

Spring April 2011

Towards An Indian Constructive Theology: Towards Making Indian Christians Genuinely Indians and Authentically Christians

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Towards An Indian Constructive Theology:
Towards Making Indian Christians Genuinely Indians and
Authentically Christians

A thesis submitted to the
**Faculty of Loyola Marymount University Department of
Theological Studies**
in Partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
Degree of Masters of Arts in Theological Studies
Los Angeles, California

on
April 29, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

“Why don’t you write something very interesting and really constructive in your graduate thesis?” my late loving brother, Fr. Arulraj, a former graduate student of Loyola Marymount, used to ask me. Though I doubt everybody might find my thesis of sufficient interest to draw them away from the Euro-American way of theologizing, it is a project I have found compelling and engaging. I hope Indian Christians will be as absorbed as I have been.

Indian Christians, involved in educating in the faith—whether as teachers, preachers, pastoral ministers, and theologians, are the primary audience of my thesis paper. It also is intended for the many Christians who live their faith with great conviction and seriousness, and want to deepen their faith in the pluralistic context of today’s world. This thesis, secondarily, is a study of educating for religious particularism and pluralism in India. By analyzing in depth a few instances of contemporary Christian engagement with the “other” in Asia, my thesis will implicitly suggest ways we might more adequately educate Indian Christians to creatively participate in a religiously pluralistic society.

The Second Vatican Council’s declaration (*Nostra Aetate*) “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”—invites us to think about who we are as Christians in today’s context facing the formidable task of taking a long, hard look at ourselves and changing appropriately. I take to heart a mandate that Pope Paul VI delivered to Asian bishops in the early 1970s. Paul VI said the Church should make an effort to understand the faith expressions native to their countries, their cultures, their races, and “draw nourishment

from the genuine values of the venerable religions and cultures.”¹ Another inspiration for my thesis is the words of Karl Rahner in Robert Blair Kaiser’s book *East meets West: The journey of Aloysius Pieris*—“Vatican II is not an end, but a beginning.” One is called to bring its liberating message to the people, translate it for them, and help spell out its implications in the context of their lives. In an effort to aid the task of theologizing today in India, I am trying to do in my thesis, for my people in India, exactly what Rahner asks us to do. Vatican II also encourages this kind of effort in our modern times:

“The Church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in the concepts and languages of different peoples and tried to clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophies: it was an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the understanding of all men and the requirements of the learned, insofar as this could be done. Indeed, this kind of adaptation and preaching of the revealed Word must ever be the law of all evangelization. In this way it is possible to create in every country the possibility of expressing the message of Christ in suitable terms and to foster vital contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures.”²

Following the mandate of his holiness Paul VI in 1970 FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences) meeting, the Asian bishops pledged themselves to the development of "an indigenous theology ... so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historic cultures of Asia..."³ Carolus B. Putranta, in his 1986 survey of the FABC documents up until 1982,⁴ does not include the word “indigenization” or, as it is more often termed in later documents, "inculturation"—among the major themes addressed in the

¹ See Statutes of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (Hong Kong: FABC Central Secretariat, 1992).

² *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44.

³ Asian Bishop's Meeting, November 29, 1970. Resolution 1. Published in G. B. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Quezon City, Philippines, 1992), p. 9.

⁴ Carolus B. Putranta, "A Brief Survey of the FABC Documents, 1970-1982," FAPA, pp. 263-269.

Federation's first twelve years of existence; the reader of the documents, however, cannot but be struck at how the effort to theologize in an Asian way seems to be the driving force behind every FABC meeting, seminar or consultation. The term "inculturation" (expressing the faith differently according to the argot and customs of the local cultures) may not be the best description of the process by which the variety of Asian religious, cultural, and economic contexts are taken seriously in the theological enterprise.⁵ Nevertheless the search for ways to make the Asian church more truly Catholic by making it more truly Asian functions as the leading motif of every FABC concern.

This thesis is on emerging a theology for India from the perspective of Asian context. I have tried to draw my sources mainly from FABC documents, and the works of Orthodox, Christian scholars and missionaries from Asia as well as from the West. I would like to acknowledge a number of theologians whose works have been directly helpful to me in preparing this thesis.

Felix Wilfred's book *Beyond Settled Foundations*, published in 1993, has been the best book on the journey of Indian theology coming from one of the post-independent generation of Christian thinkers of India. A brief note about him: He was born in 1948. He is a professor in the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras. He has lectured in several universities and higher institutes of research in different parts of the world. He was president of the Indian theological Association during 1983-1986. Professor Wilfred has the singular distinction of being the first Indian to have been appointed by the Pope to be a member of the theological Commission for the Vatican. He serves also as an advisor to the

⁵ L. Nemet, "Inculturation in the FABC Documents," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 31, 1&2 (1994), p. 94.

FABC on matters of Christian doctrine. His writings have appeared in several languages, including French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.

Fr. Alangaram's book *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology* was particularly helpful to figure out a methodology with six stages towards developing a theology for India. I have drawn the materials from the works of so many significant theologians from East and West. Indian theologians and missionary thinkers who initiated the Asian way of doing theology are Roberto De Nobili, Raimundo Panikkar, Bede Griffiths and Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya. Asian theologians who are helpful to me in developing a theology for India: D.S. Amalorpavadoss, Miceal Amaladoss, Lourdu Anadam, Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux, Aloysius Pieris, Sebastian Kappen, Samuel Rayan and Jacques Dupuis. Western thinkers, helpful in developing a contextual theology for India, are Karl Rahner, Walter Kasper, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Lakeland and Jim Fredericks.

Asian Way of Doing Theology

The establishment of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) is certainly a landmark in the history of Christianity in Asia. As a transnational body it binds together the various local Churches of Asia, comprising 14 full members (i.e., Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar [Burma], Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam) and ten associate members (i.e., Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macau [Aomen], Mongolia, Nepal, Siberia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan)⁶ represented by their bishops, in fellowship and mutual cooperation. The members of this Federation are the bishops' conferences in South,

⁶ For a history of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), see Edmund Chia, *Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context and Theology*. FABC Papers, no. 106 (16 Caine Road, Hong Kong: FABC, 2003)—The associate members joined the FABC in 1998.

Southeast and East Asia. The origin of the Federation dates back to the historic gathering of 180 Asian bishops in Manila in November 1970, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI. "Never before," writes Indian theologian Felix Wilfred: "Asian bishops come together to exchange experiences and to deliberate jointly on common questions and problems facing the continent. The meeting marked the beginning of a new consciousness of the many traditional links that united the various peoples of this region of the globe."⁷

An Asian way of doing theology is not simply based on a geographical basis, but a common expression of the many bonds; historical and contemporary—which exist among the peoples of South, Southeast and East Asia. Asian theologies are marked by their efforts to articulate Christian theology that is *of* Asia versus merely *in* Asia. In the words of Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris, "An authentic Asian theology emerges only if Christianity is baptized in the "Jordan of Asian religion" and the "Calvary of Asian poverty."⁸

What does theologizing mean in Indian Context?

Theology as "faith in search of understanding"—(*fides quaerens intellectum*) is a continual theme of Christian theology. Every generation must take up the task of faith in search of understanding with fresh vigor and creativity. Diane Bergstedt, a Bible commentator suggested that we keep in mind that Christianity is a religion that is historical and that it is a religion that grew in its understanding of Jesus. Standing at the beginning of the second decade of the third millennium, I ask: How should the Christian-faith be understood today, here and now, in this place and time in India? Religious beliefs have the

⁷ Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," FABC Papers, No. 69 (January, 1995), p. 2.

⁸ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Comparative Approach to Classical Themes*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005), p.182.

power to tear down cities as well as build up nations, and theology has the capacity to save lives as well as to take them. Faith is profound and theology is a life-and death endeavor.

Ironically, *foreignness* is one thing that characterizes the local Churches in Asia, and in a special way the churches in India. It is the nature of people to love and treasure above everything else their own country and that which belongs to it. Consequently, there is no stronger cause for alienation and hate than an attack on local customs. This foreignness is not due simply to the fact that Christianity was introduced into the region from outside. Buddhism, for example, entered China, Japan, Thailand, etc., from the outside, yet Buddhism is not considered alien, whereas Christianity is. Nor is the foreignness of Christianity due to the fact that it professes a different faith. Asian peoples have always accepted and cherished diversity. The main reason why Christianity has been viewed as alien is because the local Churches in the countries of Asia have, by and large, kept themselves aloof from the mainstream of the life of the people, their history, struggles and dreams. This happened with the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries; the newly converted were forced to renounce their cultural heritage and traditions to take up Western customs and ways of life, then thought to be a necessary sequel to the faith received.⁹ And the missionaries also failed to identify themselves with the people, although providing them with many services. John L. Allen, one of the world's foremost religion journalists in his book *The Future Church*, has said, "Southern Catholics also tend to believe that the theological agenda set in the West sometimes doesn't address their pastoral concerns."¹⁰ He further quotes Gambian scholar Lamin Sanneth, a Catholic convert who teaches at Yale University, who says in his observation on Christianity absorbing indigenous culture:

⁹ A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I, op. cit., p.242ff

¹⁰ John L. Allen, *The Future Church*, (Doubleday, New York, 2009), p.434

“Christianity had a important edge over Islam in some parts of Africa in its capacity to absorb the local language and culture, as opposed to Islam’s need to “Arabize” its converts. He states the present reality that the explosion of Christianity in the 21st century is the reaction against colonialism as it was a product of it. Christianity grew where the local cultures had preserved the indigenous name for God, as well as of native religion.... The capacity to “baptize” pre-existing cultural traditions, and to insert them into a Christian context, has always been part of Christianity’s missionary genius.”¹¹

Interreligious dialogue in some ways today is complicated by a bitter intra-Catholic theological divide between those who stress the activity of the Holy Spirit outside the visible structure of the Church and those who insist upon the singularity of Christ and the Church. How to interpret religious pluralism theologically and what it implies for classic Christian doctrines about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Church, has been the most challenging subject for the theologians in Asia and universally for the past two decades. Allan has also said, ‘theologians’ creative energy is stifled not on their merits but rather due to suspicions of a slippery slope leading to confusion about Catholic identity.¹² My orientation should be understood and appreciated against this background only.

The Asian Theology

The Asian theology is not a recent phenomenon, though it is being taken note of outside Asia only now.¹³ According to local tradition, the Apostle St. Thomas came to found communities of Christians in India in the first century. These communities have been in touch with the Syrian Church since then. But they have not done much theologizing until

¹¹ Ibid., Pp. 22-23

¹² Ibid., p.449

¹³ See Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, (Jothi Printer, India, 1993), P. 3. “When we look at the previous centuries, we can discern the early beginnings of the Indian theology in the community of Thomas Christians and later in the sixteenth century in the thoughts and writings of the Missionary Roberto De Nobili SJ.”

recent times. Following the trade routes, Christian communities were also present in China in the 8th century. Later, there were some attempts to understand or present Jesus in terms of the Tao.¹⁴ Starting from Matteo Ricci SJ in China and Roberto de Nobili SJ in India, there have been efforts to present the Gospel in a way that is intelligible to the Chinese and the Indians.¹⁵ The attempts by the early missionaries to present Christian doctrine in an intelligible way to the Asians involved dialogue and polemics. Nobili, for instance, wrote books in Tamil, not only explaining Christian doctrine, but also refuting Hindu beliefs like “polytheism” and rebirth.¹⁶ These writings would be considered more apologetics than theology. The presentation of Christian doctrine did not go beyond a translation of scholastic theology. Real theologizing, however, starts to happen in the 19th century. So I am limiting myself to this question: Is there a possibility for an Asian way of doing theology for India? If so, how can we orient such a construction of theology for India in an Asian Context?

¹⁴ See <http://www.reversespins.com/taoofjesus.html>

“There is a being wonderful, perfect;
It existed before heaven and earth.
How quiet it is!
How spiritual it is!
It stands alone and it does not change;
It moves, but does not on that account suffer.
All life comes from it, yet it does not demand to be Lord.
I do not know its name, so I call it Tao, the Way,
And I rejoice in its power, (25th chapter of the Tao Te Ching).

Both Jesus and Buddha taught the Path of The Middle Way. Harmony, like in the Tao, was a signature of their teachings. This is best seen in the Kabbalah, the mystical teachings of Judaism, also called the Tree of Life. In the Tree of Life, Jesus represents the Sefira Tiphareth, (Balance/Wisdom), which is between Geburah (Letter of the Law) and Chesed, (Mercy/Love). The sun is the Tiphareth of our solar system; in the body, Tiphareth is placed at our solar plexus, the center of balance. Moses brought the law, but Jesus brought mercy and compassion, in order to demonstrate the balance between love, wisdom and power. He also integrated the masculine, (Spirit or the Father) with the feminine, (the Holy Spirit or the Mother). He was the nexus of the figure-eight flow between Heaven and Earth or the Christ and the man, (Or in this case the “Son”).

¹⁵ See Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ, the Eternal Tao* (Platina: Valaam Books, 2002)

¹⁶ See S. Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar* (Tirunelveli: De Nobili Research Institute, 1972)

These questions are not asked in the abstract but take into account some familiarity with the situation of theologizing in India in the Asian context. I will also explore these questions in contrast with what I call the Euro-American tradition. To be precise, the Euro-American tradition that Asians normally react to is the official Vatican school (Magisterium), which daily constrains us as it is built around neo-scholasticism. There are many theologians and theological movements in Euro-America who dialogue with the Asian Churches. Inspired by the Enlightenment “turn to the subject” and dialoguing with modern philosophies, even the West has abandoned neo-scholasticism. But given the present situation of dominating relationships within the Church, it is the official school (Vatican) that Asian Churches have to differentiate themselves from, since the West tends to identify its theology with the Catholic faith. Until recently St. Thomas Aquinas was often acclaimed as the master and model of theology in the Church. I am not opposing this view. The West has a right to its way of thinking. But this serves as a foil for us to become better aware of our separate identity. I request the readers’ indulgence for this.

Contextual theology is not peculiar to Asia. The contextual method is also followed in Africa and Latin America. What is special to Asia is its context and realities (Religions, Poverty and Cultures): the presence of ancient and living cultures and many world religions that refuse to disappear in the face of Christianity. But besides this context and the reality there is also an Asian way of thinking. Human nature may be the same everywhere. But humans are the products of nature, culture and the realities in which they live. Under the impact of globalization it may be that the left-brain is trying to dominate the right brain today. But people are already seeking a balance. In religious matters, particularly, it seems that the right brain still dominates in Asia. People are not individualistic. Relationships are

important. A sense of the other becomes an element in reflection. Thinking becomes dialogical. The guru becomes an important mediation for the communication of experiential knowledge. Stories and examples form integral parts of religious discourse. What is it that makes the Asian way interesting? Concepts are abstracted from sense experience. Clear and distinct ideas may help clarity, but they lack depth. In religious reflection we are dealing with human and divine realities that transcend sense experience. They cannot be imprisoned in concepts.

Another important factor is a shift from *ad intra* to *ad extra*. *Ad intra* refers, in the traditional Catholic tradition, to the internal life of the Church while *ad extra* means its engagement with broader religious and social questions outside the Church. Today, the distinguishing feature of the Catholic life in Asia, and in particular India, is its predominantly *ad extra* focus. Allen says that theologians, bishops and lay people tend to be more concerned with how the Church tackles questions such as the relationship with other religions or alleviation of poverty rather than “insider Catholic baseball” such as women’s ordination to priesthood or how power is distributed in the Church.¹⁷ Peter Phan, a Vietnamese theologian, made a similar point with respect to Asia in a presentation at the 2007 convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Phan said, in Asian Theology, one will find a “conspicuous absence of the issues that have preoccupied Western theologians.” Examples cited by Phan include “Papal primacy, infallibility, the Roman Curia, Episcopal collegiality, the ordination of women, celibacy and institutional reform.” Instead,

¹⁷ John L. Allen, *The Future Church*, (Doubleday, New York, 2009), p. 37

Phan said, the Asian focus quickly moves from *ad intra* to *ad extra*, from self-absorption into mission.”¹⁸

My Position

By distinguishing Asian from Euro-American (i.e., official) method of theologizing, I am trying to show in what way the Asians/Indians are unique and different. It has been easy to do this by contrasting the two theologies. But it is not my intention to criticize this “official” Euro-American theology. It is not for me as an Asian to say what it should be. I only want to say that we are different and to request that we be not judged with criteria drawn from such a Euro-American theology, projecting this as universal.¹⁹ Dr. Lourdu Anandam, a professor of theology in Sacred Heart Seminary in Chennai, India, strongly defends that ‘the seeds of grace’ in every culture are the reason for incarnating the message of Christ in every nation:

“Theology as faith seeking understanding in every new situation and culture should take new forms and pave way for new interpretations. On the contrary to tie down the Christian faith to one particular interpretation, which belongs to one particular culture and one particular time in the past, would be against the very spirit of the Word which is life giving spirit in every age.”²⁰

Rahner makes the same point as Dr. Lourdu Anandam:

Rahner is locating the holy in human experience as a whole. Two points are important here. First, Rahner is insisting that God’s self in grace is present throughout creation, Jesus, the Church, and Christian tradition obviously have a

¹⁸ John L. Allen, *The Future Church*, (Doubleday, New York, 2009), p. 37

¹⁹ *Ad gentes*, no. 22. The seed which is the Word of God grows out of good soil watered by the divine dew, it absorbs moisture, transforms it, and makes it part of itself, so that eventually it bears much fruit. So too indeed, just as happened in the economy of incarnation, the young Churches, which are rooted in Christ and built on the foundations of the apostles, take over all the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance (Cf. Ps 2:8). They borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teachings, arts and sciences of their people, everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, manifest the grace of the savior, or contribute to the right ordering of Christian life.

²⁰ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A theological enquiry into Bede Griffiths’ contribution to Christology*, (La Salette Publications, Kodaikanal, India, 1998), p. xv.

particular importance, but they are not the only places where God's grace can be found.²¹

Christ is to be born among every people: Christ who is the universal mystery of salvation must take concrete form within every culture of humanity so that he becomes truly universal and belongs to the whole of humanity in the true sense. The fulfilling of this mission of the Church becomes vital while maintaining at all cost the general and essential character of the Christian faith handed down by the apostles. Indian theologians have to be extremely careful in developing a theology for India so that the unity of the Church must not be lost amid the welter of different cultural idioms. I believe the more inculturated the Church becomes, the stronger the determination will grow that it also protects its own distinctive identity. Catholicism in India tries to fall somewhere in between practicing unity on the essentials and diversity for the rest. Getting that balance right will be a major challenge in developing a theology for India.

Indian theologians are determined to keep the faith and the pressing concerns (culture, poverty and religions) vitally connected to the present-day India in their construction of theology for India. The mystery of incarnation itself constitutes the foundation for theological pluralism. We hope and demand that this pluralism be acknowledged, respected, and accepted and that there are no claims to a universal theology beyond cultures that is imposed on the faithful of Asia in the name of fidelity to the tradition of faith.

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²¹ Philip Endean, (ed.). *Karl Rahner: Spiritual Writings*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books) 2004, p.44

CHAPTER-ONE

Urgency of Constructing A Theology for India and A Suitable Methodology for developing it

I. A Need for Constructive Theology For India in the Asian Context

The one who is familiar with the Indian scene would probably remark, as St. Paul did in Athens, “People of Asia, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (cf. Acts 17:22). The signs and expressions of religiosity are quite obvious. Asians, in general, are familiar with hardships and poverty, whether resulting from natural or man-made, as in the case with political corruption and social exploitation, vicious ethnic and communal conflicts. In India since ancient times, religious leaders, ascetics and prophets have continuously sought to provide meaning for human life, in response to those questions which deeply stir the human heart: What is Humankind? What is Goodness and what is evil (Sin What is the truth about death, judgment, and retribution beyond the grave?

In fact, the first stirrings of a Christian theology that would have liberated Indian Christianity from the dead weight of Western culture and came into being in the 16th and 17th centuries with missionaries and theologians like Roberto De Nobili and Ricci. Predictably though, their efforts were smothered in the cradle by the holy men in Rome who could not think of Christianity outside of its Aristotelian and Scholastic cultural straitjackets. Paul Caspersz SJ, Founder of Satyodaya research-centre for culture, clearly states this skeptical mind-set of Rome when it comes to Third World Theology:

“Western theology works more or less self-consciously on the foundations of Western Culture. This is entirely legitimate. What was not legitimate, and was indeed completely indefensible, was to deny to Third World Theology the corresponding right to build itself on the foundations of its own culture. Even

worse was to impose Western culture as the base for Indian or Asian, African theology and spirituality.”²²

India has had a very long journey in dialogue with the ultimate and unuttered mystery of God so as to become the birthplace of the world major religions. In the past, many Asian theologians have attempted to indicate how inculturation or contextualization in developing a theology is so important in the Indian multicultural and pluralistic context. Contemporary Christianity’s concern for contextualization originates from the growing awareness of the importance of the context in the Church’s understanding of its faith and its mission in the world. The Church’s mission has taken the form of a mutually enriching encounter between evangelizers and cultures. Contextualization or inculturation in the Indian context is what Indian theologians call “indianization of Christianity.”²³ It is my firm belief that Indian theologians, when addressing the issue of inculturation, should try to Indianize Christianity and not to Christianize India. Indian theology should be based on its people, culture, traditions and values. Only by way of developing a constructive theology for India, theologians will be able to define what is a new way of being indianized Christians.

Historical Background of Religiosity in the Indian cultural context

India is the only country in the world where a large number of religions have not only evolved but flourished and have grown gradually. Religion is an integral aspect of life in India. Being a secular state, its constitution honors all religions equally. India is one of the

²² Paul Caspersz, S.J., “The Relevance of Social Analysis to Theological Reflection,” *Vidyajoti: Journal of Theological Reflection* 02/1997, Vol 61, No. 2, p.81.

²³ The term ‘Indianization’ is coined following the example of African theologians who speak about ‘Africanization of Christianity’ when they address the issue of Inculturation in African context (cf. AFER, vol.17, No. 46 (1975), pp.322-328).

few countries of the world where the social and religious identity of the nation has remained intact despite numerous invasions, persecution, colonialism and political upsurges.

