy.

Understanding Neuroscience

The brain should need no introduction. The brain is what makes you. The brain, a three-pound chunk of organic matter, is not only the body's most marvelous organ, it is the most complicated object known. Truly, the sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories that arise in the human brain are what define the species as well as being what makes each person a unique member of the human family. Neuroscientists focus on the brain and its impact on behavior and cognitive functions. Specifically, Cognitive Neuroscience is the study of the biological bases of behavior: how the brain affects behavior. It is one of the most interdisciplinary scientific fields, and also the most rapidly advancing. Neuroscientists may come from a variety of backgrounds, including psychology, computer science, biology, and medicine. It advances the potential understandings of the humanities by offering hypotheses and conceptualizations for the underlying mechanisms of sensation, perception, thought, emotion, behavior, and everything in between.

It is a complex question to answer, why study religious experience and behavior from the standpoint of neuroscience? The beginning of the 21st century has seen a burgeoning of neuroscientific studies of religious experience and belief. Many

¹²McLaren, Brian. *They Say it's Just a Phase*, Next-Wave Web-site, (2000). <http://www.next-wave.org/nov00/phase>

have attempted to answer questions like what happens when a person worship? What kind of experience do people have in worship? What are the basic needs that need to be satisfied? How can the worship experience help to satisfy these needs?and so on.

Neuroscientists assume that the brain has a wide range of cognitive, cogitative, perceptual and volitional capacities. Francis Crick asserts that,

“What you see is not what is really there; it is what your brain believes is there... Your brain makes the best interpretation it can according to its previous experience and the limited and ambiguous information provided by your eyes”.¹³

Christian act of worship is an ‘objective-subjective experience’. It is objective because God is present regardless of who is worshipping and subjective because human beings are present and active in worship. The act of worship is experienced by the total person and the person responds with their senses, perceptions, cognitions, emotions and consciousness. The total personal experience of the act of worship is received, processed, interpreted and experienced by the human brain. It is therefore not unusual to examine Christian liturgy from a neuroscience perspective, especially to reflect on the challenges raised by the postmodern world.

Liturgy in a Postmodern World

It is a matter of fact that many of those who imbibed the postmodern viewpoints seldom embrace religious affiliations, but consider themselves as spiritual beings. The postmodern person is indeed more spiritual, interested in worship, and value the liturgy that offers engagement and authenticity. Franklin

¹³Crick, Francis. *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, Simon and Schuster, New York (1993) p.31.

Segler and Randall Bradley continue to give a list of qualities to help churches to be more sensitive to the postmodern world.¹⁴ Many of these qualities need to be considered from a philosophical postmodern perspective, yet need to be mindfully incorporated into the Christian act of worship. This may be vital for both the traditional churches that has a predetermined way of doing liturgy as well as to the self-labeled emerging churches, in order to be sensitive and appealing to the postmodern mindset of individuals.

The following are some of the qualities Franklin Segler and Randall Bradley elaborates to be incorporated in the worship: Postmodern will be drawn toward a theology that is active and ongoing rather than systematic, they will look for authentic worship, mystery in worship, community relational worship, appreciate the inclusion of sermon, worship that has a flexible structure, emphasis on prayer that will be interactive and can engage the whole person, multi-sensory worship, technological involvement, worship that involves reframed vintage elements, personal testimony, narration of biblical and modern day parables, speaking in metaphors, language that avoid denominationalism, nationalism, putting down other religions and jargons. Moreover, they want to actively get involved in the areas that use their capabilities and giftedness, and they will appreciate and respond well to spiritual guides and mentors. They value relationship and connectedness very much.

Characteristics of Postmodern Liturgy: Reflections from Neuroscience perspective

The following is an attempt to understand further from the neuroscience perspective and reflect on some of the qualities of

¹⁴Segler, Franklin and Bradley, Randall. *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice (3rd Edition)*. B & H Publishing Group (2006) p.95-98.

the postmodern world that are fundamental to be mindfully incorporated in the contemporary liturgy.