It is impossible to know the religious history of India without first understanding its religious beliefs and practices. The ancient culture of South Asia, going back at least 4,500 years, has come down to India primarily in the form of religious texts. Contacts between India and other cultures have led to the spread of Indian religions throughout the world due to the extensive influence of Indian thought and practice on Southeast and East Asia in ancient times and, more recently, in the diffusion of Indian religions to Europe and North America. Devotees of Hinduism officially numbered 687.6 million people (82 % of the total population in the 1991 census). Buddhism (0.8%) and Jainism (0.4 %), and Islam spread from the West throughout South Asia, from the early eighth century, to become the largest minority religion in India (with 101.5 million Muslims, 12.1 % of the population of India). Sikhism, which started in Punjab in the 16th century, has spread throughout India and the world since the mid-nineteenth century with nearly 16.3 million adherents, (1.9 % of India's population). Christianity, represented by almost all denominations, traces its history in India back to the time of the apostles and counted 19.6 million members in India in 1991.²⁴ Judaism and Zoroastrianism, arriving originally with traders and exiles from the West, claims a small representation. A variety of independent tribal religious groups also are lively carriers of unique ethnic traditions.

²⁴ The 2005 edition of the World Christian Database (<http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/>) says that India is now 6% Christian. The government of India last conducted a census on the Indian population in 2001 said that Hindus were 81.4% of the population followed by Muslims at 12.4% and Christians at 2.3%. However, the more recent data from the World Christian Database states that Hindus are now 74% of the population and Christians are 6% of the population.

The listing of the major belief systems only scratches the surface of the remarkable diversity in Indian religious life. In other cases, diversity appears through the integration or acculturation of entire social groups—each with its own vision of the divine—within the world of village farming communities that base their culture on literary and ritual traditions preserved in Sanskrit or in regional languages. The local interaction between great traditions and local forms of worship and belief, based on religion, caste-system, tribal, and linguistic differences, creates a range of ritual forms and mythology that varies widely throughout the country. Within this range of differences, Indian religions have demonstrated for many centuries a considerable degree of tolerance for alternate visions of the divine and of salvation.

Unfortunately, one of the most notable features of Indian politics, particularly since the 1960s, has been the steady growth of militant ideologies that see in only one religious tradition the way toward salvation and demand the public conform to their interpretations of scripture. The vitality of religious fundamentalism and its impact on public life in the form of riots and religion-based political parties have been among the greatest challenges to Indian political institutions and Christian missionaries since the 1990s and still today. There is also the widespread belief among advocates of a more militant Hinduism that the colonial state encouraged conversions of lower-caste Hindus and otherwise promoted Christianity as a state religion, but on the whole there is little to substantiate this view, though the sentiments of Hindus were often flagrantly wounded by Christian missionaries, whose insensitivity and arrogance come across in countless number of texts. Missionaries today are nonetheless more often remembered for performing social work in both urban and

remote rural parts of the country, and for establishing schools where the bulk of the Indian elite still receive their schooling.²⁵

The reality faced by Christians in modern India is that they are a small minority and not noticeably present in public life. For instance, on the very day that Pope John Paul II arrived in India in late 1999, an advertisement in the form of an open letter addressed to the Pope was placed in Indian newspapers by the Citizens Committee of the Dharma Raksha Sammelan [Association for Protection of the Hindu Faith] in Chennai [Madras], which stated that "the Christian missionary activity in our nation is tearing apart families and communities in every strata of our society." The letter stated, "Religious conversion, which seems to be synonymous with papal work, is violence pure and simple." Purporting to speak on behalf of the nation, the letter concluded thus: "We Indians are deeply hurt by the spurt in the aggressive campaigning of the Church to convert the people of India by all available means."²⁶ In fact, there have been many other similar calls for an end to conversion explicitly by anti-conversion laws in the states and implicitly based on one or more of the following assumptions, all patently false: (1) Christian missionary activity is illegal; (2) the Christian population is increasing dramatically; (3) and that conversions take place forcibly, or are otherwise inauthentic because the converts are seduced with offers of money or other forms of patronage.²⁷ As I have explored a bit of the general religious history of India, it would be fair here to present a brief history of Christianity in India and the impact of the missionaries since the beginning.

²⁵ Bhavan Pakaj, "Christians Protest Persecution", *Asian Week* (7 January 1999), p.32.

²⁶ V. Sridhar, "A Numbers Game", *Frontline* [Madras], Vol. 16, no. 25 (27 November 1999).

²⁷ M. V. Kamath, "Mission Impossible: Putting an End to Conversion Activity", *Times of India* 13 October 1999.

History of Christianity in India and The Impact of the Missionaries

It has been a firm belief and a long time oral and written tradition that Christianity was founded by the Apostle Thomas, who was martyred in India around 72 A.D.²⁸ Until the time of the Italian Jesuit, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), Indian Christians did not attempt to translate the Scriptures into Indian languages or the liturgy into Indian cultures but continued to use the Syrian versions. By the end of the sixteenth century (at the synod of Diamper in 1599) the Indian Christians were forced to accept the papal supremacy, celibacy of the clergy and a much altered liturgy. The alteration of liturgy was accompanied by such widespread burning of the old service books and other documents such, that much of the earlier history of Christianity in India is lost.

Nobili, arrived in South India to work with the Portuguese missionaries, and was deeply disturbed by the fact that the missionaries had been reaching only the lower castes, since the higher castes found Portuguese customs offensive and would not even consider becoming Christians. He therefore decided to live like an Indian, adopting the style and dress of a Samnnyasin, learning Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit and conversing with brahmins. He worked in the temple city Madurai, and while uncompromising on doctrinal matters, he accepted that his high caste converts could retain most of their social customs: such as the retention of the sacred thread with a special Christian prayer. His methods inevitably aroused opposition at the time and even though Rome eventually signified its acceptance of his methods, in the apostolic constitution *Romanae Sedis antistes* of 1623, this approach soon disappeared after his death. It's worth mentioning here the English Jesuit priest Thomas Stephens (1549-1619), who worked as a missionary in Goa from 1579, published even before De Nobili the

²⁸ John Brokington, *Hinduism and Christianity*, (St. Martin's press, New York, 1999), p.167

so-called Christian Puranas in 1616 in elegant Marathi, intended to replace the Hindu puranas for Christian converts. The Protestant mission also was very active in South India. The Dutch Calvinist Abraham Roger, who served in Pulicat as chaplain, produced a vivid picture of Hinduism in South India in his 'De Open-Deure tot het verborgen Heydendom,' which first appeared in Dutch in 1651 and was translated later into German in 1663 and French in 1670.

In 1706, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau came to the Protestant mission colony of Tranquebar with the new strategy of enabling Indians to become acquainted with the Bible and, to this end, Ziegenbalg (1682-1719) undertook the translation of the Bible into Tamil; steps were taken to train Indians for ministry, with the first ordination taking place in 1733. Ziegenbalg also made a careful study of the beliefs of South Indians as a part of his missionary preparation. Ziegenbalg is essentially the first example of the Pietistic approach, which became the driving force of the missionary movements in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: "in matters of faith the vital principle is the believers' relationship to God, with a concomitant concern to save as many as possible from the corrupt world."²⁹ A later member of the Tranquebar mission, C.F. Schwartz, who was in India between 1750-1798, produced the first Tamil-English dictionaries and first Tamil translation of the Bible.

William Carey (1761-1834) formed a pioneer group together with Joshua Marshman and William Ward at Serampore (another Danish Colony just north of Calcutta) and joined with the help of many Hindu scholars in translating the Bible into the major languages of India; a translation of New Testament was published in Bengali in 1801 and within a few decades

²⁹ Ibid., p. 170.

major parts of the Bible had been translated into the main languages of India. This translation activity also helped to stimulate many Indian languages and laid the basis for a renaissance of regional cultures. Alexander Duff (1806-78) started the approach of evangelization through education via English medium. He set a high value on education as a means of preparing Hindus to receive Christianity. He did not attempt to produce the new literate class but wanted to draw on the one that which already existed among the wealthy and influential Hindus who recognized the value of liberal education. He believed strongly that “not only would the Christian values embodied in English literature attract high-caste Hindus to Christ but teaching of modern science would undermine their faith in their own religion.”³⁰ This cultural diffusion approach has been significant in the subsequent history of India, for English education became the distinguishing mark of modern Indians and opened to them the whole of Western culture. The Christian missionary-run schools’ impact in terms of conversion to Christianity was slight but they had a major impact in spreading an awareness of Christian values and helped the Hindus to get ready for a renewal of Hinduism. Efforts at converting Hindus into Christians tended rather to convert traditional and fundamental Hindus into reformed Hindus.

Culture and Conflict

Hilaire Belloc, the Anglo-French writer of the early twentieth century, famously asserted that “the Faith is Europe, and Europe is the Faith.”³¹ At birth Christianity was not the product of Europe, but of Palestinian Judaism during the Hellenistic era. In its ambition to reach the ends of the world, it was directed at the world. But it has been difficult to discern its universality in the past 2010 years since Christianity has been as tightly bound to

³⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

³¹ John L. Allen, *The Future Church*, (Doubleday, New York, 2009), p. 14

European civilization as Hinduism is to India. Where Europe went, Christianity went along: but where Europe did not venture, Christianity generally did not take its root. Thus most Americans became Christians but the great kingdoms of Asia largely escaped its holding. What makes the twentieth century unique is that this tight identification between the West and Christianity disintegrated. At the beginning of the twentieth century, only 25 percent of the Catholic population lived outside Europe and North America but by the century's end 65.5 percent of Catholic population was found in Africa, Asia and Latin America. So to paraphrase Belloc, today it would be more demographically and culturally correct to say that "the South is the Faith, and the Faith is the South."³²

Hence, it is no longer valid in the contemporary situation of India to view the world exclusively from the angle of one's Western culture. Equally it is no longer reasonable that the term theology should be restricted to Christian theology in its significance. Different religions will increasingly have to come to terms both with the existence of a plurality of religions and with specific claims made by other religions. In the colonial period, Christianity adopted, without doubt, a corresponding attitude of superiority (supersessionism), which dismissed the faith of Hinduism as little more than superstition and it is only in very recent years that the increasing pluralism of our own society has encouraged a renewed concern with the issue of religious plurality.

A considerable development has happened within Christian theology, which altered the situation within as well as from the outside. F.D. Maurice, an Anglican radical theologian, while examining how his belief in the universal revelation of divine order would affect the

³² Ibid., p. 15

Christian understanding of non-Christian religions, states: “Christ, as the root of humanity, had taken the nature of a man in general, not specifically of a European.”³³

Contextualization or Inculturation in Indian Context

The present trend or orientation in the field of theology is no longer whether to contextualize or inculturalize the Good News of the Gospel or not, but how to contextualize it in the varying cultures of the people to whom the Good News is proclaimed. This idea is fleshed out by M. Amaladoss:

“The word incultration is patterned on the model of incarnation of the Word. It does not tell anything about the process or its implications in the concrete. It becomes necessary to look at it trying to happen in a particular context.”³⁴

My focus in this chapter also will be on indicating how *inculturation* should happen in the Indian context. The present concern for contextualization originates from “the growing awareness of the importance of the context in the Church’s understanding of itself, its faith, and its mission in the world.”³⁵ ***Inculturation*** or “***Indianization of Christianity***”—the term expresses the purpose of making the Church understand itself, its faith and its mission in the Indian context. Indians embraced Christianity since the first century but even after two thousand years, Indian Christians remain largely a Westernized version. Indian Christians themselves are not happy about the situation. The complaint often heard is **Catholics are too Roman, and the Baptists are too American**. The Asian bishops and in particular Indian bishops find it an extremely challenging task to evangelize Indians into genuinely Indian and authentically Christians. As an Indian, knowing the cultures, traditions and values, and

³³ John Brockington, “*Hinduism and Christianity*,” (St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1999), p. 176

³⁴ M. Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation: Can the many be one?* (Delhi, ISPCK, 1998), P.12

³⁵ O.E. Costas, *Christ outside the gate: Mission beyond Christendom*, (New York, Orbis Books, 1982), P.5.

evaluating Indian Christianity critically, I have my hope, brighter, of arriving at a point to propose a new way of being an Indianized Christian.

II. The Christological Vision of FABC

There was “a prayer addressed to Jesus Christ the Lord of history, bearer in the Spirit of a mission from the Father ‘to all the people of Asia’”³⁶ in the very first Plenary Assembly (FABC) on 28th April 1974.³⁷ I find the vision for Indian constructive theology emerging from this prayer, which implicitly reveals the need felt by Asian bishops to have a theology of their own in their context. This prayer was made by Asian bishops in Asia for Asia with a number of Christological implications in the life of the Church in Asia. Asian bishops, by reliving the faith of the apostles and bearing witness to Jesus the Lord, acknowledge Him as the Lord of history. A. Alangaram, SJ a professor of theology at the Jesuit’s theologate in Chennai, India, sees a gradual growth (three stages of development in the Gospel) in the acknowledgment of Jesus as the Lord in the faith of the apostles: 1.) They saw him as Jesus of Nazareth (Lk 4:16), and they questioned about the place of his nativity: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (Jn 1:46); as Jesus’ followers they came to know him more than a man (Mt 8:27; Mk 4:41; Lk 8:25); acknowledged him after his death and resurrection as Jesus the Christ (the Redeemer), the Lord and God (Lk 24:34; Jn 20:28; Acts 2:36; 10: 36-41; Phil 3:8-11).³⁸

When we speak of history we always think of three dimensions of time—yesterday, today and tomorrow. Asian bishops remember the presence of the Lord in the past history of

³⁶ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication:1992], Pp. 18-19, Nos. 43-49. The FABC documents from 1970 TO 1991 have been published in this book.

³⁷ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p.3

³⁸ *Ibid.*, P.3

Asia, acknowledge and celebrate his presence in the present context of Asia, and express their hope that the Lord will make Himself known to all the people of Asia. To think of Jesus as one who was, is not an invention of Asian bishops. We too find a similar reflection in the apostolic tradition—the apostles as the new Israel people, echoed the faith experience of Israel who in their oppression and liberation experienced God as the God of History. The apostles in their faith experience proclaimed that their Lord Jesus Christ is ‘Lord of History’.³⁹

The Asian Revelation of Jesus, the Redeemer of Asian People

The Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris, as an Asian, reflects on and echoes the same experience of the Asian bishops, and presents two determining realities of Asian Christological reflection—poverty and the Asian multi-religious context. He calls these two realities of Asia and I see them also truly the realities of India: “The Jordan of Asian Religions and The Calvary of Poverty.”⁴⁰ In India, I find these two realities and ‘culture’ as the third reality when I do Christological immersion in India (cultures, religions and poverty). Only in such Christological immersion can God reveal himself and Jesus, and Jesus reveal himself and God in India. The first immersion: Jesus immersing himself in the river Jordan, God his Father revealed himself to him: “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17). The same God reveals himself today in the immersion of the Jordan of Asian religions

³⁹ While we study the theme on “Passover” we always come across the liberative hand of God in the history of Israel: ‘They were slaves and no people and they became sons of freedom and a people and a nation.’ For my discussion, it is important not only to remember how the people of Israel experienced God as God history, but also to see that what in the Old Testament referred only to God is also attributed to Jesus as “Lord of history”. It was the experience of the apostles that Jesus transcends all created realities, time and space. In their faith experience, apostles proclaimed that they have one Lord who is Jesus Christ, through whom all things came to be (the past) (Col 1:16; Heb 1:2) through whom we exist (the present) (1 Cor 8:6) and who will come again as Lord whom we will meet (the future) (I Th 4: 16; 5:23).

⁴⁰ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1988), pp.45-50

in India. Such an understanding of God's revelation in and through Asian religions is made clear in the FABC documents. Asian bishops are convinced that "the Holy Spirit taught others (other faiths) in a marvelous variety of ways" and they are aware that other religions are different from theirs (Christianity), and they strongly believe and proclaim with certainty that one can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit through other religions as He calls us "to lift our hearts to the Father" (A., 35).⁴¹

The second immersion is in Indian Poverty. Starvation, oppression due to the Caste system⁴² and suffering are the realities of poverty. They remind us of the excruciating suffering of Jesus at Calvary. Jesus experienced the total abandonment of his God the Father in his life: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, La'ma sabach-tha'ni? That is-My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). Such a moment of suffering is a perfect time for God's revelation. Here God revealed Jesus, who he really was, to the eyewitnesses. I take here for my reflection two eyewitnesses. First, the Centurion who said, "Truly he was the Son of God!" (Mt 27:54). Second, one of the criminals who was crucified with Jesus said, "We indeed suffer justly...but this man (Jesus) has done nothing wrong" (LK 23:41). He also prayed to Jesus acknowledging his 'kingship,' "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power" (LK 23: 42). The same God and Father of Jesus, reveals him also in the Calvary of Indian poverty. This experience of the Asian bishops who say, "Asia is nearly 3 billion people, almost two-thirds of humankind. It is a face with the

⁴¹ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p.5

⁴² See John L. Allen, *The Future Church*, (Doubleday, New York, 2009), p. 22. Allen says the growth of Catholicism in India reflect unique historical factors. Catholicism had its greatest missionary success among the Dalits (the permanent underclass of the Indian caste system) in India in the twentieth century. Dalits see choosing a non-Hindu religion as a means of rejecting oppression and discrimination. Dalits account for somewhere between 60 to 75 percent of the total Catholic population of India.

marks of poverty, malnourishment and ill health and what not.. (A., 4)."⁴³ In this context of utter poverty and social oppression due to the Caste-system, Asian bishops contemplate the person of Jesus and his mysteries and say: "We turn to Christ whose concern for the multitude (Mk 8:2) was made visible in another Asian land, the Christ who is also the Lord of the future of men" (A., 7).⁴⁴ Asian bishops' both immersions are God's places of revelation: God's Epiphany of Jesus as the risen Lord, liberator of all mankind from sin and death, and God's translucence of God's self as the ultimate liberator. These two revelations based on its cultures are the foundations on which theology for India has to be built. Obviously, the Indian Christian theology is to be built on the special character of theologizing in the context of cultures.

What we find in the 'prayer' of the Asian bishops that is clearly different from the experience of the Apostles is none other than an inevitable Asian Context. The Apostles announced Jesus 'as Lord of All' (Acts 10:36) and the Asian bishops proclaim Jesus as 'the redeemer of our (Asian) people' and the 'Christ of the People of Asia.' Alangaram has made this point very clear: the Asian bishops do not deny the universality of Jesus as 'Lord of History.' He also explains further that proclaiming Jesus as redeemer and Christ of Asian people is a new Christological understanding in the faith seeking understanding of Jesus in the Asian context. In asserting the right of the Asian bishops he has said that nobody can say that this Christological understanding of the Asian bishops is too narrow and that it is a Christological reductionism. Some might think that Asian bishops claim a monopoly of Jesus as a Redeemer of Asia only or minimize the universality of Jesus; but no one can deny their

⁴³ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p. 6

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6

right to proclaim Jesus as the Christ of Asia as it responds to their faith commitment in their situation where poverty, plurality of religions and cultures are identifying factors in realizing God.⁴⁵

Re-discovery of Indian Jesus and Good News to the Poor In India

Re-discovery of the Asian Jesus by the FABC bishops is not completely similar to “the Copernican revolution”⁴⁶ but a kind of model in developing a Christology for Asia. This Asian understanding of the Church (the understanding and attitude of the Church towards other religions) is completely different from the traditional understanding of the Church before Vatican II⁴⁷(A., 131). Asian bishops, instead of proclaiming *Jesus* to the people of other faiths, they believe and preach that *Jesus and his kingdom values* are present already in other religions, and they want to discover Jesus who has been already present in the Asian history and their tradition in order to lead Asians to know Jesus as ‘the Way’. In ways unknown to the Church, Jesus enlightens all Asians through their own philosophies, beliefs and worship since Jesus is ‘the Truth’ for all the Asians too.⁴⁸ This Christological vision of the Asian bishops is the motivating factor for their construction of theology and evangelization in Asia.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.5

⁴⁶ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973) and also see James Fredericks, *Faith and Faiths: Christian Theology and Non- Christian Religions*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), p.38...Hick called Christians to undergo a “Copernican revolution” in their understanding of other faith in relation to the vast diversity of religions in the world. Hick’s revolution has nothing to do with the universe of planets but with the universe of religions. As Copernicus argued for a heliocentric model of the solar system, where the Sun replaces the earth as the center of all, Hick argued for a “theocentric theology of religions, where God alone not Christ or the church is given the pride of place at the center of things.

⁴⁷ It is a fact that we will accept with no exception that before Vatican II, the Church in Asia in general had a negative attitude toward other religions, considering them as religions of pagans and looked at them with an attitude of contempt. Therefore the main concern of the Church was to convert people from their religions in order to save their souls. As a result the Church was unwilling to dialogue with other religions.

⁴⁸ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p. 6

They insist the whole truth of the Gospel has to be preached, emphasizing the three dimensions (Culture, Poverty and diversity of religions) of it in order to suit the present situation of the Asian People. Asian churches live within the history of the Church and choose to opt for the poor men and women of Asia in order to show that they are ready suffer and die like their Lord so that the poor of Asia could live (A., 147).⁴⁹

III. A Methodology Suitable for Indian Theology in Asian Context

I strongly sense an urgent need for a Christological vision and a suitable Methodology for developing a constructive theology for India today. This clarity of vision and practicability of a theological methodology will enable Indian theologians to create a relevant constructive Christology which is praxis oriented, and which can transform India to make us genuine Indians and authentic Christians. Alangaram finds a deeper inspiration from the prayers of the Asian bishops in order to construct a Christological vision for India. It is the bishops' prayer to the Lord at the end of the First Plenary Assembly.⁵⁰ Alangaram retrieves and proposes a theological methodology from the Christological vision of the FABC documents, which will support my construction of theology for India in the Asian Context. He has **six stages** in the methodology: ***Immersion, Suspicion, Evolution, Action, Collaboration and Transformation.***⁵¹

Immersion is the first step in the methodology of developing a theology for India. It means to live among people in their daily life situation in order to have a first hand

⁴⁹ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication:1992], p. 147.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Pp. 18-19.

⁵¹ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), Pp.1-2

knowledge of their different aspects of life: social, political, economic and religious. The Asian bishops have discovered the reality of Asian context that the majority, (80%) live in poverty, in religiously pluralistic societies and in plurality of cultures. J. Russell Chandran rightly indicates the Indian reality marked by three factors: cultures, poverty and religious pluralism, and no Indian theology could afford to ignore any of them. Indian Christian theology is a child of the meeting of the Christian faith with the cultures, the inhuman situation of poverty and the religious pluralism.⁵² If one immerses in Indian realities he or she will be challenged with two **Suspensions**—a suspicion about the theology of the West and a suspicion about the Indian Cultures and traditions. My methodology will include a search for information and theological foundation from FABC to authenticate these two suspicions. My efforts to respond to these suspicions have enabled me to develop a new method of doing theology in Asia for India different from that of the West.

The Christological vision and theological reflections of the Asian bishops and the theologians show me a clear **Evolution** that the Indian theological reflections revolve around two points: First, the universality of our Christian faith. The second is the different cultural, religious expression of the faith, and social setting.⁵³ In making the Christological vision operative (life oriented) the Asian bishops propose a pastoral plan—**Action**. Since the Christians are a tiny minority in India, they need the help and support of the members of other faiths—**Collaboration**. Asian bishops believe only through such collaboration we can work for the kingdom of God in Asia—liberation and salvation—**Transformation** of all the peoples of India.

⁵² Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths' Contribution to Christology*, (La Salette Publications, Kodaikanal, 1998), P. 3.

⁵³ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), P. 2

In the process of the development of this methodology in the Asian context in which the Indian Church lives, I see a clear and definite direction to develop a constructive theology for India (Second Chapter), which will not only enable Indian Church to find her identity and mission but also to live her identity and fulfill her mission (third Chapter).

Where do we find this methodology? We find these exact stages of methodology already present in God's plan of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ: the mystery of Incarnation—the Word became flesh (Immersion). In his public life, Jesus found the hypocrisy and the irresponsibility of the religious leaders and authorities and their selfish interpretation of God's Word. He witnessed an unjust socio-religious situation in society, and the suffering of the poor and the oppressed. All of what he saw made him suspect the context he lived in (suspicion). With this suspicion in mind, Jesus develops—(Evolution) a new theology—presenting God as Father and all human beings as his children, and preaching the liberation and salvation to the poor and the oppressed. He announced the Good News and denounced the power of injustice and oppression by proclaiming the kingdom of God—(Action). Jesus himself felt the need of support from his apostles and other men and women—(Collaboration) to continue his work of proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom for (transformation) the transformation of men and women.

Six Stages in the Methodology

Immersion

For Alangaram, the term '*immersion*' means to be rooted in a context or in a place with its people and to be aware of the movement of the Holy Spirit and listen to Him in that context.⁵⁴ For my purpose in this thesis, I take the place of immersion India in Asia and its

⁵⁴ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, 1999, p.7

people, Indians. There are many cultures and religions, and Christianity is one among of the religions and Christians are a minority in India. Without worrying about the minority state of the Church and the present persecutions against the missionaries, Indian bishops think of preaching the Kingdom of God and working for it in collaboration with the people of other faiths, with total trust in the power of the Holy Spirit who has chosen them. It is their strong hope that God who has planted his Kingdom in Asia will one day bring it to perfect fulfillment. In order to realize this awesome goal in a more organized and effective way, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) was established in 1970. To date there have been nine plenary assemblies (FABC) held in different parts of Asia, and the tenth plenary assembly will be held in Vietnam in 2012. Each assembly of the bishops has been an expression of all the experiences of God and of people and of immersion in the Asian realities.

Suspicion

Alangaram lists two suspicions of the Asian bishops. The first thing the Asian bishops and theologians along with few Western theologians observed in their act of immersion was the fact that the Christology of the West is no longer suitable in the Asian Context. The second thing they observed was that the existing social (Caste system), political (corruption), economic (inequality) and religious conditions (religious pluralism) in Asia.⁵⁵ Allen while writing about the progressive views among the Catholic thinkers in India said, "On several contentious theological issues, including religious pluralism, inculturation, and ecclesiology, Indian Catholic thinkers such as Michael Amaladoss, Felix Wilfred, and Aloysius Pieris (a Sri Lankan but part of the Indian discussion) express attitudes regarded

⁵⁵ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), Pp. 10-11

in the West as to the Left of the Center.”⁵⁶ Their representation of Dalits (untouchables) also means that they are more attentive to poverty, discrimination and structural injustice.

These two suspicions need to be healed and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Asian theologians and other Western theologians like Leonardo Boff have discovered the impoverishment of the West and its mind-set. When I read the writings of Aloysius Pieris, Samuel Rayan, Leonardo Boff and Felix Wilfred, I begin to ask: “what images of Christ has the West presented to Asia.”

- **Suspicion about the West**

Boff, being a Western Christian encountering the East, discovered three kinds of impoverishments in Western Christianity—Western absoluteness, Western Christianity and Western Christology. The study of Boff helped me to critically re-discover Indians and their ‘Indian Christianity’. The context that helped Boff to overcome the western ‘absoluteness’ was the Asian Pluralistic context. His experience of the paschal event of Jesus Christ took him through a process of dying to his absolute Western Christian Identity, rising to be more human, which is also Christian, more open to others, ready to learn from them and love them in spite of differences. And he also found, in his personal encounter with other religions, the closed Western mind-set of Christianity unwilling to be enriched by the wealth of knowledge and understanding of other people of the world.⁵⁷ Western Christianity in his understanding is “much preoccupied with its linguistic, philosophical and theological ‘Western Cosmivision’ rather than allowing the Gospel stories and images to enter into a free and

⁵⁶ John L. Allen, 2009, p. 51

⁵⁷ Leonardo Boff, et al, *‘Christ in Asia: Some Aspects of the struggles’-In: Any Room for Christ in Asia?* Virgil Elizondo, ed. al, (London: SCM Press 1993), Pp. VII-XI

friendly dialogue “with the life-stories of any cosmovision in the world”.⁵⁸ Thirdly, ‘Impoverishment’ of ‘Western Christology’—means the European religious syncretism has marred the real image of the person of Jesus as well as his message. He pointed out that the cosmovision of the Empire and the Kingdom of God are somehow interwoven and fused as one, and the result of this fusion is what we find in this strange synthesis “a curious mixture and interdependency of God and gold, material wealth and salvation, earthly property and heaven, enslavement and emancipation, Church and state and military power and spiritual power”.⁵⁹ Alangaram believes that Boff’s disclosure of Western colonial Christianity confirms the longstanding suspicion in the minds of Asian theologians (A., 337)⁶⁰ that the Christianity spread by the powerful colonial West remains alien to Asian culture and religions, and remains a big problem in getting rooted in the Asian Culture.⁶¹ This is the main reason why the Christians in Asia are a minority even now. Samuel Rayan, an Indian Jesuit theologian, perceives “Christianity was seen by some as the religion of the foreigners and conquerors, and Christ as invader, a kind of religious Julius Caesar.”⁶² While trying to explain the right of Asian people to have their own Christology, Teotonio R. de Souza, an Indo-Portuguese

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. viii

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.viii. See also Harvey Perkins, “Four Bible Studies on Development in the Asian Context” *The South East Asia Journal of Theology*, XXI (no 1, 1980), p. 82: “But it is one of the tragedies of the history of Christianity that this original emphasis of the faith was lost in the Constantine era and buried under medieval feudalism; and that then a travesty of the gospel, fashioned to suit the growing middle classes of modern Europe, was used to proclaim submission of Western workers to new industrial power and of Asian peoples to new imperial power”.

⁶⁰ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication:1992], p. 337.

⁶¹ A. Alangaram S.J., *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p. 12

⁶² Samuel Rayan, *Hindu Perceptions of Christ in the Nineteenth Century. In: Any Room for Christ in Asia?* (London: SCM Press, 1993) p. 13.

historian and the founder-director of the Goa-based Xavier Center of Historical Research, at Alto Porvorim, expresses his opinion in the following words:

“It may be unfair to reduce God’s salvific manifestations in the history of all semitic people and many other children in Asia and the rest of the world to the images and the times caricatures of Christ manufactured and exported by the dogmatic theologies understandable or acceptable to the Western mind and to the socio-political systems backing them.”⁶³

Thus the painful experience of colonization by the West has disfigured the image of Jesus in the hearts and minds of the Asian people. Therefore it is the inevitable responsibility of the Asian or Indian bishops and theologians to rediscover the true image of Jesus and the original message of Jesus, who preached freedom, love, and service, against any sort of enslavement, exploitation and abuse of people, and who spent all his life in healing, forgiving and saving people. Stanley J. Samartha, an Indian theologian and a participant in inter-religious dialogue, brings to our awareness that, “a new hermeneutics is developing, a hermeneutics willing to read and hear biblical texts about Jesus in ways quite different from those of the West.”⁶⁴

- **Suspicion about the Indian Context**

On the basis of immersion, Asian bishops have made the analysis of the Asian situations (Social, political, religious and cultural).⁶⁵ This orthopraxis is to be the testing

⁶³ Teotonio R. de Souza, “Some guises of ‘Christ’ in Asia,” In: *Any Room for Christ in Asia?* ed. Virgil Elizondo, et al, pp.13-23 (London: SCM Press, 1993) p. 3.

⁶⁴ Stanley J. Samartha, “The Cross and Rainbow, Christ in a Multi-religious Culture,” In: *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. Paul F. Knitter, et al. pp. 69-88.

⁶⁵ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, (Philippines: Claretian Publication:1992), p. 212, No. 4: “We bishops and our experts came to see the causes of this distressing situation. Because of colonialism and feudalism and the introduction of Western classical capitalism, the traditional texture of Asian society with its in-built balances has been disrupted.” See also A., p.275: “Asian bishops also regret to see that many structures and situations, groups and persons in Asia, where justice and peace, love and compassion, equality and brotherhood, and

stone of the Christian orthodoxy. India is a sub-continent where the great majority of people are condemned to the life of poverty, oppression due to the Caste-system and destitution. In such a sub-continent the Word of God to the suffering masses cannot be anything but liberation and salvation. Unjust social, exploitative economic, dehumanizing political and oppressive religious contexts are the existing situations that invite Indian theologians to fulfill a more meaningful and responsible mission of constructing a theology of liberation and salvation for India.

Evolution

The suspicion of the West and of the existing Asian contexts and situations have not only opened the door for a new method of doing theology but also have made obvious the urgent need of developing a constructive (relevant) theology for India. The Asian context needs a theology that is different from that of the West because of its pluralism of religions, cultures and its struggle to overcome poverty. Hyun Kyung Chung, a Korean Christian theologian, while speaking of developing theology, said:

“Every religion and theology is influenced by its social location. Class, race, gender, caste and the cultural dynamics are playing important roles in the formation and the development of the specific religion and theology.”⁶⁶

In the tenth annual meeting held at Mangalore, Dec. 28-31, 1986, the Indian theological Association discussed at length the methods of doing theology in the Indian context.⁶⁷ They

religious freedom do not always find a sufficient place for existence.” Ibid., p.212, No. 4-5; p. 223, No 3: Asian bishops in their macro economic analysis that “the foreign markets and investors and the local elite” are responsible for making and keeping the Asian masses poor. See also A., 276: “The state openly support only one religion as weapon to have political power and social control.” A., 336, No 7: “Asia tends to identify with nationality, religion and culture. Thus religions, ethnic and regional differences are easily manipulated politically. The state often sponsors a particular religion. Religious fundamentalism has arisen as a short-cut response to the complexity of socio-political.”

⁶⁶ Hyun Kyung Chung, “Asian Christologies and People’s Religions” *Voices from the Third World*, XIX (June 1996), p. 215

found in their discussion the difference between the 'traditional' (based on Revelation and Faith but worked mainly on the traditional concepts derived from Jewish tradition and Greco-Roman World—God as object) and the 'new' (a holistic, including other religious traditions and oriented to historical and social problems—God as subject) way of doing theology. If Christian theology is the interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ then this Gospel is to be lived in the Indian context and transposed the same Gospel into Indians' own present life-situation, in all its dimension, only then will reach a unique and new theology.

Action

The pastoral plan or response of the Indian bishops to their mission has three important dimensions. The first is to be in touch with Asian realities. The second is 'discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit' (A., 284)⁶⁸ which has six pastoral priorities: 'to keep Jesus as the center of our life and mission,' to have maximum concern for 'the religious and cultural pluralism,' the commitment to empower people for 'integral liberation,' 'to encourage the grassroots initiatives,' to bear witness to the faith through active involvement for 'justice and human rights', and to re-plan the process of paying attention to 'cultural values and structural factors.' The third dimension is to materialize the priorities into action—doing what the Spirit tells them to do and to 'accomplish' it in Asia. Amaladoss echoes the understanding of the Asian bishops:

A "community starts with the life-experience. Through analysis it seeks to understand that experience. Understanding leads to reflection when the life-experience is confronted with the plan of God as revealed to us in the Scriptures. The plan of God suggests a course of action to transform the life-situation. The community discerns the options and commits itself to

⁶⁷ Kuncheria Pathil, *Socio-cultural Analysis in Theologizing*, ed. (Mannanam, Kerala: St. Joseph's Press, 1987), p. 186.

⁶⁸ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication:1992], No. 284

transformative action. Action raises further questions that seek understanding. So the cycle continues.”⁶⁹

He also points out that these three dimensions are built into a pastoral cycle (A., 231). This pastoral cycle will be very practical at the diocesan and parish level in bringing liberation and transformation at the micro level.

Collaboration

In the minority status of the Church in India, and for that matter the Church in Asia (except the Philippines) and in the context of many religions and cultures, Alangaram points out that the Asian bishops and the Christian theologians in general see that there is a growing desire among other faiths themselves “to break down the traditional barriers of division and hostility, and reach out to the neighbors of other faiths in a spirit of love, friendship, harmony and collaboration”(A., 318).⁷⁰ *Nostra aetate*, No. 2⁷¹ will answer the following questions in our collaborations with other faiths: Can religions encounter one another? Is there a common base for them to work together? What is the goal of this encounter? Do the religions practiced by their followers reflect the values of the kingdom of God? Answers to these questions will enable the bishops and the theologians to seek a common base and the goal of collaboration.⁷²

⁶⁹ Amaladoss, “From Experience to Theology” *Vidyajoti*, LXI (June 1997), p. 372.

⁷⁰ Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), P. 46

⁷¹ “The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”

⁷² As a help to our reflection on interreligious collaboration, the ideas of Aloysius Pieris and Paul Knitter are helpful: Aloysius Pieris, *The Church, the Kingdom and other religions*” *Dialogue*, XXII (Oct. 1970), p.7. He says that the world religions can meet at two levels: the first is, “personal salvation in terms of a Transphenomenal Beyond (Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, Nirvana, ect.)” and the second is by

As a help to our reflection on interreligious collaboration, we can listen to Aloysius Pieris and Paul Knitter. Pieris says that the world religions can meet at two levels. First is the level of personal salvation in terms of a Transphenomenal Beyond (Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, Nirvana, etc.) The second is preaching one's faith through "a horizontal relationship (charity, love of neighbor, brotherhood, ahimsa, metta, etc.)"⁷³ Paul Knitter emphasizes the second level without denying the importance of the first level since the second level is much neglected today. He further proposes 'a global responsibility in saving people' as the basis for all the religions:

"Yes, religion has to do with God or the Ultimate, and with life after death, and with altering or expanding our consciousness- but it also has to do with confronting, specifying, and then repairing what is wrong in the way human beings live their lives together in this world."⁷⁴

The religions in India collaborate not only with the people of India and of Asia but also with all men and women of good will in the world. They relate to "the interfaith groups in the West" (A., 323) for better co-operation to explain the Indian situation to their own people and a transnational collaboration. Alangaram underlines the fact that the Indian or Asian poverty and oppression are not only individual or communal but structural in nature (A., 220), existing at national and international levels. This is the reason why the Asian bishops in the name of the Asian people plan to cooperate with the Pontifical Commission for Justice

practicing one's faith through "a horizontal relationship (charity, love of neighbor, brotherhood, ahimsa, metta, ect.). Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*-Preface by Hans Kung (New York: Orbis, Mary Knoll, 1995), p. 100. Knitter, without denying the importance of the first level, emphasizes more on the horizontal relationship, which is neglected most today. He proposes 'a global responsibility in serving people' as the basis of all religions. Ibid., p.47: "The ideals of 'justice' or 'salvation' or 'human well-being' are really the justice and the salvation envisioned in Jesus' notion of Reign of God.

⁷³ Aloysius Pieris, "The Church, the Kingdom and the other Religions" *Dialogue*, XXII (October 1970), p. 7.

⁷⁴ Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*-preface by Hans Kung, 1995, p.100.

and Peace, the agencies of the United Nations Organizations and Amnesty International “in a transnational unity in Christ to denounce injustice...”(A., 220-21).⁷⁵ Panikkar while underlining the importance of this kind of collaboration said:

“This venture of discovering or perhaps even creating a new forms of human consciousness—and corresponding new religious consciousness—requires an intense collaboration.”⁷⁶

Transformation

Transformation is the goal in developing a theology for India. Alangaram, in the FABC documents, finds the Asian bishops speaking of a dialogue spirituality that has God and Christ at its center. They see both the mystery of creation and incarnation as God’s dialogue. To interact with this God of dialogue, they insist the need of openness and *Kenosis*—“demand a kenosis modeled after that of Jesus” (A., 331).⁷⁷ Hearing the cry of the poor and the hungry, and seeing the innumerable unjust situations and structures in India and in Asia, the Asian bishops and clergy along with its people should turn to Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, implore His grace, guidance, and pray to Him to shower His Holy Spirit on the face of Indian realities in preaching the Good News, healing the sick, sustaining and transforming people and their societies (A., 92).⁷⁸ Alangaram explains the stance of the Asian bishops that According to them, all human persons are “rooted in the Christ even” (A., 221)⁷⁹ whether they know Christ or not, whether they proclaim Christ as the savior of world and

⁷⁵ Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p. 51

⁷⁶ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 1982), p. 10.

⁷⁷ Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p.57

⁷⁸ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication:1992], p.92

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 121

belong to the churches or simply admire Christ yet being part of other religions and cultures. Unlike the Latin American or African context, much less the European context, the Indian or Asian context is very unique. In this unique context, there emerges in the thinking, reflection and writing of the Asian or Indian bishops and theologians “a Christ of the people of India or Asia,” who alone can show them, the way to inculturate, the way to dialogue in order to work together in the service of the Reign of God—“a new humanity and new human family” (A., 221) where all will be the children of God with love, justice and freedom.⁸⁰ Knitter observes that in all our theological reflections and praxis we have to have the mind of Jesus:

“But what was clear to Jesus in his day is just as clear to us today: in order to foster the well-being of persons in this world, we will have to change this world. If the well-being of humanity is to be promoted, if there is to be evermore abundant life, clearly this world must be transformed, for as is painfully evident, so many of the practices and structures of nations and of the international community are death-dealing rather than life-giving for millions of people.”⁸¹

One of the urgent needs of the Church in Asia, and as well as the Church in India, is to develop an Asian or Indian Theology. It is very well made clear from the vision of FABC, Alangaram says that ‘the formation and development of Asian theologians seem to be one of the immediate steps which will lead to a theological reflection on the reality of Asia, both from the human and the specifically Christian perspectives.’⁸² Having established the necessary reasons for the urgent need for a theology for India in the Asian context, and having found a suitable methodology with six stages (Alangaram’s methodology in

⁸⁰ Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999), p.58

⁸¹ Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the other names* (England: Oxford, 1996), p.116

⁸² Alangaram, SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India 1999) p.58

developing a Christology for Asia) to develop such a theology for India, I will move into the next chapter: Towards an Indian constructive theology.

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CHAPTER TWO

TOWARDS AN INDIAN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

In the first chapter (A suitable theological methodology), I have shown the Asian context in which Indian Church lives. It also shows the clear and definite direction in which a theology for India could be developed with the purpose of liberating the poor and the oppressed from the 'Calvary of poverty' and the perverted caste system (The history of India bears testimony to the fact that efforts were made by social reformers and Christian missionaries to oppose the caste system and the practice of untouchability as they considered it as a heinous crime against humanity) in India. Indian bishops are convinced that the key to liberation and salvation of all people (Mt 25: 31-46) in India lies in the liberation and salvation of the poor, the needy and oppressed. As Asians, Indian bishops and theologians look at Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who himself is 'the Way,'⁸³ so that Christ may show them the way to liberate the poor and transform India.

The student of Karl Barth, specialist in teaching Christian Doctrines, and professor of systematic theology, John Thompson has said, "any contextual theology has Jesus Christ and his Good News at its center."⁸⁴ Even though we know that the 'Christ event' itself is a mystery and no human mind can comprehend it in and through a theological interpretation, Asian bishops, for their understanding of liberation and salvation, try to make this unique 'Christ event' in human history, somehow comprehensible, relevant,⁸⁵ and operative. Since the Asian bishops have understood that the imported models of Christology and Ecclesiology

⁸³ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], p.19

⁸⁴ John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978), P.3

⁸⁵ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, 1992, p. 335, No. 1

are “inadequate for the fulfillment of their mission”⁸⁶ (to liberate the poor and transform Asia in and through Jesus and his message) in Asia, they seek along with the theologians and the faithful for a relevant reinterpretation of the person of Jesus and his message in the Asian context. Asian theologians see with all clarity that the Church is “primarily a faith community, expressing and proclaiming kingdom values. She does not place herself at the center. Thus in theology, she is not centered on herself but on Christ.”⁸⁷ Asian bishops’ main pastoral concerns are the option for the poor, liberation and salvation, and transformation of Asia—“cry out for the urgent reforms and bold transformation.”⁸⁸

In order to make Indians become truly Asians and authentic Christians by removing their association with colonialism, Indian bishops can adhere to the most important thing in Peter C. Phan’s judgment that Asian Catholics must take their ‘Asianness’ seriously as the context of their being Christian. In practice, he understands that the first and last concern of the bishops of the Asian Churches must not be how a particular policy is conformable with the colonial requirements and directives coming from Rome or elsewhere but rather how it will respond to the challenges of the Asian social, political, economic and religious contexts and whether and how it will effectively help Christians live their faith in faithfulness to the gospel and the living tradition, here and now, in Asia.⁸⁹ Phan further underlines the importance of the fact of determining this ‘Asianness’ and making it the perspective through

⁸⁶ Ibid., No. 73

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 340, No. 25.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 4, No. 11.