Mystery in the Worship

Postmoderns do not want God to be explained, for they are fully aware that God is beyond rational explanation and understanding; therefore, to fail to recognize the mystery of God will disconnect with Postmoderns. Mystery is celebrated in many of the traditional churches, especially in Orthodox churches. Orthodox churches, propagate the idea of mystery in its everyday life of worship, sacraments and theology. The mystery of the living God is that of the Tri-unity. Orthodox theology recognizes that, all language that speaks about God in the third person entails the moral risk of objectifying him or of speaking of him merely in conceptual language: therefore, theological language must be 'doxological', issuing out of and returning to prayer.¹⁵ Boris Bobrinskoy elaborates about Orthodox liturgy that, it is not possible to comprehend the nature of liturgical action without constant reference to the Trinitarian mystery into which worship introduces to the Christian. All worship is then, ecclesial and personal celebration addressed to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian mysticism is expressed in the worship in a comprehensive celebration of the Holy Trinity. On the other hand, it is the person and the mystery of Christ, the incarnate Word, and Son of Mary exalted at the right hand of the father in the power of the Holy Spirit that allows to define and clarify the specificity of Christian worship. The mystery of Christ represents the basis of Christian liturgy in its origin, nature and final goal. In its origin and nature, because the very life of Christ is liturgical; it is

¹⁵Bobrinskoy, Boris. *God in Trinity*, In Cunningham, Mary and Theokritoff, Elizabeth (Ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2008).P.51.

praise, intercession and perfect unceasing communion with the Father.

Theologically, God's attributes are sometimes divided into those that cannot be shared with human beings (incommunicable or mysterious), and those that can be shared (communicable attributes).¹⁶

Andrew Newberg, the proponent of neurotheology, makes a clear distinction between what a human brain can and cannot perceive. The question is: how are the brain and its functions related to the human understanding of the attributes of God? The mysterious attributes of God usually include those related to being: omnipotent, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipresent, Tri-Union of God and so on. The communicable attributes are usually related to those things that human beings can potentially perceive such as: Mercy, love, justice, wrath etc.¹⁷

Why should incommunicable or mysterious attributes be unavailable to human beings? Newberg argue that the limitations the brain places on the human ability to understand the world necessarily limit our understanding of the mysterious or incommunicable attributes. For example, the brain clearly has limited capacities for interpreting the world. We are only able to perceive what enters through our senses and thus cannot directly absorb much of the universe. We are therefore limited rather than infinite, restricted in our inability to control the universe rather than being omnipotent, and forced to perceive a linear progression of time rather than being eternal.¹⁸

¹⁶Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1959). Cf. Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.235.

¹⁷Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.235.

¹⁸Ibid, p.235.

Although, human cannot comprehend the mysteries of God, like eternity or omnipresence, the brain does have some knowledge, some idea of time, and some control over the universe. Thus, the human brain can provide a “taste” of these attributes, or at least abstractly conceptualize them, so that we can name them and have a sense of what they are. But we clearly do not understand or process such attributes directly.¹⁹

The doxological liturgical approach of Orthodox Churches attempts to “make sense and taste” of the mysteries of God, the creator, through worship by acknowledging the intellectual and spiritual limitations of human beings, the creation. The liturgy that propagates the mysteries of God in its theology, sacraments, and everyday life of worship, as well as acknowledging the cognitive limitations of human beings, maybe more appealing to the postmodern person. Celebration of mystery is a well aligned quality of post-modern liturgy in its philosophical, neuroscientific and theological understanding.

Multi-sensory Worship

Modern worship was primarily oral; postmodern worship will actively engage all the senses- hearing, seeing, touching, tasting and smelling. Incense is often a part of postmodern worship, candles are often used, the space for worship uses multiple style of art, symbols abound, communion is observed and allowed to taste in each service, and there is a wide variety of sounds and styles in music.²⁰

Liturgy is closely related to the body and the senses. It is not the cognitive dimension alone that is involved in the liturgy. The total human being is expected to involve in the worship, by engaging one’s cognitions, emotions and behaviors all together.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Segler, Franklin and Bradley, Randall. *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice (3rd Edition)*. B & H Publishing Group (2006) p.100.