⁸⁹ Peter C. Phan, *Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*, see in <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eaproo/pcphan.htm>. Also see *Ecclesia in Asia*, no.9 where it is said that “despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavors, the Church in many places was still considered as foreign to Asia and indeed was often associated in people’s minds with colonial powers”—it uses the past tense and fails to recognize that the foreignness of Christianity in Asia and the perception of its association with colonialism are present realities, and this not simply “in many places” but in all parts of Asia.

which the Christian faith is consistently expressed and lived so that it should be the top priority for Asian Christianity. This determination of the Asian context has been the first step in the theological method adopted by the FABC.⁹⁰

Through the Synod of bishops (*Ecclesia in Asia-1998*) in New Delhi, Asian bishops got their first official recognition. Phan says that “the Churches of Asia have come of age or as a Synodal participant puts it, that Asian Churches are not branch offices of the Roman Curia.”⁹¹ To the universal church the Asian bishops proclaimed, with great humility but forcefully with all their strength, that the Asian Churches not only learn *from* but also have something to *teach* the Church of Rome, as well as the universal Church, precisely from their experiences as Churches not simply in but of Asia. Phan further clarifies the fact that the Apostolic Exhortation (*Ecclesia in Asia*) has incorporated several elements of the Asian Synod and made them part of the papal Magisterium, and by doing so they become an eloquent witness to the value of the experience and wisdom of the Asian Churches.⁹²

I. Two Major Trends of Indian Christian theology

Dr. L. Anadam, a professor of theology in India, says that there are two trends of Indian Christian theology that resulted out of two different emphases—First, an Indian theology as *anubhava* (experience) and, second, an Indian theology as *orthopraxis* (liberation).⁹³ One of the main questions of post-Vatican Indian theologians is about the special character of Indian Christian theology. After the study of Hinduism, specially the Sankara tradition of

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lourdu Anadam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths' Contribution to Christology*, (La Salette Publications, Kodaikanal, 1998), P. 5

advaita, some theologians laid emphasis on ‘experience’⁹⁴ in defining theology. And there were other theologians who, after studying the socio-political, economic, and the religious situations, and the inhuman miseries of the millions of God’s people in India, found ‘liberation’ to be a better term for defining Christian theology for India.

1.) Theology of *Anubhava* (Experience)

One of the most significant and distinctive elements in the Asian theological enterprise is the place afforded to **experience** in the construction of Christian theology. In the Hindu philosophical traditions, *anubhava* (experience) plays a significant part in epistemology.

Picking up on that significance of *experience*, Asian theologians have argued for ‘the primacy of experience based on the story of Jesus Christ and the Asian realities as a source for theology.’ Friedrich Schleiermacher, father of modern Protestant theology, introduced *experience* as the basis of theology, while recognizing Scripture, the witness to originating Christian consciousness, as its source. For him, the salvific work of Christ consists in releasing into the history Christian faith, a form of God-consciousness that mediated through the Christian community.⁹⁵ P. Chenchiah, an Indian theologian and the author of *The History of Telugu literature*, insists on one’s direct experience of Christ as gaining priority over the Scriptures or tradition. For him, “the central fact of the Christianity thus consists in the believer coming into a direct experiential touch with Christ; we must have *anubhava* of the living Christ.”⁹⁶ In Chenchiah’s word: “Jesus is a cosmic fact—a crisis in creation. There can

⁹⁴ See Vandana, Indian Theologizing the role of experience, in: M. Amaladoss/T. K. John/ G. Gispert-Sauch, (ed.). *Theologizing In India*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981, pp.81-115.

⁹⁵ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes, with CD-ROM*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2005), P. 216

⁹⁶ Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to India Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK: 2004), p.147

be no Christianity without this fundamental experience.”⁹⁷ For Phan, *experience* signifies the whole of ‘Asian reality’ in all its joys, sufferings and struggles. For some others, it is the religious/ mystical experience that takes precedence over the bible in their theological thinking and articulation. But the word ‘experience’ means different things to different theologians. While describing the context of Asia with its poverty, oppression, religiousness and multicultural context, Phan sounds like insisting on the pure experience based on Asian realities and fails to bring the Jesus story as one of main sources and starting point in developing a theology for Asia:

“*Asian theology*, whose form and method are molded by and related to the historical context of Asia, is distinct from a theology of the West whose structure and style are not shaped by such a context. The Asian reality as described above and not the Bible/ or tradition, is the starting point.”⁹⁸

In the writings of Abhishiktananda, Raymond Panikkar and other Roman Catholic theologians of Asia, one can discover the same emphasis on *experience* based on the Christian story and the Asian realities. More recently, the idea of experience, in developing a theology for Asia, is related more closely with the experience of the poverty, oppression (Dalits), multi-religious and multicultural contexts than with the Christian story of Jesus and the Gospel. It is beyond doubt that the experience of both oppression and hope in the India serves also as a source of theology and the basis for biblical hermeneutics.

Fr. Felix Wilfred, the Founder-Director of Asian Center of Cross Cultural Studies at Chennai, India, and a former member of the International Theological Commission of the Vatican, chaired at that time by the present Pope Benedict XVI, understands theology as

⁹⁷ P. Chenchiah, “*wherein Lies the Uniqueness of Christ? An Indian Christian View*” in R.S. Sugirtharajah and Civil Hargreaves (eds.), ‘Readings in Indian Catholic Theology,’ Vol. I (London: SPCK, 1993), pp.83-92

⁹⁸ Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), p.102

something primarily *anubhava*.⁹⁹ The Sanskrit term *anubhava* has a deeper meaning than the English term *experience*. However I will use the terms interchangeably in this chapter. God or the divine mystery is the YOU outside of ME. God is not the object as opposed to the subject. In the Indian thought the divine mystery is intimately connected with the person or subject (Atman) who seeks to understand God (Brahman). So theology could be understood according to the Sankara tradition in Hinduism, as the desire to experience the Absolute or the Brahman. Wilfred defines that theology as a development of the deeper experience of God by the one who is involved in the process of theologizing and experiencing the Absolute simultaneously.¹⁰⁰ So here the experience or the knowledge one attains does not belong to the empirical knowledge but to the ontological category. The difference between Western and Indian theology, Wilfred finds, is that God for the West is understood as an object, and the subject-matter of theology, namely God, is outside the subject. If God becomes the subject matter of theology then theology becomes the science of God.¹⁰¹ Kathleen Healy, a professor of interreligious studies, has said that the preoccupation of Western theology is to present the methods of knowing God but on the other hand, Indian theology's primary emphasis is on the experience and not on knowing.¹⁰²

Since Indian theologians understand theology as something based on experience of God revealed in Jesus we can call such theology as *experience or God-realization*. A purely academic or cognitive work alone cannot be accepted as theology in theologizing in India.

⁹⁹ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, (University of Madras, 1993), pp. 174-76

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 176

¹⁰¹ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths' Contribution to Christology*, (La Salette Publications, Kodaikanal, 1998), P.6

¹⁰² Kathleen Healy, *Christ as Common Ground: A study of Christianity and Hinduism*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990), P.131

Theology transforms first the person who theologizes. Wilfred characterizes a theologian as one who has the experience of God. Hence the theology becomes a matter of experience (anubhava), wisdom (*prajna*) and the Spirit.¹⁰³ Vandana understands the role of theology as *Sadhana*: it is a praxis that helps the theologian (God-seeker) to free himself or herself from all the attachments that prevent one from experiencing God.¹⁰⁴ Bede Griffiths who belongs to the ashramite school insists on the interior experience of *advaita or non-duality* as a point of departure for Indian Christian theology. The following are the representatives of this school: Brahmabandhav Ubadyaya (1861-1907), P. Johannes (1882-1955), Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), Abhishiktananda (1910-1973), Panikkar (1918-2010) and Samartha (1920-2001). Kalpesh Gajiwala, an Indian writer, said in an article written in *Vidyajyoti* (an interreligious Indian magazine) that a Christian interpretation of *advaita* is certainly more appealing to the Hindus in India.¹⁰⁵ Samartha, an Indian theologian, said that the *advaita* philosophy is found more suitable to interpret the Christian message than Ramanuja's philosophy of *Vishishtadvaita* (Philosophy of Sri. Vaishnavism).¹⁰⁶

In the past, people both from Catholic and Protestant faiths have attempted to formulate Indian Christian theology through the interpretation of Hindu religiosity and *margas*. For example, A.J. Appasamy attempted to interpret Christian life according to *bhakti marga* and the philosophy of Ramanuja. For him *bhakti* (An Indian system of thought about the way of life to reach God) is more as love than devotion or worship and *moksa* or final liberation as oneness with Christ. This oneness with Christ is viewed more as personal

¹⁰³ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p.176

¹⁰⁴ Vandana, Indian Theologizing-the Role of Experience, in: M. Amaladoss/ T.K.John/ G. Gispert-Sauch, (ed.). *Theologizing in India*, p.92

¹⁰⁵ Kalpesh Gaajiwala, "Liberating the Unlimited: A Hindu's Reflection on Christ," in: *Vidyajyoti*, 57, 1993, pp.105-09.

¹⁰⁶ S.J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, (Madras: XLS, 1974), pp.177-84

relationship than the metaphysical unity (*advaita* philosophy of Sankara). The relationship between the Father and the Son is explained through the bond of love. The relationship of the Son to the Father is that of love. In both of them as persons they remain separated. Likewise human beings maintain their identity in becoming one with God in our faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷

There are two branches under the definition of theology as *anubhava*: One group stresses its emphasis on *advaita* experience of the divine and the other group places its emphasis on *bhakti* devotion of people to the divine. Even though both of them are part of the Vedanta doctrines, many Christian theologians were attracted towards *advaita* of Sankara. Dr. Anandam states that the *advaita* philosophy could be more helpful in India to articulate the Christian mystery of Godhead, creation and the final destiny of humankind as the *advaita* understanding of the reality of God and the world is close to the Christian mystical traditions with little variations.¹⁰⁸ Along with *Advaita Vedanta*, Tamil *bhakti* movements and the *Vishishtadvaita* of Ramanuja are great help to understand and to explicate the Christian mysteries of sin, grace and redemption. So *Advaita Vedanta* is to be the foundation with which the basic mysteries of Godhead, world and their relationships can be explained and *Vishishtadvaita Vedanta* is the super structure to illustrate the mysteries of the personal God, grace and redemption.

I want to present the life and theology of three theologians who belong to the Ashramite school: Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux and Fr. Amalorpavadoss. All the three strongly

¹⁰⁷ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths' Contribution to Christology*, 1998, P. 7

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8

believed the *Advaita Vedanta* is the gateway for an Indian Christian experience and for theologizing in the Indian context. Their theology is primarily theology of *anubhava*.

Jules Monchanin

Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), a French missionary, is one of the pioneers and representatives of the Ashramite school in India, and he is also the founder of the *Saccidananda* Ashram which has become the center of God's experience and a living dialogue of the East and the West. He tried to relate Christian theology with Indian thought and was not just interested in the intellectual comparison of Christianity and Indian thought, but started to relate Christian theology to the contemplative and mystical tradition. He was a good friend of Henri De Lubac who was an eminent representative of the *New Theology*, popular in Europe. De Lubac compares Monchanin with Teilhard de Chardin and sees a convergence in their spirit of universality. De Lubac encouraged Monchanin "to rethink everything in the light of theology and to rethink theology through mysticism, freeing everything incidental and regaining everything through spirituality alone, everything essential."¹⁰⁹

As per the letter of the then bishop Dr. James Mendonca, bishop of Tiruchirappalli, Monchanin was the first priest to arrive in India from the *Societe des Auxliaries des Missions*.¹¹⁰ In India, Mondonca first started to learn the language and the culture of the people, and was appreciated for his love for the poor, kindness, compassion, humility and simplicity. He worked as pastor for ten years in three parishes: Pannaipatty, Kulithalai and

¹⁰⁹ J.G. Weber, (ed.). *In Quest of the Absolute: The Life and Work of Jesus Monchanin*, (Kalamazoo: Christian Publications, 1977), p.25

¹¹⁰ Bishop James Mendonca, Letter of His Excellency Dr. James Mendonca, Bishop of Tiruchirappalli, in: *Swami Parama Aribi Anandam*, a Memorial, Trichy: Sacidananda ashram, 1959, p. 97

Panjampatty.¹¹¹ He founded the Saccidananda Ashram in Kulithalai, 20 kilometers away from the Kaveri river city Tiruchirappalli on 21st March 1950.¹¹² He named the Ashram after the Holy name of Trinity—Saccidananda Ashram in Shantivanam (Garden of peace). His aim was to experience for himself an Indian spirituality that would be ‘totally Indian and totally Christian.’¹¹³ He found that the failure of Christianity in India was due to the fact of not recognizing the soul of India, and he was also convinced that the Indian soul could be met only at the level of contemplation and mysticism and Indian Christian theology could evolve only at the meeting of Hinduism and Christianity in their depth of interiority. It can be said that it was Monchanin who showed a definite way for the future of Indian Christian theology.¹¹⁴ His special contributions to Christian theology paved the way for understanding Trinity in the Indian context. He proposed that the mystery of God could be understood as **Saccidananda** (*Sat-* the being, *Cit-* the consciousness and *Ananda-*the eternal bliss) in the Indian background of contemplation and not in the classroom discussions.

Henri Le Saux

Henri Le Saux, a French Benedictine monk, was known for his great love for the Hindu way of life, *advaita* experience and his revolutionary approach to Christian theology. He was well known by his Indian name *Abhishiktananda*, means *the bliss of the anointed*. He came to India with the plan to assist Monchanin in establishing the Indian Christian Ashram. He was already then a theologian and a mystic, and wanted to integrate the Christian monasticism with Indian contemplative tradition. Thus he became the co-founder of the Ashram. He

¹¹¹ S. Michael Udeyar, Amongst the poor, in: Swami Parama Arubi Anandam, pp. 115-17

¹¹² Bishop James Mendonca, Letter of His Excellency Dr. James Mendonca, in: *Swami Parama Aribi Anandam*, p. 98.

¹¹³ J.G. Weber, (ed.). *In Quest of the Absolute*: 1977, p25

¹¹⁴ Bishop James Mendonca, Letter of His Excellency Dr. James Mendonca, in: *Swami Parama Aribi Anandam*, p. 98.

wanted to be immersed totally into the *advaita* experience of non-duality. He started to visit different Hindu Ashrams such as Swami Gnanaananda of Thapovanam at Thirukovilur and Ramana Maharishi Ashram at Thiruvannamalai. He went about as a Hindu Sannyasi with just a *thiruvodu* in hand (begging bowl of a Sannyasi). His experiences as a wandering sannyasi revealed to him the actual elements that constitute Indian life. In 1957, listening to his inner voice, he left Shantivanam for the Himalayas inviting Bede Griffiths to take the leadership of the Ashram. His contribution to contemplative life and theology is incredible. His *advaita* experience and his contribution to Christian theology are significant as well. Monchanin saw in *Saccidananda* the traces of the Holy Trinity. Abhishiktananda saw Saccidananda and Trinity to be one in his advaitic experience:

“The experience of Saccidananda carries the soul beyond all merely intellectual knowledge to her very center, to the source of her being. Only there is she able to hear the Word which reveals within the undivided unity and *advaita* of Saccidananda the mystery of the three divine persons: in *Sat*, the Father, the absolute beginning and source of Being; in *Cit*, the Son, the divine Word, the Father’s self knowledge; in *ananda*, the Spirit of love, Fullness and Bliss without end.”¹¹⁵

His advaitic experience led him to new horizons in the field of theology. Dialogue was an important element without which he could not think of an Indian Christian theology. He presents his conviction thus:

“A theology which does not put dialogue with other theologies and that necessarily includes other religions as well—at the very center of its outlook on the things of God or of its interpretation of the Word, is a limiting theology, a one-legged Brahman....”¹¹⁶

D. S. Amalorpavadass

¹¹⁵ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1990), P.178

¹¹⁶ Abhishiktananda, “The depth-dimension of Religious Dialogue,” *Vidyajyoti*, may 1981, pp. 211-12

After having seen two European personalities who have contributed to Indian Christian theology and religious life, we turn to an Indian scholar Durai Simon Amalorpavadass who also contributed considerably to the field of Indian theology. After his higher studies in theology in Paris, he was entrusted with the task of carrying out the renewal proposed by Vatican II, and it was there he excelled as a multi-faceted theologian. He was well known for his organizational ability, his approach to other religions and his sound theological understanding. Dr. Ananadam summarizes: "Inculturation in liturgy, theology and life of the Church were his major concern."¹¹⁷ Amalorpavadass was committed to introduce inculturation at all levels. He founded the Anjali Ashram and became the *Acharya Guru* (Religious instructor or founder) of this center of God experience. The theological synthesis and the model of Indian *sannyasa* proposed by the school of Shantivanam and Amalorpavadass are similar in nature, approach and life-style. He certainly belonged to the Ashramite school he stressed liberation and social justice. Like any other Ashramite theologian, he too proposed a life of interiority and voluntary poverty as a means of overcoming the problem of poverty, injustice, oppression and domination.¹¹⁸ After having dealt with the representatives of the theology of *anubhava* I will proceed to the discussion of theology as orthopraxis and its representatives.

2.) Theology as Orthopraxis

It is our faith in God, who loves us also, which invites us to have full communion with God and with God's people, and to build up of that fellowship in history. Gustavo Gutierrez, a

¹¹⁷ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths' Contribution to Christology*, P. 13

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14

Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest regarded as the founder of Liberation theology, says that involvement and commitment of the believers are the necessary concomitants of our confession of faith and only by doing so, our faith will be 'verified.'¹¹⁹ The orthopraxis is the touchstone of orthodoxy. India is a sub-continent of great population who are condemned to a life of miserable poverty, oppression, caste system and destitution. In such a context theology to the suffering masses cannot be anything other than liberation. I present three prominent theologians who dealt with liberation for India/ Asia: Aloysius Pieris, Sebastian Kappen and Samuel Rayan.¹²⁰

Aloysius Pieris

Aloysius Pieris is very convinced that "a theology for Asia cannot be anything else except the theology of liberation." He also believes "inculturation and liberation are two names for the same process and there cannot be any debate over this."¹²¹ He has observed that the *Basic Christian Communities* have revolutionized the ecclesiology in the Asian Churches where inculturation and liberation are conceived as twins in the same womb of praxis.¹²²

Pieris says,

"---inculturation is the by-product of an involvement with a people rather than the conscious target of a program of action. For it is people that creates a culture. It is therefore, from the people with whom one becomes involved that one understands and acquires a culture."¹²³

¹¹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p.8

¹²⁰ Here I have presented three liberation theologians. My intention is not one of developing a full-fledged theology of liberation of these authors. I take them as examples of Asian/ Indian liberation theologians in order to show their unique perspectives and contributions.

¹²¹ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 111

¹²² Ibid., p. 112

¹²³ Ibid., p.38

Pieris is very positive about religion unlike Marx and others who viewed religion as an obstacle for liberation. He sees in the Asian religions¹²⁴ the potential for liberation. He further points out that the religious socialism of the Asian monks is based on the *Metacosmic religiousness* that points to a salvific beyond attainable within the person through gnosis.¹²⁵ *Metacosmic religiousness* means not the negation of cosmic reality but a 'non-addiction to cosmic needs.' Pieris indicates that many Gnostics of Greco-Roman culture practiced poverty as a condition for attaining wisdom and perfection but the voluntary poverty was not motivated by any form of solidarity with those condemned to '*forced poverty*.'¹²⁶ He points out the Buddhist's explosive social message of the accumulative tendency in humans (acquisitive tendency) which generates all social evil and lays foundation for the vicious idea of private property in the place of the reasonable practice of common ownership. So he concludes that the accumulative instinct is the root cause of absolute poverty and class division—Caste system. In such a society, the monastic community ideally composed of greedless men and women presents itself as an eschatological community that symbolizes and even anticipates what could be everybody's future.¹²⁷

The positive role of the poor or poverty is another potential of liberation. This biblical concept becomes an integral element of Asian theology together with the Asian religiousness. The biblical axioms that God and mammon are irreconcilable to each other; and God has made an irrevocable covenant with the poor¹²⁸ help us to see the positive role of the poor. Pieris invites the Asian church to see 'the poor as those through whom God shapes

¹²⁴ Ibid., 91

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 43

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.122

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 121

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 120-21

our salvation history.¹²⁹ George M. Soares-Prabhu, an Indian bible scholar says that poverty in the bible is indeed a sociological category and not a purely economic one; and the poor in the bible are an oppressed group in conflict. Bible goes beyond Marx's classless society in its affirmation of a religious basis for social justice (Isa 11:9; 65:25; Rev. 21: 3-4).¹³⁰

Thus for Pieris, theology for Asia/ India can be only *Christo-Praxix* (liberation theology) and Asian theology of liberation is constituted of the religiousness of Asia and the biblical understanding the poor. His special contribution is his emphasis on the religious socialism based on the *metacosmic religiousness*. A religious community *Ashram* built upon it stands as an eschatological community that symbolizes and anticipates what could be everybody's future. Now I turn to other liberation theologians to look for their specific contribution to the development of Indian theology.

Sebatian Kappen

Wilfred presents Sebatian Kappen as one of the most important representatives of Indian liberation theology.¹³¹ Kappen has a background of long involvement with action groups, and from that background he attempts to find out what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ in a concrete situation. He draws from a keen perception of the Indian social reality with its oppressive and dehumanizing structures. He is very much convinced that in the face of the untold suffering of the Indian people due to all forms of oppression—religious, social, cultural, economic and political—the challenge of their integral liberation must be the main concern of all citizen of India.¹³² Liberation being the common concern of

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 122

¹³⁰ George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class," *Vidyajyoti*, 49, 1985, pp.345-46.

¹³¹ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, pp. 138-47

¹³² Sebatian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p.50

every Indian, “the responsibility of the believer is great as the Christians claim to be the co-workers of Christ in the liberation and salvation of mankind,” says Kappen.¹³³ Even though the traditional belief systems of India have legitimized the system of unfreedom, he is convinced the authentic Christian religiosity can be a potential for liberation. Hence he invites Christians to seek in their religious tradition the sources of their commitment to liberation that is their Christian vocation in India.

He believes that there is an urgent need for the reinterpretation of the story of Jesus for today. There are two criteria he proposes for this reinterpretation: fidelity to the original Jesus phenomenon and responsiveness to the God who reveals Himself in history.¹³⁴ He further states that Jesus of history means the prophet of Nazareth who prophesied the kingdom of God, where justice, equality, fraternity and love are seriously believed and practiced. The absolute dimension of Jesus’ message is that the self-revelation of God took place in the person of Jesus and continues to take place. This encounter of God in Jesus in history transcends the historical limitations. That is to say God whom Jesus encountered is at work even today in India and the divine revelation of God is to be recognized everywhere where love, fellowship and truth are practiced. Kappen calls it as the divine call in history, and one can say theology is nothing other than this praxis.¹³⁵

Kappen insists that in theologizing, if one considers Jesus as a liberator then one must try to liberate Jesus from the cultic, dogmatic and institutional alienations. He goes a step

¹³³ Ibid., P.17

¹³⁴ Ibid., P.17 “...it is necessary to go back to the original message of Jesus, and that it is equally necessary to reinterpret it in the context of the self-understanding of contemporary man.”

¹³⁵ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths’ Contribution to Christology*, P. 18

further saying that Jesus is alienated through Indian religiosity as well and he identifies three kinds of religiosity: the cosmic, the Gnostic and the ethical.¹³⁶

Cosmic religiosity is identified with the microcosm characterized by magical praxis and the cyclic view of time. Here man is reduced to an object under the strong magico-mythical forces. Kappen believes the cosmic reality is individualistic and is founded on determinism. The Gnostic religiosity that is based on the identity of the *Atman* with the *Brahman*, is the spiritualization or the theoretical vision of the cosmic religiosity.¹³⁷ Kappen states that Gnostic religiosity's aim is to escape from the cyclic time to timelessness. It is also individualistic and expresses itself in mythical language, and for the Gnostic, the social injustice, exploitation and oppression in concrete existence is a play of the *Brahman*. Thus Gnostic religiosity legitimizes the situation of evil and it can inspire people to withdraw from historical action, multiplicity, freedom and passion. When a Christology integrates Jesus into this Gnostic religiosity, it alienates the prophetic function of Jesus in the Indian Context. He moves on into the third type of religiosity—ethical religiosity. He sees a connecting link between Jesus-tradition and Indian tradition in this ethical religiosity. In this type, man is considered as a subject seeking his/her identity in relation to the divine. And this religiosity also insists on the ethical praxis of loving one's neighbor and it is communitarian. In India, Buddha initiated such a religiosity, rejecting magic, myth, sacrifice, cyclic time and caste system.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ibid., P.18

¹³⁷ Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Christology in the Indian Context: A Critical Study of the Development, Context, and Contemporary attempts of R. Panikkar and S. Kappen to articulate a Relevant Christology in the Indian Context*, (Thesis. Theol., Freiburg: 1992), p. 184

¹³⁸ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East: A Theological Enquiry into Bede Griffiths' Contribution to Christology*, P. 19.

Kappen invites the Indian bishop and theologians to revive the ethical religiosity and to link the Jesus tradition with the Indian ethical religiosity, and also encourages them to initiate a constant dialogue between the Jesus tradition and the Indian heritage of ethical religiosity, not to prove the superiority of one over the other but to bring out the conviction over their superiority of the humanizing religiosity. Unlike the Ashram theologians and inculturationists, he is critical about the concept of mystical Christ as he thinks the one who turns to the mystical Christ loses sight of the Indian reality and make Christians incapable of perceiving the prophetic function that is entrusted to them in India today.¹³⁹

Samuel Rayan

Wilfred states that Samuel Rayan is another important representative of Indian liberation theology who demands that the new description of the Christ mystery should proceed from the changed situation of the whole Indian society.¹⁴⁰ The basis of his theological thinking lies in the dignity of the human person. He considers the dignity of human person as a gift and grace of God. Thus he cries for the dignity of human life, human rights and the human freedom wherever they are denied. He is very critical about the dehumanization and enslaving forces such as capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism. He attacks the Church for having cooperated with the colonizers at the cost of the less privileged, the casteless and the oppressed. In an article in *Jeevadhara*, Rayan recognizes the power of the people to change their destiny, and he affirms “the chief sources of theology, the chief ‘record’ of God’s self-revelation and intervention in history is people.”¹⁴¹ It is the

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.20

¹⁴⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, pp. 147-58

¹⁴¹ Samuel Rayan, “The March has begun,” in: *Jeevadhara* 9, 1979, p. 180

historical Jesus who motivates us to involve in the task of liberating the poor and establishing their right and the human dignity.

His theological reflections are founded on his Christological reflections. For him, Jesus is a man of freedom who was able to identify himself freely and authentically with the poor, their longing and struggles. Jesus initiated a movement of radical love and radical action. Rayan is convinced that Jesus must be interpreted in India this way: Jesus as initiator of new social order. He also sees nothing Indian in the presentation of Jesus Christ in India and what he sees until now is the Christ of dogmas. In another article in *Jeevadhara*, Rayan insists that the authentic discipleship of Jesus who was thrown away outside the gate and killed consists in respecting human dignity, recognizing the power of the people and fighting against the demonic and inhuman powers.¹⁴² For him, the task of Indian bishops and theologians is to be in solidarity with the marginalized participating in their daily struggle for liberation in order to create a society of equality, love and justice. This is only way the Church should incarnate in India and become flesh of Indian flesh.¹⁴³ He is not for interpreting Jesus in Hindu categories as they are symbols of enslavement.

II. Libration as the Main Constitutive Element of Church Mission in India

The tradition that emphasized the prophetic action for the liberation of the suffering humanity in the Indian theological scene started with V. Chakkarai (1880-1958), a convert, lawyer and self-proclaimed Christian communist.¹⁴⁴ He had his inspiration from the interpretation of *karma* (Dharma of action) as an instrument for the political liberation of

¹⁴² Rayan, "Outside the Gate, Sharing the Insult," in: *Jeevadhara* 11, 1981, pp. 203-31

¹⁴³ Rayan, "Flesh of India's Flesh," in: *Jeevadhara* 6, 1976, pp.259-67

¹⁴⁴ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 22

India. From his time onwards the plea for liberation and a theology of liberation became very convincing. We saw from the study of the above theologians that the basis for such a theology is liberation. Hence, the question of liberation in the context of India is a question of life or death.

The Indian reality is marked by the factors such as domination of high castes and classes in the socio-political, cultural and economic fields. As a result, millions of people stand on the border of extreme poverty, illiteracy, hunger and disease. Ananadam states that the inhuman life-situations of millions of untouchables, child laborers, women, tribal and agricultural workers challenge the conscience and the credibility of the Church of the general and every Christian in particular.¹⁴⁵ It becomes a question of credible proclamation of Jesus Christ. The life of a true witness of Christian faith becomes the best form of evangelization. This option for the poor and the oppressed makes the Asian bishops speak a prophetic language in an oppressed Asian society.¹⁴⁶ When we proclaim Jesus Christ who brought close to us the God who lives and love all children, especially the least among them, how can we then be indifferent to the life situation of millions of people who are driven to the border of death everyday?

Hence, liberation becomes a constitutive element of the Church mission in India and theology is none other than the attempt on the part of the Indian bishops to spell out this concern in theory and practice. This is the way in which Asian bishops can “make the voice of Christ heard more relevantly on such current problems in Asia as social justice, education,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.22

¹⁴⁶ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], p. 309, No. 8: “ The situation of inhumanity, injustice and exploitation to which ‘the least’ (Mtt 25, 45) of our brother and sisters are in this continent (Asia), desperately cries out for help on the part of all the forces committed to the defense of human right and dignity and to the well-being of the society.”

and political freedom...” and work for the Reign of God.¹⁴⁷ A recent book by Tom Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Orbis Books, 2002), gives an updated view of Asian Catholicism. The subtitle is particularly felicitous, since it shows that what is at stake in Asia is a different way of living out the Christian faith from that found in North America and Europe. In a nutshell, this new way of carrying the mission of the Church and hence new ecclesiology consists in a wholehearted commitment to dialogue. It is, in fact, a triple dialogue: with the people of Asia, especially the poor and the marginalized, with their religions and with their cultures.¹⁴⁸

We cannot deny the tension between the ashramite approach and liberation theology in India. Since the ashramites insist on the interiority and the interior experience of the ineffable through meditation, prayer and yoga, they remain unaware of the untold sufferings of the millions of Indians and the need for liberation. Some of the liberation theologians like Kappen view the ashramite theology as not essentially in support of the liberation the suffering masses need now. In the past, the ashramite spirituality has been made use of to the advantage of the privileged castes and classes, and that is why some even denounce the ashramite theology.

Attempts have been made in the recent past to develop a typical Indian liberation theology that is totally different from that of South America. The need for a different liberation theology for India arises because of its unique socio-cultural, political and religious contexts, quite different from that of the South American liberation theology. Anandam insists that even if the Indian goal of liberation such as *mukti* and Indian way of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 91, No. 3. The bishops’ ardent zeal is, “to advance the cherished goal of a more effective presentation of Christ in Asia.”

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Peter C. Phan, “The Next Christianity: Asian Catholicism is theologically far ahead,” *America* 3, Feb. 3, 2003, p.10

liberation Gandhian Praxis are given due importance, the multi-dimensional problem of *karma* which is the root cause of the Indian social structure and social evil like casteism, feudalism and untouchability must be studied critically while developing a typical Indian liberation theology.¹⁴⁹ He further underlines the fact that religion cannot be ignored in theologizing in India, since any ideology or theology that does not recognize the power of religions cannot really liberate Asian people. Wilfred names two trends that the ashramite and liberation theology have to meet each other and influence each other simultaneously:

....the future of Indian theology will depend very much on how the two mainstreams of Indian theology—the religio-cultural (symbolized by the ashram) and the socio-political (the liberation) interact and meet.¹⁵⁰

In my opinion, both the ashramites (religio-cultural context) and the liberationists (socio-political and economic context) stand in the starting point of their theological attempts in India. If their starting points are the *believing human being*, then there is a common starting point for both of them. Since everything is seen from the perspective of religion in India, poverty can be seen independently or from socio-political and economic perspectives alone. This is the main reason the Communists political party cannot gain big political ground in India except in two states (West Bengal and Kerala). Anandam points out that the right starting point and the right direction for both theological trends in India is to keep the human person and the goal of theologizing centered on the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 24

¹⁵⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, p. 254

¹⁵¹ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 25

III. Indian Approach to Christology and Ecclesiology

Unlike Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism, Christianity did not have its historical origin in India. Wilfred states that the Indian Church obviously inherited its history and tradition, institutions and doctrines as they came from the West.¹⁵² However they are not to be fettered by the past. He also presents two serious lacunae in the received tradition of theology: the first one is the pretense that the theology developed in the West is *the* theology. This is an attempt to globalize a theology developed in one particular cultural milieu and historical situation—the Western—as something perennially valid and universally applicable. The second lacuna is the cleavage between the life-world and theology. He points out that, in the West, theology is understood as an intellectual inquiry into what one believes. As a result, theology did not mirror the life-realities or seek to respond to them, but rather oriented towards resolving the intellectual queries of a limited group of professionals.¹⁵³

Wilfred presents an observation that developing an Indian theology has made great strides on two critical fronts. In the first place, the major enterprise of Indian theology since the 19th century is the attempt to reappraise and reimage Christianity in the cultural context of India, re-interpreting the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ in the context of India. Secondly, of late, Indian theology has addressed itself also to the life-context and the socio-political situations of the Indian people.¹⁵⁴ This orientation stems from the conviction that theology cannot be simply an intellectual or academic acrobatics on the religious arena or in other words, our concentration in theologizing is not how to demonstrate to a world of

¹⁵² Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, p. vii

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. viii

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. viii

unbelief that God exists (the preoccupation of the West), but how to tell that God is a caring Father when his children are starving.

For Wilfred, Indian theology today is contextual: it must be in solidarity in a special way with the marginalized in our society: the displaced, the slum-dwellers, low peasantry, bonded laborers, the tribals and the dalits. It is with them as its focus that genuine theology will develop itself. He also further states that theologizing in India is not a matter of conceptual elaboration. In fact, Indian theology is least inclined to develop theology in its traditional divisions like Ecclesiology, Christology, Mariology, etc. Theological attempts in India try to address certain vital issues touching the life of the people, and this certainly has consequences in the way the Church, Christ, Sacraments, etc, are understood and treated.¹⁵⁵

Christology and Ecclesiology in the Indian Context

Christology and Ecclesiology are the two important areas of theological reflection—the mystery of Jesus Christ and the community of his disciples (Church) who live by his memory and on the basis of his promises and the vision of hope he inspired. In theologizing in India, the interpretation of the mystery of Jesus Christ and the self-understanding of his community takes place in a multi-religious context and in a situation of massive poverty and oppression. It is the context that makes Christology and Ecclesiology really Indian.

- **Christology and Different Indian titles of Jesus (Discovering Jesus in India)**

Wilfred uses the word ‘discovering,’ precisely because it is a task of the faithful and of the bishops to plunge into the existing reality of poverty and oppression, the plurireligious and multicultural Asian context, in order to discover Jesus.¹⁵⁶ Fathers of the Church, in the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.173

¹⁵⁶ Felix Wilfred, *From the Dusty Soil: Contextual reinterpretation of Christianity*. Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, (Trichy: Jothi Printers, 1995), P. 175: “Let Asian then

midst of their context filled with challenges and problems, discovered Jesus. Their biblical interpretation was meaningful, relevant and life-oriented since the Word of God for them was not “a dead reality but a testimony of history lived by a people.”¹⁵⁷ Indian people have to be inspired and transformed by this Jesus who was merciful, who had love and concern for the multitudes and who entered into dialogue with all, even his opponents. They also have to re-discover Jesus who accepted and promoted all that was good in his culture, religion and community, and rejected all that was inhuman and oppressive. Alangaram insists that such a re-discovery should not only authenticate the Christ of the Gospels and the historical Jesus but also make him and his message more relevant and meaningful in the Asian context.¹⁵⁸

Mark, Luke, Matthew and John present Jesus in their own way with a number of images and titles, understandable in their contexts and intelligible to their people. Alangaram states that the reason for the difference between the evangelists in presenting Jesus is to help the hearers not only understand the message but also to find it meaningful to their lives. He also states that all of them have a number of points common in presenting Jesus—the Son of God (Mt 8:20; 12:8; 12:32-40; Mk 2:28; 8:38; 10:45; Lk 9:58; 12:8; 18:3,31; Jn 1: 34; 3:16; 11:4; 17:1; and Savior Mt 1:21; Lk 19:10; Mk 16:16; Jn 12:47).¹⁵⁹

Alangaram states the FABC bishops’ vision that the mission of the Church in Asia tomorrow will be not only to bring Christ and his Church to this immense continent, but also to discover with immense joy the presence of this hidden Christ in his own home

discover and rediscover the image of Jesus most suited to respond to the challenges of the continent and its questions.”

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Naduvilezham, “The biblical Interpretation of the Fathers” *Bible Bhashyam* 1, X (March 1984), p.6

¹⁵⁸ Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*: 1999, p. 65

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.66

continent.”¹⁶⁰ It is a call for effort to discover Jesus in the poverty, suffering and struggles of the poor in India. An American biblical scholar and a historian, Marcus J. Borg’s theological reflection on the historical Jesus helps definitely to comprehend the different images of Jesus portrayed by the Asian bishops in the FABC documents. His reflections are of great use to group these images of Asian bishops into the images of the historical Jesus and of the Christian experience. Alanagram points out that as a historian Borg has developed certain images of the historical Jesus as a religious ecstatic, healer and so on which he calls the images of the pre-Easter Jesus. Then Borg also presents Jesus with the Christian faith proclamations, such as Jesus the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Lord and Christ and etc., which he calls the images of the post-Easter Jesus. Alanagram sees Borg not only as a Christian historian busy in discovering historical Jesus but also as one who does not forget the context in which he lives today.¹⁶¹ In other words, for Borg context plays a major role in shaping the images of Jesus, and so in different context one is bound to have different images of Jesus even though Jesus Christ is one and the same. Borg states that the Gospels are “a combination of a historical memory and metaphorical narrative, they express the early Christian movement’s witness to both the pre-Easter Jesus and post-Easter Jesus.”¹⁶² This way of seeing Jesus helps us, “to see God as an experiential reality, not simply an article of faith, ...and to actualize compassion in the world, both as an individual virtue and as the core value of the alternative social vision of Jesus.”¹⁶³ Thus through Borg’s analysis of different

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.70

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.68

¹⁶² Marcus J. Borg, “The Historian, The Christian and Jesus,” *Theology Today*, LII (April 1989), p. 132-42.

¹⁶³ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], 1992, p. 139, No. 8: “Inculturation is a discovery of the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in the given cultures and living traditions.” Also see *Ad Gentes*, No. 11

images of Jesus, we can clarify the doubts of the Christians and offer an orientation to understand both the Jesus of history and the Jesus of Christian experience.

- **Indian Titles to Jesus Christ**

Robert de Nobili is the father of Indian Christian theology and inculturation.¹⁶⁴ Following the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council, there began serious theological attempts on the side of the Catholic Church to understand the person and the mystery of Jesus Christ in the Indian context. Abhishiktananda had proposed suggestions for the renewal of the Church by attributing the ancient Hindu titles to Jesus and invoke him under those names as the Hebrew bible did with the Old Canaanite names such as *Elohim, Shaddai and El Elyon* for Yahweh.¹⁶⁵ Without going into details, I would like to present different suggestions that Abhishiktananda made and only one or two titles he proposed which garnered the consideration from theologians later. *Narayana*- the 'Son of man,' *Trilokanatha*- the sovereign of the three worlds, *Purusha, Sat-purusha*- the Messiah, *Medhapurusha*- lamb of God, for Jesus besides such as *Agni* for the Holy Spirit and *Brihaspati*- for God (the Father).¹⁶⁶ Even Griffiths like others did not think whether such titles could be used to signify Jesus in the Indian context but he believed that *Purusha* and *Advaita* will be the key concepts in an Indian Christian theology.¹⁶⁷ Griffiths's concentration was more on the understanding of the Divine mystery and Christ mystery than looking for the possibility of expressing them in Indian/ Hindu titles.

¹⁶⁴ S. Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, (Madras: The Diocesan Press, 1972), pp.86-94

¹⁶⁵ Abhishiktananda, *Towards the Renewal of the Church*, (Cochin: K.M.C. Press, 1970), pp. 51-54

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.51-54

¹⁶⁷ Bede Griffiths, "A Christian Ashram," in: *Vaidikamitram*, 9, 1976, pp. 14-20.

Wilfred states that there are at present three Indian terms suggested to connote the person and the mystery of Jesus.¹⁶⁸ They are *Jivanmukta*, *Guru-Satguru* and *Satyagrahi* indicating the three major schools (*advaita*, *bhakti* and liberation). As we have seen already, the Catholic theological attempt was predominantly to understand the Christian mysteries in the background of *advaita*. Ananadam points out that this school of thought understands Jesus as the *Jivanmukta*, who has reached oneness with the Father. "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30) is an expression of Jesus' innermost experience of his non-duality with the Father.¹⁶⁹ All human being strive to realize this non-duality with the Absolute. The one who has reached it already during his earthly life is known as *Jivanmukta*. For the *Jivanmukta*, what we call 'eternity' is a reality already. Jesus has reached it already for eternity and so he is *Jivanmukta*.¹⁷⁰

Other theologians see in Jesus the *Guru* or the *Satguru*. Wilfred explains the meaning of the term *Guru*¹⁷¹ as a teacher, not one who merely imparts theoretical knowledge, but one who leads his disciples to the experience of the divine. Jesus is the teacher of truth. "Grace and truth came from Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:17b) and so his words are truth. "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known" (Jn 1:18). The one who has been in the bosom of God can impart his God-experience to his disciples. Because of this Jesus becomes the *Satguru*.

The third title would be Jesus as *liberator*. This concept of Jesus as liberator has a specific Indian aspect. Jesus and his message of the Kingdom of God are to be understood in the following Indian contexts: Corrupted socio-political, caste discrimination, untouchability and

¹⁶⁸ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, p. 193-96

¹⁶⁹ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 26

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26

¹⁷¹ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, p. 196

pluralistic religiosity. So when we speak of Jesus as liberator in the Indian context, the prophet is not the main character of a liberator, which might be easy to be understood in the semitic religious tradition, but he is a *Satyagrahi*. *Satyagrahi* is the one who stands firm in truth. Jesus is the *Satyagrahi* of the highest order. Since he was deeply rooted in truth, he can be the real liberator “Truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). When we speak of Jesus as *Satyagrahi*, we mean the liberation of both socio-political structures as well as personal sinful situations. The one does not exclude the other. The *Satyagrahi* is committed to the task of liberating from the untruth, the unjust structures and situations, not by inflicting suffering on others but taking up the suffering on himself. He accepts the aggression in the spirit of *ahimsa* (love). The suffering love of Jesus and his cross have a tremendous meaning for the suffering Indian masses. In summary, Wilfred puts this point in his book *Beyond the Settled Foundations*:

“The passion death of Jesus the liberator-*Satyagrahi* is most appealing to the oppressed masses of India; they find their own struggles, sufferings, agonies and humiliations reflected in his passion. The death of Jesus on the cross is a scandal to many (Cor 1:23) but for Indians masses cross and suffering are apart and parcel of life. So they find it comforting than scandalized that God himself is a participant in their life through his suffering and death. God is in solidarity with them and his passion is a liberative suffering.”¹⁷²

- **The Central issues in Christology**

I would like to deal with the Christological issues in an attempt to articulate Christology in the religiously pluralistic and socially oppressive context of India. Ananadam points out that *Renewal of the Church* has been the main theological discussion after the Vatican II—such as the question of the Church, its nature, its unity and its structures and the issue of the

¹⁷² Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, p. 196

Church's relationship with the world and the religions in the world.¹⁷³ As a result many theologies such as Eucumenical theology, the theology of the world, political theology, liberation theology, theology of development, theology of Religions and Dialogue came into existence and dominate the scene of theological discussions in India. The theological discussions in India at the level of Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) in the past years were of ecclesiological nature. Walter Kasper, the German theologian rightly points out that the various issues, questions and conflicts that face the Church and Christians today cannot be resolved on the level of ecclesiology alone.¹⁷⁴ The Church as the body of Christ cannot be separated from her head and understood properly without relation to him. Every issue that the Church faces can be resolved or dealt with only at the level of right Christology.