Godfried Cardinal Danneels, in his review on the liturgy forty years after the second Vatican Council, observes the following:²¹The human eye is the most active of the senses. In the modern liturgy, however, it tends to be somewhat undervalued. There is a lot to hear but a little to see. Postmodernism demands the reintroduction of the visual side of the liturgy. The sense of touch finds its most profound expression in the laying on of hands and in anointing. These are among the most physical gestures of the liturgy that can have an enormous impact on the human person. The significance of praying at the presence of a sick person takes on quite a different character if one places one's hand on that person. The sense of smell is almost completely unused in the Western liturgy. The Eastern churches especially the Orthodox churches are much better off than the Western churches in this regard.

Four elements that work together within the human brain that to enable, to develop beliefs and assumptions about the world, namely perceptions, cognitions, emotions and social consensus. Understanding the biological nature of the basis of these assumptions is important as it provides a perspective from which we can evaluate such assumptions or beliefs. Perceptions are generally the first mechanism by which human beings begin to make assumptions, since there is a strong tendency to accept perceptions at face value as real. The sensory organs of seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling and touching provide the window into the external world. They interact with the sensory areas of the brain by sending sensory data which is then processed to provide a smooth and persistent construct of the external world.

Human perception in the brain goes through multiple processing steps in order to raise a particular perception to a

²¹Danneels, Godfried C. *Liturgy Forty Years After the Second Vatican Council: High Point or Recession* In Pecklers, Keith (Ed). *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, Continuum Books, New York (2003) p.22.

sense of reality. However, the multiple steps towards constructing a sense of reality can result in a variety of misperceptions.²² Cognitive processes as well as human emotions also suffer from many flaws. Numerous studies have demonstrated how individuals make erroneous decisions when faced with various sensory-perceptual problems and tasks.²³

Newberg argues that all the processes that lead up to an assumption or a sense of reality through the process of perceptions, cognitive processes, emotions, social influence and memories has the potential to be substantially flawed; it is not possible to reliably hold any of the human ideas, assumptions or a construct of reality as valid. It is ultimately a leap of faith that we believe anything about reality. Thus it is not surprising that religious traditions tie into this sense of faith. The question of what is “really real” remains unanswerable.²⁴

Liturgical practices that actively address all the senses in their worship are attempting to create a look-alike reality of heavenly worship. Participants are sensing and creating mental constructs regarding the heavenly worship. At the same time, the cognitive process that leads to assumptions and a sense of reality, including perceptions, emotional representations, social influences and memories are also activated.

Godfried Cardinal Danneels states that the uniqueness of the liturgy is that it gives primary place to experience. Experience comes first. While reflections, analyses, explanations and

²²Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.214-15.

²³Newberg, A. B and Waldman, M.R. *Why We Believe What We Believe: Uncovering Our Biological Need for Meaning, Spirituality and Truth*, Free Press, New York (2006) Cf. Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.215.

²⁴Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.218.

systematization might be necessary, they must follow after experience. Celebrate first, then understand might seem a strange proposition to some.²⁵ The Eastern pedagogical approach was also sensorial: participate first and experience things at an existential level in the heart of the community. Only after the experience, explain what it is. For example, prior to the baptism, the catechumens were given moral instructions and teachings on the Christian way of life. Immediately after baptism, the method of instruction was structured around a framework of questions and answers such as: “Did you notice that...?” – “Well, what this means is...” The deeper meanings of Baptism, Eucharist and Sacraments were disseminated after the baptism.²⁶

In a nutshell, multi-sensory experience of liturgy is crucial not only in its spiritual experience but also in the validation of such experiences, building up of the deeper meanings as well as systematization of faith and practices.

Rituals, flexibility, authentic worship and participation

Postmoderns will be attracted to the worship that is fully authentic. They will not want worship to be “watered down” for them in anyway. They will not want to observe their friends or family worshipping in self-conscious manner.

Ritual is synonymous with rigidity and sclerosis. The postmodern emphasis on flexibility often places a threat to the ritualistic traditional liturgies. It is true that an exaggerated attachment to particular forms or rites does exist especially in Eastern and Orthodox traditions. But that is ritualism, unsound ritual. Ritualism keeps the post-modern individual hesitant to

²⁵Danneels, Godfried C. “Liturgy Forty Years After the Second Vatican Council: High Point or Recession” In *Pecklers*, Keith (Ed). *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, Continuum Books, New York (2003) p.18-19.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.18-19.

authentically participate in the liturgy. Danneels elaborates that rituals in liturgy is priceless and irreplaceable.²⁷ Rituals have its place in every human activity. The unique characteristic of every ritual is its repetitiveness and stereotypical nature. This kind of repetition however, does not necessarily imply monotony or stifling of any kind of personal element. For example, every marriage sacrament is stereotypical: everyone marries in the same manner with the same words and gestures. But every marriage remains unique even though it took place in just the same way as any other.