Anandam states that today's conflicts, polarizations and other Church related issues can be resolved only if we go to the original source and the real basis. He also states that this basis and the foundation is not an ideology or principle but *a person*. Kasper clarifies the same point:

"The basis and meaning of the Church is not an idea, a principle or a program. It is not comprised in so many dogmas and moral injunctions. It does not amount to specify Church or social structures. All these things are right and proper in their setting. But the basis of and the meaning of the Church is a person. And not a vague person, but one with a specific name: Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁵

Further Kasper states that when we say Jesus is Christ, we confess that Jesus of Nazareth, the man Jesus of the first century who lived in Palestine is the Christ, the Son of God, Messiah anointed by the Spirit for the salvation of the world and the eschatological fulfillment of the

¹⁷³ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 29

¹⁷⁴ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, (London: Paulist Press, 1977), p.15

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15

history.¹⁷⁶ Anandam understands this Christological confession is provocatively individual and uniquely universal. And this theological conclusion of the Christological confession has been questioned both in the West and the East. Voices have been raised calling for a rethinking, for a Copernican revolution. That is, instead of the Christocentric understanding of the faith and the nature and mission of the Church, the theocentric understanding of the faith and reality is placed as an alternative. The question of the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ being a very crucial point, I cannot deal with it here elaborately. It is very obvious today that the Christological discussions of dogmas or Christological formulations are either questioned or attempts are made to understand the mystery of Christ from a different perspective. Anandam argues with the words of Rahner to justify the new theological discussions:

“that the Christological formulations were both the end of the old theological discussions and the beginning of new discussions. They are newly discussed not because they are false but they are true and have permanent value.”¹⁷⁷

We see a turn in Catholic theology to Christology in the Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* by Pope John Paul II, 1979. Anandam states that this turn in Catholic theology to Christology soon became a turn within Christology itself.¹⁷⁸ He further states that K. Barth and H.U. Von Balthasar saw Christology as God’s revelation and the Son’s humility to the Father respectively (Christology from above); the following are the other theologians, representatives of the Christology from below such as R. Bultmann, H. Braun, and G. Ebeling who saw Christology as the function of the faith, Teilhard de Chardin who saw Christology from the Cosmological perspective, K. Rahner who saw it from the Anthropological

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., P 15-16

¹⁷⁷ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 30

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 30

perspective, J. Moltmann from Eschatological perspective, P. Schoonenberg's ascending Christology.

I see the tension between Indian theology and Christology as being similar to that in the West (Ascending and Descending), namely the tension between the Christology from above and the Christology from below. A brief summary of the theme of Christology from above and below will help us to understand the real tension involved in it. The Christology from above is the high Christology based on the Christology of St. John's Gospel. The new concept of the Christology from below would be a Christology that proceeds from the concrete human being and his experience, a Christology of historical Jesus, a Christology on the horizon of an evolutionary world-view, and a Christology on the horizon of the liberation movements. Anandam strongly suggests that it must be acknowledged that while no one could deny the validity of the methodology of Christology from below, it can on no ground invalidate or make the Christology from above superfluous. Christology as a methodology has its right to exist. Christology from below is the important door providing entrance into the Christology from above; at the same time it has its limitations too. He further underlines that the Christology from below being the only possible entry into the Christology from above, without the Christology from above the Christology from below loses all its place and meaning.¹⁷⁹

I also see, in the two main trends of Indian Christian theology, Christology being inherent in them. I can give the name of Christology from above to the ashramite and similarly I can call the 'liberation theology' as Christology from below. John Desrochers, an Indian theologian, explains that the ashramite theologians try to understand the mystery

¹⁷⁹ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 32

Christ from above (from the standpoint of the ultimate reality God) and the liberation theologians from below (from the standpoint of the historical Jesus and the concrete situation of acute poverty and inhuman oppression).¹⁸⁰

Anandam makes his critique that the representatives of the Ashramite theology in their conclusions are far removed from the high Christology, because the recognition of the God or divine of the ashramite school is not exclusively the God of the Bible and tradition. This creates a big difficulty in the Christology of the ashramite school. In the same way, he states that the Indian school of liberation, unlike the South American liberation theology, recognizes the dimension of religious pluralism. In the evaluation of the Christology of the school of liberation, one would raise the question whether Christology proceeds from the Christian faith or from the history of religions.¹⁸¹ This recognition of the religious pluralism by the two trends of Indian Christian theology led to new conclusions and positions which Western theology does not consider carefully and in detail.

Ecclesiology (The Community of Jesus' Disciples)

The Indian mind detests anything too structured or institutionalized in matters of religion and spiritual praxis. For anyone brought up in the Indian tradition and culture it is very difficult to reconcile the view of the Church as a religious institution with the mystery of Christ. A few Indian theologians have attempted to explore some new avenues in interpreting the mystery of the Church in keeping with the Indian genius.¹⁸² According to

¹⁸⁰ John Desrochers, *Christ the Liberator*, (Bangalore: The Center for Social Action, 1984), p.31-199

¹⁸¹ Lourdu Anandam, *The Western Lover of the East*: 1998, P. 32

¹⁸² Cf. Gerwin van Leeuwen (ed.), *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology*, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore 1984); Thomas Manickam, "An Inculturated Ecclesiology," *Jeevadhara* 12, (1982) pp. 197-304

Wilfred, what is being attempted is an Ecclesiological orientation that will bear the mark of Indian spiritual tradition and be sensitive to the present context of India, while being faithful at the same time to the vision and the spirit of traditional Ecclesiology.¹⁸³ He further states that the starting point of the building forth of Indian ecclesiology is the inner experience. Church is viewed as the community of those who are awakened to the divine mystery, to the *logos* shining from within the hearts of persons.¹⁸⁴

Inclusivism is a characteristic of Indian ecclesiology since that is how a community is conceived and lived in India. In the Indian ecclesiology, the boundaries are not rigidly marked, structures not rigorously fixed and conditions for belonging not strictly laid down. The community exists in the hearts and attitudes of the believers so what matters is not so much the external religious identity as the deeper religious experience and the path one follows to attain the goal.

The third important area of Indian ecclesiology is the question of Christian identity. The point of departure is the concrete situation of religious pluralism in India. In day-to-day Christian life, Christians meet and mingle with people of other faiths with whom they share a common heritage, culture and social organization. Basic Christian communities bear witness to love, and fellowship and involvement in the promotion of justice and peace. These are some of the bold directions along which Indian ecclesiology has started reflecting in response to concrete experiences and the exigencies of inter-religious communitarian existence.

IV.) Building God's Kingdom in India—Jesus the Way

¹⁸³ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 1993, p. 197

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 199

Alangaram points out there four models of harmony in Scripture: Creation, Covenant, People of God and Kingdom of God.¹⁸⁵ All these models reveal and proclaim the presence of God and God's action in human history, but Asian bishops chose the model of the kingdom as the best model to realize harmony and liberation since it also the central message of Jesus' proclamation (Mk3: 15) which counts all human beings as the children of God under one Father who is 'the powerful yet compassionate God.'¹⁸⁶ It is the kingdom model that "provides the most action-oriented model for fostering harmony within the society." This raised a fundamental question: Does not this 'Regnocentrism' run the risk of understanding the role of the Church in relation to the reign of God and, ultimately, that of Christ in whom God's reign has been inaugurated in history?

Jacques Dupuis, a Belgian Jesuit priest and theologian who spent 36 years in India, makes a thorough study of the documents of the FABC and concludes that there has been continuity in the teaching of the FABC from the beginning and there is no underestimation of the role of the Church to proclaim the gospel. He also pointed out that the teaching of the Asian bishops is well in agreement with the teaching of the Church especially as spelled out in *Redemptoris Missio*.¹⁸⁷ Dupuis has seen no contradiction between the Kingdom of God concept of the FABC and the proclamation of the gospel. According to Wilfred, the evangelizing mission of the Asian Church is characterized by the Asian context of inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, and liberation. He also states that the Kingdom Jesus began moves towards its fulfillment to bring every human and societal relationship before God. The kingdom calls us

¹⁸⁵ Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, 1999, p. 87

¹⁸⁶ Gaudencio B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], p. 314

¹⁸⁷ Jacques Dupuis, "FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelizing Mission in Asia Today," in: *Vidyajyothi*, 56, 1992, pp.449-50

to individual conversion and structural transformation. God's kingdom "is not a land or a territory but a reality of relationship or communion—*koinonia*—a fellowship of men and women with God as Father and men and women among themselves as brothers and sisters."¹⁸⁸

Asian bishops, in their dialogue with other religions to establish the kingdom of God in a new Asia, do not say that all religions are equal and neither do they claim that they have the monopoly of the kingdom of God, rather with the humility of Jesus who came to serve, they serve the poor and call for justice and peace which are essential features of the Kingdom of God.¹⁸⁹ This is our understanding of the Kingdom of God, as revealed in Jesus: Jesus is the way to inculturation, dialogue and liberation. This will enable us to continue the Christ-like deeds and build God's Kingdom in India.

Kingdom of God is the Best Way to Proclaim Jesus In India

In contemporary theologies, the uniqueness of Jesus is much discussed. The problem of uniqueness of Jesus is neither the problem of the West nor the East, but it is a problem for Christians outside their communities. A Christian is a Christian only when he/she accepts in his/her belief that Jesus Christ is not only a man but also the Son of God, when he/she in his /her creed confesses that the Second person of the Trinity became man for the redemption of the world. In our dialogue with other religions, especially when other religions also make such claims, Christians experience a problem. However, even in interreligious dialogue a Christian can profess his/her faith in Christ as the only redeemer of the world. But a Christian cannot force his/her faith on the people of other faiths. When any faith is forced on

¹⁸⁸ Felix Wilfred, "The Context of the Emergence of Social Action Groups and their Significance at the present Juncture for the Church" FABC Papers, XXXIX 1985, p.13

¹⁸⁹ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], p. 314, NO.9

the people of other faiths the interreligious dialogue is jeopardized. There is a sense of fear and suspicion in the minds of the people of other faiths, often resulting in hatred, and bringing peaceful dialogue to a dead end. There is no scope for building up the Kingdom of God in India without getting the co-operation of the people of other faiths. Since it is important for the Church in India to work for God's Kingdom it is a luxury to enter into arguments and disputes about the uniqueness of Christ. Christ himself did not come to proclaim himself but the One who sent him, not to do his will but the will of the one who sent him. He realized the will of God in his word, action and his whole life. To follow Jesus means to continue his work of witnessing to God's Kingdom.

The Indian Church's intention is neither to dispute nor to deny the uniqueness of Christ, but to find ways in which Jesus can be proclaimed through dialogue. Interreligious dialogue will help us to collaborate with other religions to work for the Reign of God in India. Asian bishops believe, "where God is accepted, where Gospel values are lived, where man is respected...there is the Kingdom," which is a reality "oriented towards the final manifestations and full perfection of the reign of God."¹⁹⁰ Interreligious dialogue helps people of other faiths to be open to Jesus and to collaborate with Christians to build God's Kingdom of "justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in...Asian realities."¹⁹¹

V. Conclusion

The poor and the oppressed in India wait to be free from all oppression and to become the children of God. This implies that the poor will have enough to eat, to cloth and to shelter

¹⁹⁰ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], p. 252

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.275

and they will be treated and respected as equal human beings, with a human face and a name. The Second Vatican Council echoes the same point that all the dimensions of human life such as justice, equality and transformation find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ who “was crucified and rose again to break the stranglehold of personified Evil, so that this world might be fashioned anew according to God’s design and reach its fulfillment.”¹⁹² Alangaram states that Asian bishops and theologians in their effort to articulate a theology for Asia find in Jesus a way to Asian liberation and salvation. They, filled with the Holy Spirit, try to rediscover the Jesus of Nazareth and make him and his message relevant.¹⁹³ Their rediscovery in Asia a Christology that can be a leaven for the liberation of the poor and oppressed (theology of Orthopraxis) and be a life giving force that come out of the experience of the divine mystery (Theology of *anubhava*). With this faith seeking understanding and awareness, Indians are attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and serve wholeheartedly in order to work for God’s Kingdom growing in our midst and one day reaches its perfection.

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¹⁹² *Gaudium et spes*, No. 2.

¹⁹³ Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*, 1999, p.142

CHAPTER THREE

TOWARDS MAKING The INDIAN CHURCH GENUINELY INDIAN AND AUTHENTICALLY CHRISTIAN

I. The Indian Church Discovering its Identity and its Mission

Having established the hopes and confidence of the Indian bishops and theologians in developing a theology for India in view of working for the liberation and salvation of the poor, and the transformation of India, I will move into discovering the identity and the mission of the Indian Church in the twenty first century, that is an ecclesiology and missiology for India. Alangaram, an Indian theologian, states explicitly in specifying the role of the Indian bishops and theologians that they should strive to rediscover and redefine the identity and mission of the Church in the “complex human reality of our people.”¹⁹⁴

In one of its annual meetings, the Indian Theological Association stated: “guided by the traditional theology of mission,¹⁹⁵ the Church continues to view evangelization with its stress on numerical increase and institutional growth. Consequently its mission to transform the world in the prophetic spirit of Jesus seems to suffer (Lk 4:18).”¹⁹⁶ What the Indian theologians mean here is that, despite the new awareness of mission in India, the Indian Church has not yet incorporated the concerns of liberation with its traditional understanding of mission and evangelization. Wilfred underlines the fact that the unique context of Indian

¹⁹⁴ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, 1999, P. 143

¹⁹⁵ The missionaries had but one all pervading and dominant motivation: It was the saving of souls from the damnation by administering the baptism and thus turning them into members of the Church which was absolutely necessary for salvation. It was a motivation derived from the mission theology then prevalent in the West, and which the missionaries imbibed and carried with them to India.

¹⁹⁶ Final Statement of the IX Annual Meeting of Indian Theological Association, no. 19, in Paul Puthanangady (ed.), “Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation,” Indian Theological Association and NBCLC, Bangalore 1986, p.14

Church calls for a rethinking of mission in relation to religious pluralism, massive poverty, oppression and injustice. He further states a strong opinion that there can be no true understanding of the nature of evangelization in India without bringing into focus these pressing needs.¹⁹⁷ Thomas Rausch, S.J., quotes Walter Buhlmann's point in his predicament of the Church in the South in his book *Towards a Truly Catholic Church*:

“.....this third Church was emerging in the newly independent Third World countries, it was a church facing enormous challenges caused by the gap between the wealthy and the poor, widespread corruption, repressive regimes, and the accompanying institutional violence. He called for an ecumenism, not just with all Christians, but also with non-Christians, stressing the importance of a dialogue focused less on doctrine and more on the kingdom of God.”¹⁹⁸

Paul Lakeland, Professor of Catholic Studies and Chair of the Center for Catholic Studies at Fairfield University in Fairfield, has said: “When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go out like sheep among wolves, when he called his apostles, and when he charged his followers to “preach the Gospel to all nations,” his commission to them is to spread the Good News of the gospel, to proclaim the imminence of the reign of God.” He has further said, “To talk of the mission of the Christian community, then, is to talk about being called to further the reign of God.”¹⁹⁹ For him, this calling of Jesus is one that is always subject to historical conditioning and that must be asked and answered anew for every generation. Indian bishops and theologians today try to deepen the

¹⁹⁷ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 207

¹⁹⁸ Thomas P. Rausch SJ, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church: An Ecclesiology For the Third Millennium*, (Liturgical Press, Colledeville, Minnesota, 2005), p.169. See also Walter Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978).

¹⁹⁹ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Christian Theology*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2005), p. 233

understanding of the practice of mission by linking it closely with the challenge of liberation in their particular context.

Mission as Inculturation

Mission or evangelization entails also the question of the mode of the presence of the Church in the world. It is about the Church being deeply aware of the realities in the midst of which Jesus lived and fulfilled his mission. Indian theologian Wilfred states that Incarnation is the basic mode of the presence of the local Church and its mission in the context of India.²⁰⁰ He further insists also that the task of inculturation is an essential part of the mission of the Church. He understands inculturation fundamentally as a response of the Church to the total situation in the midst of which it lives and defines its specific identity as a *local* Church. Mission as inculturation would include also commitment to liberation. Since the local Church in India is different in terms of the situation and the challenges of the context in which it exists, there will be legitimate pluralism in the understanding and practice of mission.

The need for pursuing mission in context as inculturation has led to the emergence of a distinctively Indian praxis of mission. Wilfred states that “from out of this praxis a characteristic Indian Missiology is also being shaped.”²⁰¹ He further unambiguously confirms that the emerging Indian missiological tradition is thus centered on such important concerns such as dialogue, witnessing, making the Gospel rooted in the context and transformation of society through the process of liberation.²⁰² In this chapter my focus will be on the Indian Church, discovering its identity and its mission in the twenty-first century. I draw my

²⁰⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 207

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.208

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p.208

sources for this chapter mainly from FABC documents, and some of the encyclicals and papal documents on Missiology, and Indian thinkers: Roberto De Nobili, Raimundo Panikkar, D.S. Amalorpavadoss, Michael Amaladoss, Felix Wilfred, A. Alangaram, S.J.

II. Indian Church- A Church in need of Inculturation

1. Meaning of 'Culture' and 'Inculturation' And 'Evangelization'

Culture and Inculturation

Culture is a term used by social scientists for a people's whole way of life. In everyday conversation the word 'culture' may refer to activities in such fields as art, literature, and music. But to social scientists, a people's culture consists of all the ideas, objects, and ways of doing things created by the group. Culture includes arts, beliefs, customs, inventions, language, technology and traditions. A culture is any way of life, simple or complex. Culture consists of learned ways of acting, feeling and thinking, rather than biologically determined ways.

While not forgetting this classical meaning of culture, our focus here is its anthropological meaning: "cultural anthropology,"²⁰³ namely, culture/s understood as a way of life of a people. They may not speak English, play music or may not be able to appear in public, but they have a culture too. Their life is governed by a value system, they feel at home among themselves, they have their own store of proverbs, folktales, mythologies, music and dance, their food is tasty to them, they know how to organize their life, and what they do is meaningful to them. They have a way of life like many thousands of cultural groups anywhere in the world. So what is culture? In simple words, culture is where one feels or

²⁰³ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, 1999, P. 89

makes oneself feel at home. It may be in the area of language, food, living conditions, fine arts, meaning systems, worldview, etc. And what is inculturation?²⁰⁴ To put it simply again, it is making people feel at home in the Catholic Church, because they hear their own language, see cultural expressions which they are familiar with, live their life as Catholic Christians creatively using their cultural resources to express their faith and, above all, they are able to experience the Good News from within their culture/s.

Evangelization

The Church exists in order to evangelize,²⁰⁵ namely, to make all what she does is “good news” to people. Though it sounds simple, it can become complicated since the evangelizing mission of the Church is carried out not in the abstract, but in the concrete situations of time and space, in people’s socio-political, economic, and religious and cultural settings. The complexity is felt all the more, because of the confusion surrounding the rich concept of culture. The concept of culture includes the whole way of life of a people – the world of symbols and meanings, peoples’ history understood not merely in its chronological aspect, but as the integral present-living with its roots in the past. We also know that the social, economic, and political realities of a people are very much part of their culture as well. And the culture of a people cannot be divorced from their religious beliefs, since religious values form the core of culture. As humans we are cultural beings. We cannot escape culture or cultures. Our life is intercultural.

²⁰⁴ Schreier in his book *Abschied von Gott der Europear* explains inculturation on regional theology—that people who live in different life situations and circumstances react differently to the Word of God. Such a change of perspective is visible in parts of Africa and Asia where Christian religion is relatively new. Such a changed perspective in regional theology in 1970’s both in the Catholic and protestant Churches brought about a number of new concepts such as contextualizing, localizing, indigenizing, inculturation and adaptation.

²⁰⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), No. 14

Evangelization and Inculturation

The incarnate God in Jesus Christ did not escape culture. He was born into Jewish culture just as each one of us is born in a culture.²⁰⁶ Since we are born into a culture, not with an intrinsic culture, we are free to accept and grow into or grow in another culture. The mode in which we grow in our own culture or into another culture is through dialogue, which is also the mode in which evangelization takes place. The FABC (the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) speaks of a four-fold dialogue: dialogue of Life, Action, Theological exchange, and Religious experience. This fourfold dialogue is carried out with three partners: the Asian peoples [in our case, the people of India], their cultures and their religions. Since the concept of culture is gaining importance all over the world, and since the evangelizing mission of the Church is inseparably linked to it, the future of the Church in India will depend on how seriously we take the process of inculturation of the Good News in the different cultures of the nation. In other words, how will the Church in India transform cultures from within via-a-vis the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How will she make it "heard, seen and experienced" in people's cultural flesh and blood, so as to reenact a new Pentecost (Acts 2:8)? How will the people see Jesus and his Good News in their proverbs, stories, folktales, mythologies, initiation and sacrificial rites, their history, politics and socio-cultural life? The question becomes—how could the people become fully Indian, and authentically Christian? Putting all these together, how can we germinate the Good News in good soil at the heart of each culture?

²⁰⁶ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, 1999, P. 93-94

Walls have been erected, though not willfully, in the history of evangelization in India. Too much emphasis has been put to differentiate the Christian faith from other religious and cultural realities, and the Christian identity is too often constructed on the principle of identification, so much so that the Christian faith is marked 'foreign' to all peoples in India. Seeing that the Christian faith has aroused the least response from the most religious continent of the world, a recent document of the Pontifical Council for Culture asks: "Is that not chiefly because Christianity is still perceived there as a foreign religion introduced by Westerners, which has not been sufficiently adapted, thought through and lived in the cultures of Asia?"²⁰⁷ The Synod of Bishops of Asia also stressed this fact: "While the Church is admired for her organizational, administrative, educational, health services, and developmental works, the believers of other faiths and non-believers in India often do not see the Church as totally Indian, not simply because much financial support comes from western countries, but also because of her western character in theology, architecture, art, etc. Therefore, many are reluctant to accept Christianity, fearing a loss of national identity and culture."²⁰⁸

Evangelization should not in any way favor the building of walls or barriers between cultures or religions. Christ comes to break down walls that separate (Eph, 2,14) and is the way to communion (Jn 14,6). In breaking down walls Christ creates in Himself a union of diversities. He teaches us that all human beings, of whatever race and culture, are on the journey to the same destination. "Beyond all divisions, Jesus makes it possible for people to

²⁰⁷ Pontifical Council for Culture. *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 1999, No.20; Visit also http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_pc_cultr_doc_03061999_pastoral_en.html.

²⁰⁸ Synod of Bishops, XI Ordinary General Assembly, *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church Instrumentum Laboris*, (July 7, 2005), No.13.

live as brothers and sisters, recognizing a single Father who is in heaven. In Him a new harmony has emerged."²⁰⁹ He Himself is the way, the space of vertical relationship with the divine and the horizontal communion with the world, with others.