Repetitive ritual provides, in addition, the opportunity for in depth reflection and interiorization. Serious matters (such as the liturgy) cannot be grasped all at once: they need time, means repetition is required invariably. Only pure information such as an order or computer language does not require repetition, since it can be understood immediately. More profound matters (such as the mystery in liturgy) only let the real significance emerge over time through repetitive participation.

Neuroscience approaches rituals and liturgy as a means of attaining spiritual experiences. Spiritual experiences can occur either in a group or individual setting. Group practices such as religious rituals and ceremonies, services, and pilgrimage can have profound effects on people. Newberg explains that the brain has specific neurons called “mirror neurons” that are excited when we see other people doing something. These neurons are believed actually to mimic what we see others doing. Ritual may tap into such a mechanism by getting many individuals to do the same thing, in large part, by having them observe the behavior and activities of the people around them.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., p.20.

²⁸Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.155.

Rituals appear to create an experience of group unity and cohesiveness around a specific set of beliefs or doctrines. Rituals have several common elements like, a structured repetitive pattern, as well as they act to synchronize affective, perceptual-cognitive, and motor processes within the central nervous system of individual participants. They also synchronize these processes among the various individual participants.²⁹

A number of animal studies have shown that there is something about the repetitive or rhythmic emanation of signals from a participant (member of the same species) which generates a high degree of arousal in the limbic or emotional system of the brain.³⁰ Another study has shown that repetitive auditory and visual stimuli can drive neuronal rhythms in the brain and eventually produce an intensely pleasurable, ineffable experience in humans.³¹ Furthermore, such repetitive stimuli can bring about simultaneous intense discharge from both the human sympathetic (arousal) and parasympathetic (quiescent) nervous systems.³²

It is also hypothesized that the various ecstatic states, which can occur in human beings after exposure to rhythmic auditory, visual or tactile stimuli produces a feeling of union with other participants in that ritual. In fact, oneness of all participants is a

²⁹Ibid., p.159.

³⁰Schein, M.W. and Hale, E.B. "Stimuli eliciting sexual behavior", In *Beach, F.A (ed.), Sex and Behavior*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, (1965) Cf. Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.160.

³¹Walter, V.J. and Walter, W.G. *The central effects on rhythmic sensory stimulation, ElectroencephalogrClin Neurophysiology*(1949) Cf. Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.160.

³²Gellhorn, E. and Kiely, W.F. "Mystical states of consciousness: Neurophysiological and clinical aspects", in *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* (1972) 154, p.399-405.

theme that runs through the elements of most human rituals. It seems that the rhythmic or repetitive behavior synchronizes the limbic systems emotional response of the group of participants. It can generate a level of arousal which is both pleasurable and reasonably uniform among the individuals so that necessary group action is facilitated. Rhythmic activity likely causes these effects. There are also evidences that simultaneous stimulation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems may ultimately cause both hemispheres of the brain to function in a simultaneous fashion.

Traditional liturgies in corporate marked ritualistic actions. Any action such as prostration, bowing down, making a sign of cross, stretching out hands slowly, deliberate moments of the arms and hands or any other action which by its form or meaning draws attention to itself as different from ordinary baseline actions should produce an orienting response by the brain usually in a structure called the amygdala.³³ ³⁴ The amygdala acts to perform environmental surveillance and can direct attention towards something of interest in the environment. In animals, stimulation of the amygdala initially produces sustained attention and orienting reactions. If the stimulation continues, fear and/anger reactions are elicited. When some degree of fear follows the attention response, the pupils dilate and the animal will cringe or withdraw, which are all functions of the sympathetic system. Thus, during human ceremonial ritual, the amygdala, which helps fix the attention, should be more than normally responsive to specifically marked ritual actions. This tends to produce sustained attention and

³³Newberg, Andrew B. *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate, Farnham (2010) p.162-163.