Inculturation is always interculturalization, since it is an encounter of at least three cultures –the Bible, the Catholic Christian tradition and the people to whom the Gospel is proclaimed. Genuine inculturation involves the whole people of God, and not just a few experts only.²¹⁰ Inculturation is linked with weighty theological issues such as the salvific nature of religions other than Christianity, the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, Christ as the universal and unique Savior, the relationship between the local churches and the Universal Church, the nature of the veneration and worship of ancestors, and the nature and function of popular religious practices. Inculturation has been the Church's way of evangelizing since her very beginning as she moved from her Jewish matrix into the Greco-Roman and Franco-Germanic, Celtic and Slav cultures.²¹¹ And today the Church faces a greater challenge as she moves into a multicultural digital world. The spirit and teachings of the Second Vatican Council²¹² are still very helpful to guide us. Asian bishops believe that "in ways unknown to them, Jesus is

²⁰⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 13

²¹⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, (March 25, 1987), No. 54

²¹¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York: 1995), p. 448

²¹² *Lumen Gentium*, No. 1, 5 The Church is only the seed and the sign of the Kingdom and not the Kingdom itself: "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament of intimate union with God...she is a sign and an instrument of such union and unity." She is "the budding forth of that Kingdom. While she grows slowly, the Church strains toward the consummation of the kingdom and, with all her strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with her King." This understanding of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, reflects that the Church is not the Kingdom as a finished product in the salvific economy of God. In this sense the Asian bishops see the 'the Redeemer of our peoples' not only in the Church but also in the histories, traditions and cultures of our brothers and sisters of other faiths as he has all along been present with them and enlightened them and hence for them to, he is way.

present in the worship, beliefs and philosophies of the other faiths, for he is *Truth*, and in many ways he is present in the lives of the Asian people, for he is their life.”²¹³

Inculturation in the Indian Church

The urgent task for the Church in India is not just being a Church in India, but also for India to enrich the Catholicity of the Church Universal. Hence, our task is not just transplanting a Church, but becoming a truly local Church so as to give birth to a new society that is transparent, a society in which the Church becomes a sign of and an effective instrument for the saving presence of the reign of God. The challenge in other words, is to give birth to a truly local and indigenous church: a communion of communities, a participatory church, a witnessing church, and a prophetic sign Church in India with a Mission of Love and Service to all peoples enriching the Catholic Communion of Communities. The task before us is not only to apply the concept and reality of inculturation in some external ways as it happened in some parts of India, but to become aware of the presence of the Risen Lord and of his Good News from within the cultures of India, and to acknowledge him in people’s history, their cultural heritage of proverbs, stories, folklore, mythologies, traditional religious practices, etc.

This process will bring about not only the conversion of individuals and communities, but also the evangelization of cultures themselves, that is, the Gospel values of justice, peace, solidarity, reconciliation, forgiving love, and a sense of sharing and harmony will transform the cultural, political, social, and economic structures of India. Then only evangelization will become evangelization of Cultures.²¹⁴ Inculturation of the Good News is the way to achieve

²¹³ Gaudencio B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], No. 19

²¹⁴ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), No. 20

it. There is no alternative to inculturation. In October 1974, during a Synod on evangelization in Rome, the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar declared obsolete the theology of adaptation in the process of evangelization, and recommended the development of a theology of incarnation. In the wake of further missiological study, the Magisterium recognized the theological significance of the similarity between the idea of 'inculturation' and the mystery of the Incarnation. In *Slavorum Apostoli* (1985) Pope John-Paul II expressed it succinctly: "Inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in local cultures and at the same time the introduction of these cultures in the life of the Church."²¹⁵

2. Inculturation in India and the Pioneers of Inculturation

Indian Christian theology is still in its early stage. Indian theologians have made great strides on two crucial fronts in their effort to develop a theology for India.

First, is an attempt to reappraise and reimage Christianity in the cultural context of India. Wilfred states, since the 19th century onwards, the major enterprise of the Indian theologians has been "the attempt to re-interpret the message of the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ through the concepts, categories and symbols drawn Indian cultural tradition and history."²¹⁶ Secondly, Indian Christian theology has addressed the issues connected with the life-contexts of the people and the socio-political situations prevailing in India. This perspective originates from the conviction that theology is not only an intellectual enterprise to demonstrate the arguments to prove the existence of God. but is also an attempt to reveal how God is a caring Father when his children are starving. It is worth paying attention to some of the pioneers of inculturation in India.

²¹⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Slavorum apostoli*, (June 2, 1985) , No. 21

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. vii

Roberto De Nobili (1577-1656)

“The first oriental scholar,²¹⁷ Robert De Nobili’s contribution to Indian theology, is his *praxis* of inculturation animated by his theological vision. He was convinced very much that true Christian faith could not be inimical to the culture and the tradition of the land. In an attempt to give concrete expression to his vision, he assumed the traditions and the ways of life of the Brahmins who have been considered guardians and protectors of Indian culture and religion. He dressed like them, remarkably abstained from all kinds of meat and became a pure vegetarian and made the plain earth his bed.²¹⁸

Given the mission theology of the times, it is pretty well understandable how De Nobili’s style of living became the object of controversy. He was accused of compromising the Christian faith with paganism and having gone syncretistic. In a way, the question of the relationship between culture and religion in today’s context of discussion on inculturation was posed in concrete terms in the case of De Nobili. In India it is hardly possible to mark off what belongs to Indian culture from Hindu religious beliefs and practices since they are very much intertwined. It is interesting to note how he invoked the theology of early Fathers in support of his *praxis* of inculturation: He showed how several pagan customs of the Greco-Roman world had found an honorable place in the Christian religion.²¹⁹ Linguistic inculturation and philosophical interpretation was his method of inculturation. He plunged into the study of languages and religious literature of Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. He, being a brilliant man endowed with prodigious memory, was able to acquire certain mastery in

²¹⁷ Title of the book, S. Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, Tirunelveli, 1972

²¹⁸ S. Rajamanickam ed., “Roberto De Nobili and Adaptation”, *Indian Church History Review*, 1 (1967), Pp 83-91.

²¹⁹ S. Arokiasamy, “De Nobili’s Encounter with Hinduism: An Evaluation in the Light of Vatican II.” *In Spirit and In Truth*, (Aikiya Alayam, Madras: 1985), Pp. 52-67; cf. also Richard De Smet, “Robert de Nobili and Vedanta,” *Vidyajyoti*, 40, (1976), Pp 363-71

writing and speaking these languages. Wilfred states in his book *Beyond Settled Foundations* that De Nobili was the first European ever to familiarize himself with the *Vedas*, the most ancient religious texts of India. He was fascinated by the various schools of philosophy and religion functioning in Madurai with thousands of students studying under Brahmin masters. He also dreamt of a Christian school of philosophy as well as a seminary for India where unlike the Tridentine model, theology would be taught in Sanskrit, and Indian students for priesthood would learn theology in the Indian cultural and philosophical context.²²⁰ He visualized the visions of Vatican II centuries ahead of time as he was convinced that the gospel could never take root in India if its ancient religious heritages are ignored.

Wilfred does not fail to mention De Nobili's efforts to persuade the learned Hindus to believe that Christianity is the true religion in which he had very little success. The scholastic and Thomistic philosophy he employed in his discussions did not carry much conviction with the Brahmins whose premises, assumptions and backgrounds were quite different.²²¹ De Nobili could conduct very fruitful discussions with the Brahmins because he had an enlightened understanding of the Indian religious-cultural world, which were not seen with other missionaries.

D.S. Amalorpavadass (1932-1990)

Amalorpavadass interprets evangelization not simply as proclamation; evangelization is the effective realization of the Gospel in the life-stream of the country, through the committed involvement of the Church. He also says that evangelization would take place only through "the response of the Church to the *total situation* of the country which includes its past cultural and religious heritage as well as the future hopes to be realized through its

²²⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 15

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.16

present historical struggles.”²²² He sees an inextricable link between the human and Christianity since God’s revelation continues to take place even today through history. The response of the Church to the total Indian situation calls for a process of inculturation and the praxis of dialogue with other religions and ideologies.

Amalorpavadass believes the Church, as the agent and subject of evangelization, to be the first one to be gripped by the Gospel and to experience it deeply in its life to assist society and humanity at large in its pilgrimage towards the kingdom—the fullness of life and freedom. Wilfred sees Amalorpavadass’ placing his emphasis on the inner experience as the foretaste source for evangelization.²²³ Here we can observe his theology resonating with the vision of Monchanin and Abhishiktananda. Amalorpavadass believed deeply that the experience of God-realization and the contemplation of the Gospel within the hearts of the individual and within the Christian community would make the evangelization of the Indian Church effective and credible. It is not the Divine and the Gospel alone that need to be experienced but the people, the society, and the culture. The Christian community must embrace within its inner experience the whole historical situation of the exterior world. Amalorpavadass assures us that this inner experience will express itself in the form of action for liberation, praxis of dialogue and inculturation.²²⁴ We can see all the elements of Amalorpavadass’s vision of evangelization in one of his latest descriptions:

“It (evangelization) is a process of interpretative or prophetic sharing by a group of Christians of their double experience of the world and the (Gospel) with the whole community of the people in the mutual interplay of receiving and giving, while journeying together with the human community in the same stream of life within a process of all-round sharing towards the common goal of

²²² D.S. Amalorpavadass, “Evangelization in the Context of India,” *Indian Theological Studies*, 17 (1980), Pp. 97-119

²²³ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 114

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

freedom and justice, integral development, liberation, wholeness and communion.²²⁵

Particularly noteworthy are Amalorpavadass' various efforts to strip liturgy of its Western trappings and turn it into an experience rooted in the Indian spiritual and cultural tradition.

Michael Amaladoss (B. 1936)

Michael Amaladoss, one of the very significant Indian theologians in recent years, explains 'inculturation' as a theological notion describing the way in which the Christian message inserts itself into a given culture. According to Wilfred, M. Amaladoss is well known for his fresh insights and for his vision of the future of Christianity in India. In the West he is known as a leading Missiologist.²²⁶ He is one of the very few theologians whose writings are based on cultural anthropology. He thinks that anthropological studies and social sciences should increasingly take the place traditionally occupied by philosophy and theology.

M. Amaladoss has been a staunch promoter of a liturgy that is rooted in the culture and religious tradition of India. In keeping with his anthropological orientation, he emphasizes the place of *ritual*. The promotion of rituals is tantamount to affirming cultural identity. He says that, "religious rituals of any social group are the occasion when its religiosity and a deeper identity become symbolically and socially visible."²²⁷ In Western culture, concepts and words dominate. This is true of Western liturgy too. Liturgical celebrations are a sequences of words, readings, sermons, etc. Even symbols are looked at as visible words functioning as vehicles to communicate meaning more easily. The ritual becomes a concrete illustration of a formula. For Amaladoss this is an unacceptable approach to the Indian

²²⁵ D.S. Amalorpavadass, "A Theology of Mission in India Today," in Kuncheria Pathil (ed), *Mission in India Today—The Task of St. Thomas Christians*, (Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore: 1988), p. 324

²²⁶ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 129

²²⁷ M. Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many be one?* (New Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society/ ISPCK, 1998), p.82

liturgy. For worship is the action of a community as well as the projection of the identity of the community with its specific structures, differences of roles, its beliefs, tasks, etc.²²⁸ Worship with its symbols becomes the celebration of the community of its past and present experiences as well as the ideals it projects for its future. For him ritual actions are self-expressions of the community, its structures, and they carry, paradoxically, an anti-structural element in themselves.²²⁹ Wilfred sees the intimate connection between the religious ritual and community in the writings of Amaladoss who calls *liturgy* as a symbolic action. Amaladoss believes that Liturgy can not be fabricated and transported from without; it must spring from the community and its experience, its tradition and its concrete historical context.²³⁰ Amaladoss is convinced that “a community will not have new cultural identity until it finds expression in ritual.”²³¹

Amaladoss looks at music as *sadhana*. Just as liturgical action is not action subordinated to words, but is impregnated with the experience of the community, so too music is not an ornamental or secondary element in liturgy, but has a concrete place in liturgical experience. He is also very critical of the new Indian liturgy, since in the holy Mass that was attempted as an experiment, the vertical relationship with God was focused but the horizontal dimension was left out.²³²

Helpful Attitudes needed in inculturation in Evangelization.

Inculturation demands that the missionary has certain indispensable dispositions. I draw a few of them here below:

²²⁸ M. Amaladoss, “Religious Rite as Symbol,” *Jeevadhara*, 5 (1975), Pp 322-323

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 326

²³⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 130

²³¹ M. Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many be one?* (New Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society/ ISPCK, 1998), p.82

²³² Ibid., p.131

- 1.) Anyone who wishes to work with a people must understand and strive to continue to understand their culture, starting with the language and slowly moving into the core of their attitudes, belief systems and world-views. This requires some apprenticeship in a spirit of humility, openness to learning and much of patience.
- 2.) There is need of recognizing and acknowledging Jesus Christ from within a culture: its history, cultural expressions of proverbs, stories, folklore, fine arts, music, mythologies, rituals and sacrifices, etc. which sum-up both the natural and the spiritual as a continuum.
- 3.) This calls for room for creativity and freedom... to “incarnate” Christian living in a specific people’s way of life. This would also mean that the way in which Christ is preached and encountered will be different for different backgrounds. That would mean not only inculturation but inculturations.
- 4.) The task of inculturation is the work of everyone in a given culture – the teaching authority of the Church guiding, encouraging and accompanying the entire process in prayerful listening to the Holy Spirit.
- 5.) Since the concept and reality of culture touches every aspect of a people’s life, genuine inculturation should be seen in a transformed life. The transformed life results in promotion of justice, openness to other cultures, and a richer religious experience leading to communion of communities.
- 6.) This desire to share faith with an attitude of dialogue leading to mutual enrichment need not be divorced from the process of inculturation. The process of inculturation is never ending since it touches the soul of a people. For bringing about a real encounter between people and Christ, inculturation is a must.

III. Dialogue and Theology of Religions (Indian Church in Dialogue)

Interreligious Dialogue?

Simply put, a dialogue is a conversation between two people. But in the context of religions the definition most apt is 'an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue, especially a political or religious issue, with a view to reaching an amicable *agreement* or *settlement*.' However, this definition of mine is still too general. In the domain of religions, an amicable settlement or agreement is difficult. Firstly, such '*agreements*' would require centralized decision-making; something that even the most organized of religions cannot possess, primarily because faith/belief is a matter of individual conscience, which is inherently beyond the scope of any form of legislation.

Secondly, the very nature of belief in religious matters renders agreement that can resolve the conflicts exceedingly difficult, almost impossible to achieve. So, the expected result of inter-religious dialogue then cannot be *agreement*; it has to be *comprehension*. Naturally, a superficial conversation cannot be dialogue in this sense. A sustained encounter between members of different religious traditions with the stated intent and determined efforts towards understanding another point of view; this will be my definition of 'Inter-Religious Dialogue,' for the purpose of this entry. Jim L. Fredericks, who teaches comparative theology at Loyola Marymount University, in his experience of dialogue with Buddhism, states that dialogue at its best takes the form of a common search for a truth genuinely significant to both Buddhists and Christians. He also further underlines the fact that dialogue

excludes argument and debate in the name of misguided irenicism often become barren and platitudinous.²³³

Given the Multi-religious situation of India comprising seven major religious groups—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsees, it is very clear why the theme of interreligious dialogue cannot but be of paramount importance for Indian theological reflection. Paul Lakeland states that globalization also places the whole Christian church in a new forceful way into a situation of explicit dialogue with other religions.²³⁴ The need for interreligious dialogue is based on the teaching that the Church acknowledges and proclaims that all human beings are related to Christ.²³⁵ It is the one area where Indian theology is making a definite and original contribution at the world-level,²³⁶ where every society is becoming progressively multi-religious in its composition. In recent years much has been spoken and written about dialogue and religion also in the West.²³⁷ What distinguishes the Indian approach to the non-Christian religions is the difference in the *approach*. Wilfred points out this difference, that the Indian approach “is not concerned primarily to put forward new theories and theoretical constructs about the place of non-Christian religions and debate about their salvific value” but “the concern is the existential

²³³ James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York: 2004), p.109

²³⁴ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes, with CD-ROM*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2005), P. 219

²³⁵ *Ad gentes*, No. 7

²³⁶ James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York: 2004), p. 5

²³⁷ Cf. Leopold Ratnasekera, *Christianity and the World Religions: A Contribution to the Theology of Religions*, (Colombo 1982); James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, (Paulist Press, New York: 1999)

and experiential encounter with *peoples* of other faith with whom Christians live and interact everyday.”²³⁸

Among the theologians in the West, a lively debate is under way with scholars who are vitally interested in our new sense of religious diversity. Fredericks, an American comparative theologian, says that at issue in this debate about religious diversity among Christian theologians is “nothing less than what we as Christian believers should think about non-Christian religions and their adherents. At stake in this debate is the way Christians will respond to their neighbors who gather for worship in mosques and vihars, in gunawaras and temples. Perhaps, according to Fredericks, the most important of all at issue is how Christians will come to understand themselves and their own religion in new ways as a result of their encounter with their non-Christian neighbors.”²³⁹ In the West, the effort to develop a theology of religions is concerned with the questions such as: in order to be saved, does a person have to have faith in Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ the one and only savior of the world? If Hindu believers can be saved, are they saved despite their Hindu religion or by means of their religion? What Fredericks means by a theology of religions is that which “assists Christians in living responsibly and creatively with the intrusive fact of religious diversity.”²⁴⁰

The Journey of Dialogue and its Various Stages in India

The present positions and insights in the Indian theology of religions are the results of a long journey arrived at passing through various stages. I would like to simply recall here, in short, how in the past the relationship of Christianity to other religions was marked by

²³⁸ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 225

²³⁹ James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, (Paulist Press, New York: 1999), p. 6

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8

confrontation and apologetics. People like Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya and Roberto De Nobili were to some extent a departure from this general trend. In the last century, any religion other than Christianity was considered, at its best, as preparation for Christianity. J. Sharpe (1933-2000), the founding Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney, states that Christianity was viewed as the fulfillment of the spiritual quest of humanity as expressed in their various religious traditions.²⁴¹

The next stage of development of theology of religions was *inclusivism*. R. Panikkar speaks of three attitudes: Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Parallelism.²⁴² Present Indian theological reflections take us beyond these positions. Wilfred describes that the praxis of dialogue has led to an appreciation and a value of the richness of other religious traditions and to enrich one's own Christian faith in encounter with them. Because of this, the focus changed *from* questions like whether other religions are salvific, whether their tenets reflect Christian doctrines, *to* the unique character of every religious tradition and their mutual complementarity. There has been a sea of change after Vatican II in the attitude and approach of the Church to other religions.²⁴³ Wilfred invites our attention to note that this position is not similar to the view that holds all religions are equal as they lead to the same goal and thus one can follow the religion of his/her choice. The approach of complementarity, which is widely prevalent among the Indian theologians, recognizes the *specificity* of each religious tradition. Through dialogue and co-operation each religion from

²⁴¹ On the encounter of Christianity and Hinduism at the turn of the century, cf. Eric J. Sharpe, *Faith meets Faith: Some Christian Attitudes to Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (SCM Press, London: 1977)

²⁴² Cf. Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, (SCM Press, London: 1983).

²⁴³ *Nostra aetate*, No. 2. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions."

its own unique spiritual resources can contribute to the common project of *the transformation of the world*.²⁴⁴

Felix Machado, the archbishop of Nasik and the former undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, speaking to more than 650 bishops and priests of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India in 2009, said, "For Christians, engagement in interreligious encounters is a way of 'being' in pluralistic society" and invited Indian Catholics never to forget that "faith must be lived in its integrity" in a world that has become a "map of religions." He further said, "God can never become a negotiable item or a marginal thought in our interreligious encounters. God is at the centre or like a foundation of all interreligious encounters." India's pluralist society offers Christians a great opportunity for enrichment.²⁴⁵ From my own experience as an Indian, I think that dialogue in India has to take place at the level of day-to-day life since the relationship between religion and society has become complex in the context of growing communalism and religious fundamentalism.

FABC'S Stance on the Dialogue and the theology of religions

Asian bishops call the change of attitude in the Church's notion of other religions a kind of liberation through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church today officially declares to the world that other religions are worthy enterprise and that she has to enter into dialogue with them.²⁴⁶ They also say that dialogue with the great, living religious

²⁴⁴ Among all the Indian theologians, the writings of M. Amaladoss express poignantly the complementarity of the religious tradition. Transformation of the world is the main final goal of Asian/Indian theology.

²⁴⁵ Asia News. See <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Archbishop-Machado:-Interreligious-dialogue-and-evangelization,-a-task-for-Christians-in-India>.

²⁴⁶ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], No. 258

traditions of Asia “should be the ideal form of evangelization...”²⁴⁷ They draw inspiration from Vatican Council II. Interreligious dialogue is a mandate given by the universal Church to all her sons and daughters.²⁴⁸ The Church in Asia receives this mandate with immense joy and happiness as she finds herself in the midst of many religions and cultures, and the bishops, in their faith experience, are convinced that it is God who “encourages us to enter into dialogue with the people of other religions in Asia.”²⁴⁹ This is the foundation for the Church in Asia who calls these believers of other faiths, not ‘non-Christians’ but as ‘Brothers and Sisters’ of other Asian faiths, a phrase which appears often in the FABC documents. For Asian bishops, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14) means “a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its cultures and with other religious traditions.”²⁵⁰

Dialogue for Asian bishops is not simply a dialogue on various religious themes but it is a deeper level of sharing of everyday life with its challenges and struggles. They call this ‘dialogue of life’²⁵¹ and while commenting on the nature and characteristics of dialogue they say that it is a way of living, speaking, interpreting, searching together with the brothers and sisters of the other faiths to enrich “one another’s faith and understanding.”²⁵² They strongly believe that reflection of the Word Incarnate makes the Christian experience not *exclusive* but *inclusive*. The Word-made-flesh in Jesus entered into dialogue with people with the purpose of building God’s Kingdom on earth. Thus the church in Asia, drawing her

²⁴⁷ Ibid., No. 94

²⁴⁸ *Nostra aetate*, No. 2

²⁴⁹ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], No. 292

²⁵⁰ Ibid., No. 280.

²⁵¹ Ibid., No. 58

²⁵² Ibid., No. 111

inspiration from Jesus, understands that “dialogue is an integral dimension of the life of the Church and mission to build up a new community in Christ.”²⁵³

Challenges of Dialogue

‘Fundamentalism’ is one the main challenges in dialogue that is prevalent both in the Church and other faith communities. Alangaram understands Fundamentalism within Christian community “the stance of the groups of Christians (Pentecostal churches and independent Churches and Jehovah WitnessES) who, by their behaviors and attitude, appear to isolate themselves from the great majority of Christian communities, refusing to accept the authenticity and legitimacy of the same communities.”²⁵⁴ He sees the fundamentalism among other faith communities in the form of revivalist movements or nationalist movement protesting against the proselytizing work of other religious communities. Their protest emerges out of their fear of not only losing the members of their communities but also an erosion of their culture and religious beliefs.²⁵⁵ Whatever may be the reason for the emerging trend of fundamentalism, the outcome is hatred, religious intolerance and violence that lead to destruction of property and loss of life.