³⁴ Amygdala is an almond – shape set of neurons located deep in the brains medial temporal lobe.

orienting reactions accompanied by a mild fear response which, in this context, humans call “religious awe”.³⁵

Traditional liturgies are definitely superior in utilizing rituals in the conduct of worship. Brain studies are validating the importance of rituals or any deliberate repetitive action that exceeds the ordinary baseline of psychomotor activity in creating positive brain experiences and further understanding the deeper perspectives.

The duration of Liturgy and human attention span

According to Danneels, many of the liturgies did not provide enough time or space to enter into the event. The Eastern liturgies provide a good example by taking its time and by inviting those who participate to ‘leave all worldly cares behind’. However, the importance of silence and the time to interiorize were not given much of a chance in Eastern liturgies too. Orthodox liturgies also understand silence as an ‘ordered liturgy’. Lack of silence turns the liturgy into an unstoppable succession of words which leaves not time for interiorization.³⁶

According to a study by Microsoft Corp. published in ‘Medical Daily’, digital lifestyle has made it difficult for us to stay focused, with the human attention span shortening from 12 seconds to eight seconds.³⁷

People now generally lose concentration after eight seconds, highlighting the effects of an increasingly digitalized lifestyle on the brain. Humans now have less of an attention span than a

³⁵Ibid, p.163.

³⁶Danneels, Godfried C. *Liturgy Forty Years After the Second Vatican Council: High Point or Recession* In Pecklers, Keith (Ed). *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, Continuum Books, New York (2003) p.16.

³⁷Borrelli, Lizette. *Human Attention Span Shortens to 8 Seconds Due to Digital Technology: 3 Ways to Stay Focused*, Medical Daily Web-site (2015) <http://www.medicaldaily.com/human-attention-span-shortens-8-seconds-due-digital-technology-3-ways-stay-focused-333474>

goldfish (nine seconds average). The decrease was seen across all age groups and genders in the study. Although, the capacity to multi-task, it was also found that heavy multi-screener find it difficult to filter out irrelevant stimuli — they're more easily distracted by multiple streams of media.

Postmodern liturgy encounters its greatest challenge from the human brain that has been tuned a great deal by the digital world. The liturgy needs time to deliver its richness. It has nothing to do with the physical time or the clock time, but with the spiritual time of the soul.

The most relevant question in this context is, how can the church attempt to overcome the limitations of human brain to help the human to imbibe the richness of liturgy? Bridging the human physical time with 'kairos', the time of the soul, has to be done intelligently by remaining open to the possible variations in liturgy, at the same time retaining its unchangeable liturgical themes, signs, symbols and modes of delivery.

Conclusion

In the decades to come, will the churches be filled with postmodern believers? As the postmodern momentum continues and the world increasingly embraces its qualities, are the traditional liturgical forms will likely to get morphed or remain traditional? The neuroscience approaches to study religion, spirituality and liturgies are in its infancy. It is true that many of the characteristics of traditional liturgies are congruent with the postmodern qualities and are in a way validated by the available fund of knowledge of neuroscience, especially the relevance of multi-sensory worship, mystical perception of God, importance of participatory and repetitive rituals, and the pedagogy of understanding the hardcore hidden pearls of liturgy that goes beyond the limitation of human comprehension and attention span. Not only the neuroscience understanding raises multiple challenges on the form and mode of delivery of liturgy, but also

provides relevant insights on the direction in which the changes have to be made in liturgy to make it congruent to the requirements of the postmodern worshiper. Our common sense responses to the challenges of liturgy in the postmodern world largely revolve around the modernist perspective of controlling the outcome- by making liturgies more comprehensible, participatory, flexible with possible themes and variations, and short and sweet. However, the postmodern perspective reminds us that, God is in charge of the church, and the church has survived difficult periods in the past. The church will be the church: God will make it so! The ground rule here is that, the liturgy is first God's work on us, before being our work on God. The hardcore of liturgy remains as the mystery- one can only enter into it in faith. The liturgy lets itself be understood only by those who have faith in and who love it. Moreover, a dialectic relationship with day-to-day life and liturgy should happen: liturgy should both challenge and impact on day-to-day life and vice versa.

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