The Aim of Dialogue

When I speak about interreligious dialogue what I refer to is the dialogue among different religious groups where there exists misunderstanding and anxiety. Alangaram presents the Asian bishops’ belief that the Church, in her dialogue with other religions,

²⁵³ Ibid., No. 119

²⁵⁴ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, P. 182

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 182. Cf. Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], No. 308

recognizes “the living faith of mankind or the living religions.”²⁵⁶ What is to be noted is the ‘living.’ The Church is sent into the world to proclaim Christ and his message. In her encounter with these living faiths she discovers the divine light, “the light that was shining into the world, and illumines every man with its divine splendor.”²⁵⁷ Hence the aim of dialogue will not be only to bring Christ, his message and his Church to Asia/India but also to discover the hidden Christ there. Alangaram, in speaking of effective evangelization in India said, the Church’s evangelizing activity will take many forms, but in India she cannot have better means of bearing witness to Christ than engaging herself in activities of integral human development and witnessing to justice, as well as to interreligious dialogue.²⁵⁸

Theology of Religions

Alan Race, Editor-in-chief of *Interreligious Insight*, is the first one who introduced the threefold typology: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.²⁵⁹ Karl Rahner, did not overestimate the magnitude of the problem posed by the diversity of religions to Christianity today when he wrote that the pluralism of religions:

..is a greater threat and a reason for greater unrest for Christianity than for any other religions. For no reason—not even Islam—maintains so absolutely that it is *the* religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living God, as does the Christian religion. The fact of pluralism of religions, which endures and still from time to time becomes virulent...even after a history of 2000 years, must therefore be the greatest scandal and greatest vexation for Christianity.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, 1999, p. 188

²⁵⁷ Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia*, [Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992], No. 137

²⁵⁸ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, 1999, P. 188.

²⁵⁹ See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N. Y: Obris Books, 1982).

²⁶⁰ Karl Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), p.116

Fredericks states that every theology of religions must come to terms with the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and the universality of God's offer of salvation. How are these two Christians teachings to be related to each other? Are they incompatible? Can they be reconciled? All the theologies of religions hold these two affirmations together in one way or another, further states Fredericks.²⁶¹ Fredericks explains that the exclusivist theologies of religion claim that Christianity is the only true religion. No other religious path is founded on Jesus Christ, the unique and unsurpassable savior of the world. God's salvation is available to all, but only through Jesus Christ. Inclusivist theologies are in agreement with exclusivist theologies in claiming that all salvation is in the name of Jesus Christ. Non-Christians are included, at least potentially, in the salvation enjoyed by Christians. The Second Vatican Council opened up the possibility of accepting others religious traditions as "ways" or "paths" of salvation, which John Paul II has confirmed with his teachings since the council.

Pluralistic theologies of religion go beyond inclusivist theologies in their willingness to recognize the possibility of salvation apart from Christianity. That is, for the pluralist theologians, Christ is one way to salvation, but not the only way.²⁶² Inclusivist theologies as well as exclusivist theologies insist that all salvation is through Jesus Christ, but with the difference inclusivism is willing to recognize that the saving grace of Christ is at work outside the walls of the institutional Church. But my question is—Can exclusivism and inclusivism be counted adequate Christian responses to the intrusive fact of religious diversity today?

²⁶¹ James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, (Paulist Press, New York: 1999), p. 14

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 15

John Hick's personal experience of working in England among different religious people led him to begin a long process of working out a suitable theory to account for the diversity of religious paths in the world today.²⁶³ Hick argued for a "theo-centric" theology of religions, where God alone and not Christ or the Christian Church is given pride of place at the center of things. Fredericks, while speaking about Hick's theo-centric view religions, finds with it a tangled knot of complications. He looks at the problem Hicks' view posed for the traditional Christian understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus and the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation. Another problem, Fredericks thinks, Hick had to solve is how we can know that there is one divine reality behind all the great religions of the world.²⁶⁴

Uniqueness of Christ in the Context of Dialogue

M. Amaladoss states, "in dialogue with other religions, the claim of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ has presented a problem while some theologians argue that it is not a problem for Christians in Asia in the context of dialogue."²⁶⁵ Aloysius Pieris says that that the Church takes refuge "in a more convenient kind of uniqueness which she spells out in terms of the theandric (God-Man-Savior) model which makes no sense in many of our cultures where it often evokes the image of one of the many cosmic forces rather than of a Personal and Absolute Creator-Redeemer. Moreover, this model, utterly untranslatable into some Asian languages, suffers also from an ontology before which soteriology fades out into

²⁶³ Ibid., P. 37

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Pp. 44-45

²⁶⁵ M. Amaladoss, *Interreligious Dialogue: A View from Asia*, (Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore: 1988), p. 216. Amaladoss says that: The uniqueness of Christ is often presented as a burning issue in the context of dialogue. I think that in India the person and role of Christ is not a problem. The real problem is the attempt of the Church to monopolize Christ."

insignificance.”²⁶⁶ Even though bishops in India are aware that similar ‘uniqueness claims’ in some form or other exist in other religions too, they do not make any compromise in their faith on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one mediator of God’s salvation in history.

Wilfred looks at the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as a sensitive issue of great importance for its repercussions on the theology of religions and the praxis of dialogue. In the earlier decades, Indian theology hoped to maintain openness toward other religions while affirming at the same time the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. But subsequently, the concrete experience of dialogue showed the difficulties in reconciling these two things. For, in the eyes of the people of other faiths, the assertion of the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus Christ does not respect their experience of divine savior in their religious traditions. Each divine savior, at least in the experience of that savior’s devotees, has an incomparable uniqueness.²⁶⁷ The language of exclusive or absolute uniqueness appears to them as asserting unilaterally Christian faith without entering into similar experience and faith-claims of the people of other religious traditions.

Wilfred introduces another issue when he states that the use of the term uniqueness even in the ambit of the Christian community has to necessarily pay attention to the distinction between the historical Jesus and the trans-historical mystery of the universal Christ, the *Logos*.²⁶⁸ Today, Indian Catholic theologians engage in balancing and relating the reality of the historical Jesus with the mystery of transcendent Christ and the concern of dialogue. If every religion begins to discuss this issue of uniqueness there will be no end to it. Kavunkal Jacob, an Indian theologian, while speaking about the Christological considerations

²⁶⁶ Aloysius Pieris, “Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm,” *Voices from the Third World*, XV (December 1992), P. 186

²⁶⁷ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 235

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

said, "The existing trend in the religious scene of India is to reject "an exclusive claim of any religious tradition as far as ultimate truths are concerned."²⁶⁹ A point that can help bring all religions together is the attitude of Jesus who made God known: Making known God, doing God's will and establishing God's Kingdom is the aim of Jesus' mission and that should be the aim of all Christians. Alangaram, while speaking of the role of the Indian church in future in this pluralist context, says that the Church has to dialogue with other religions and serve mankind by revealing the unconditional love and ever abiding mercy of God made manifest in Jesus Christ the Savior.²⁷⁰

IV. Conclusion

Alangaram points out, in the First Plenary Assembly itself, the main focus of the Asian bishops was "the building up of a truly local Church."²⁷¹ It meant to make the message and the life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of Asian people so that they may know God's design for this world and respond positively to the grace of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit, and make the design of God reach its fulfillment. Hence the Church has to dialogue with the great religious traditions of the people and dialogue with the poor and Cultures of Asia. At this historical juncture, the Indian Church's mission is filled with the pastoral implications of inculturation, dialogue, and liberation. She looks at Jesus for her inspiration and guidance so that the Kingdom of Christ now present in mystery grows in the Indian subcontinent through the power of God.

²⁶⁹ Kavunkal Jacob, "Ministry and Mission, Christological Considerations," *Vidyajyoti*, LVI, (December 1992), p. 649

²⁷⁰ A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, P. 184

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, P. 204

Jacques Dupuis, a Belgian, who has spent much of his life as a Jesuit priest serving the Church in India, wants to move beyond the notion that the aspirations of all religious believers are fulfilled in Christianity without jettisoning Christianity's core affirmation of Jesus Christ as the unique savior of all. In this respect Dupuis wants to address the weakness of fulfillment theologies without falling into the error of religious relativism that marks the pluralist model proposed by philosophers like John Hick.²⁷² Fredericks also, while discussing the drawbacks of the pluralist model and theology of religions, states that they reject Christianity's traditional claim that Jesus Christ is one and only savior of all.²⁷³ Since, in the pluralist paradigm, Christianity is but one interpretation of an ultimately unnameable transcendent reality, and every religion has its own interpretation of this transcendent reality, there is nothing unique or normative about Jesus Christ. Since it is a denial of the uniqueness of *Christ-events* to hold the view that all religions are of equal value as separate paths to salvation, and Christ is but one way to name this salvation. In contrast to the pluralist approach, I hold the view of Dupuis who makes a double affirmation: Christians must continue to affirm the centrality of Jesus Christ in the salvation of all, and at the same time, they must recognize the soteriological value of the other religious paths:

Jesus Christ is indeed the constitutive Savior of humankind, and the Christ event is the cause of the salvation of all human beings; but this does not prevent the other traditions from serving as "mediations" of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ for their followers within God's design for humankind.²⁷⁴

²⁷² For the pluralist model, see John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Divine* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

²⁷³ James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York: 2004), p. 6

²⁷⁴ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontations to Dialogue*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), p.253

In making this double affirmation Dupuis is drawing on not only the lived experience of his local church in India but also the teachings of John Paul II. When he mentions “mediations,” Dupuis has *Redemptoris Hominis* in mind, where the pope introduces his key idea that other religious traditions may be looked on as “participated forms of meditation.”²⁷⁵ The centrality of the Church’s hope in the kingdom of God forms an important part of Dupuis’ understanding of other religions. In this respect his theological contribution has much in common with that of other Asian theologians and bishops. Asian theologians who are “regnocentric,” or centered on Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God, recognize that all human beings who work for justice and harmony—signs of the kingdom of God announced by Jesus Christ—are heirs to God’s kingdom and thus saved. Asian/Indian theologians focus on the elements within other religions that promote an “integral liberation” and therefore call for Christians to collaborate with other religious believers in the building of the society that is just and harmonious.

Following the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the various statements of the FABC, regnocentric theologians emphasize that the reign of God cannot be identified with the Church unambiguously. The universality of the kingdom of God requires Christians to recognize the kingdom is present wherever Gospel values are present. For Dupuis, Christians should expect to find the kingdom emerging outside the boundaries of the Church:

The religious traditions contribute, in a mysterious way, to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world. They exercise, for their own members, a certain mediation of the kingdom—doubtless different form that which is operative in the Church—even if it is difficult to define this mediation with theological precision.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Hominis*, (March 4, 1979), No. 5

²⁷⁶ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) p. 207

People might ask, If the Church cannot be simply identified with the Kingdom, is membership in the Church necessary for salvation? Dupuis answers this question by way of recommendation to avoid two extremes: One extreme is to place the necessity and universality of the Church on the same level as that of Christ, which would be tantamount to a return to the outdated principle “*outside the Church, no salvation.*” The second is to completely minimize the necessity and universality of the Church, as if to suggest that the church is the means of salvation intended only for its members.²⁷⁷ He also finds an alternative to these positions in the conciliar documents and in the teaching of John Paul II. *Lumen Gentium* teaches, “Those who have not yet received the gospel are ordained, in various ways, to the people of God.”²⁷⁸ John Paul II teaches that those who follow other religious paths can be saved by “a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”²⁷⁹ In my view, similar to that of Dupuis, instead of “belonging” to the church, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and people of others faiths are “oriented” toward the Church as the fullness of the means of salvation.

Now the time has come for the Indian Churches to discover themselves as truly Indian. The Indian identity demands from the Churches that they are Indian in their way of thinking, praying, living, and communicating their own Christ-experience to others. The Indian churches will have their future only through adopting a pluralist theology and discovery of themselves as the churches *of* India. I believe strongly, the Indian church without losing its Christian identity, in collaboration with the brothers and sisters of other faiths, can realize

²⁷⁷ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) p. 347

²⁷⁸ Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, No.16

²⁷⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, (Dec. 7, 1990), No. 10

the FABC'S proposed pastoral plan of building the Kingdom of God in Asia. They can follow *the Christ of Indian People* and bear witness to him, as he is the way to inculturation, dialogue and liberation and salvation. Empowering the poor and oppressed for their total liberation and leading them to Jesus for salvation is the true identity and mission in India today.

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CONCLUSION

I. Struggles and Handicaps in Emerging Authentic Indian Theology

From start to finish, this thesis has been about emerging Indian theology. Asian theologies are marked by their effort to articulate Christian theology that is *of* Asia versus merely *in* Asia. In the words of Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris, an authentic Asian theology emerges only if Christianity is baptized in the “Jordan of Asian religion” and the “Calvary of Asian poverty.”²⁸⁰ This double and nonexclusive concern for inculturation and liberation marks many of the theological developments emerging from Asia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I have discussed in the first Chapter the history of Christianity and the urgent need for an Indian theology in the first chapter.

Even though Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself, we cannot speak of the proper development of Indian theology until the recent times. The only significant exceptions are Roberto De Nobili, Raimundo Panikkar and Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya who made their early attempts to develop a theology for India. When looking back at the history of the Indian Church, one would naturally ask—How is it that no Christian theology emerged in the past 19 centuries? There have been many struggles, hurdles and handicaps against the efforts made to develop a theology for India. Such obstacles are not only a matter of the past but also some of them continue to exist and inhibit the development of Indian theology, states Wilfred.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes, with CD-ROM*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2005), P. 182

²⁸¹ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 236

When one critically examines the reasons for this state of affairs in the past as well as in the present we would find the following results: the flaws in the missionaries' practice and policy, anti-religions and anti-cultures attitude, lack of deep encounter with other religious traditions, the Western theological baggage, and misinterpretations and misunderstandings about Indian theology.

Missionaries' Sole Concern for Conversion, and Anti-culture and Anti-religion Attitude

The missionaries were engrossed in the work of conversion and engaged in the care of the pastoral needs of the new converts. Theology did not become part of their concerns and they did not promote or entertain any theological reflection. Wilfred explains that the situation during the time of the colonial missionaries was "not conducive to any original and creative theological enterprise."²⁸² Even when the indigenous clergy began to be recruited and formed, the theological education was confined to the bare minimum by the missionaries. The missionary orientation and attitude were very much opposed to what later proved to be two important sources for Indian theologizing—Indian cultural heritage and religious traditions. With these wellsprings of an Indian theology having been blocked by ignorance and deep-rooted prejudices, the only theology that dominated the scene was that of scholasticism and Counter-reformation. Since the Western theology imported was so self-contained it hardly permitted any opening for local cultures and religions.

The Western Theological Baggage and Its Fulfillment Theory

Wilfred also points out that the Western theology always viewed the other religious traditions and cultures within the framework of fulfillment theory, according to which other cultures and religions are there only to be fulfilled and crowned by the Christian

²⁸² Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 239

dispensation.²⁸³ With such stance and approach, one could hardly imagine a deep *encounter* between Indian religious traditions and Christianity to take place. It is another reason Wilfred has in his list to answer why it took so long for an Indian theology to come of age: The contents of theology and the method followed and imparted to the candidates for priesthood were completely divorced from the concrete socio-political realities of local people.²⁸⁴ The imported theology of Scholasticism and the Enlightenment stamp had no concern for the life-questions and daily realities of the Indian people,²⁸⁵ and the historical context of India. Even when the Indian church came under indigenous leadership, there was not much change in the perspective of their theology since they were schooled in the Western theological tradition and molded by colonial values and tastes, thought-patterns and way of life. Thus the prospects of an authentic Indian theology emerging until recent times appeared to be bleak.

Misinterpretations and Misunderstanding about Indian Theology

It is very unfortunate that there have been so much misinterpretation and misunderstanding about Indian theology. These are to be clarified. Allegations are made that Indian theologians maintain that all religions are equal, and therefore one could choose for oneself the type of religion, as in a shopping mall, that suits him/her best. I do not deny that a few theologians may hold this view but that is not fair to generalize it. Wilfred refutes this

²⁸³ Ibid., p.240

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Bidyut Mohanty, "Orissa Famine of 1866: Demographic and Economic Consequences," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, nos. 1&2, January 2-9 (1993), Pp. 55-63. In ancient and medieval times India was known for great prosperity but colonial times we see India was under the grip of starvation, malnutrition and catastrophic famines. It is frightening to think that the tragic Orissa famine of 1866 struck down one million people; millions of people succumbed to death in Bengal famine. And yet, such tragic experiences of people affecting their very life and survival found no place in the theology of those times.

by saying that it is far from the truth that this simplistic position is the dominant view among the Indian theologians. He also states that one of the reasons for this misunderstanding is “the tendency to interpret and judge the Indian position from the theology of religions and categories developed in the West.”²⁸⁶ In the West, in the name of ‘*the one and universal*,’ the specificity of the various religious traditions are trivialized or submerged. For Pieris, an authentic Christology for Asia must speak of the poverty of the Indians and the religiousness of the non-Christians religions. He insists, in a continent where less than 3 percent of the population is Christian, Asian theology must recognize and take seriously the soteriological implications of non-Christian religions.²⁸⁷ I found, in emerging with an Indian theology based on the ground realities of India, it was necessary to have a suitable methodology to emerge with a new contextual Indian theology. In the light of the FABC documents Fr. Alangaram has formulated a theological methodology with six stages: Immersion, Suspicion, Evolution, Action, Collaboration and Transformation. In the process of its development, this methodology that reflects the Indian context, showed me a clear and definite direction in which I had to develop an Indian contextual theology (Chapter one).

In India, pluralism is approached first and foremost as a fact of daily existence This reality calls for an appropriate praxis. It is not a *concept* as the West looks at it. Only a lack of knowledge and failure to see the nuances of the Indian perspectives and approaches can lead to an easy equation of Indian theologians’ idea of pluralism with polytheism or pantheism. Failing to take into consideration the realities of plurality of religion and diversity of cultures in an emerging Indian theology would be self-denial in developing an authentic Indian

²⁸⁶ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 236

²⁸⁷ Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes, with CD-ROM*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2005), P. 183

theology. This clear understanding of the context of Indian church led me to trace out the two main trends of theology: Theology of Experience *anubhva* and Theology of Praxis *liberation*.

4. Recent CDF-6 members meeting with 29 Indian bishops and 23 Indian theologians

A team from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) led by its prefect Cardinal William Levada met with a group of theologians and bishops of India last Jan. 16-19, 2011 in Bangalore. In the closed-door symposium many theologians presented Indian church's struggle in presenting Christ as the "unique and only savior" in a multi-religious context, where 29 Indian bishops and the six-member CDF team were present. The discussions reportedly centered on inculturation, pluralism, and the unique role of Christ and the Church in salvation. In India, some influential theologians have argued that Christianity is one of many different routes to salvation and truth. This argument appeals to India's tradition of religious pluralism, but falls short of Catholic orthodoxy.²⁸⁸ There was an atmosphere of cordiality, openness and mutual respect in seeking the truth together.

Cardinal Gracias, Mumbai archbishop, explained the religious, social, cultural and economic situation of India where Christians form only 2.3 percent of 1.2 billion Indians. He also urged the Vatican to appreciate and encourage the work of theologians to communicate Christ to those "who have a different world-view, religious and philosophical convictions from that of the traditional Christian world-view." Jesuit theologian Father Errol D'Lima, in his paper, explained there could not be universal understanding of doing theology because of the challenge of pluralism. He stressed the need to appreciate Christian traditions,

²⁸⁸ cf. <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=8989>

proclaiming the Christian message in the civic life and the need for accelerating dialogue as understood by Vatican II.

Another Jesuit theologian, Father Michael Amaladoss, in his paper said since "the Church is not bound to any particular culture it can draw from cultures elements compatible with its faith." His paper also pointed out that all theology is contextual and "this is also true of Indian Christian theology." Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune, who heads the CBCI's Doctrine and Theology Commission, wants theologians to consider the "faith of the entire people of God" in doing theology. Archbishop Luis Ladaria, CDF secretary, in his paper asked theologians to "affirm the faith of the Church rather than personal opinions." However, mere repetition of what the Church teaches does not offer a service to the Church, he explained. The theologian, according to him, is called to have "a humble audacity at the same time openness to objective discussion, fraternal dialogue and readiness to modify one's own opinions."²⁸⁹

II. Contemporary Scenario in India

From the recent closed-door theologians' colloquium led by CDF prefect Cardinal William Levada, it is clear that the situation has not changed in any appreciable way even today in the understanding between the West and Indian theologians. The lack of an enlightened approach on the part of the overwhelming majority of the Church-leaders is one of the main reasons for this state of affairs. Anyone should be able to see that the present day experiences of India, its socio-political conditions and its religious traditions are still throwing up many theologically pertinent questions, and responding to those questions in

²⁸⁹ <http://www.ucanews.com/2011/01/26/indian-theologians-discuss-uniqueness-of-christ>

openness is bound to result in a creative Indian theology. The present functioning of the Indian Church and its mode of the exercise of authority are such that many theologically and pastorally relevant issues go unheeded. It is very obvious that there is a close connection between the quality of theological thinking and the mode of the exercise of authority in the Church. Wilfred, from his experience being an insider of the Vatican, states that “where orthodoxy, power, control become the overreaching concern, theological thinking is weakened. Only in an atmosphere of freedom can an Indian theology—for that matter any theology—emerge and grow.²⁹⁰ Hardly one could see a fresh and bold thinking in the Catholic Church in India until recent time as much as one would see in the Western churches. The clericalism and centralization of thought have characterized the life of the church in such a way that the Catholic community in India has not produced lay theologians like Chenchiah, Chakkarai and M.M. Thomas from other Christian churches (Chapter two), and the effort to develop a contextual Indian theology enabled me not only to find Indian Church’s identity and Mission but also to find ways to live her identity and fulfill her mission (Chapter three).

III. Evaluation of the Essential presuppositions in Indian Theology

In spite of the many handicaps and hurdles in its direction, one could still see some fresh stirrings of theological thinking coming mostly from the periphery, and not from theological institutions or from the professional theologians.²⁹¹ These are some of the fresh stirrings of theological thinking based on the essential presuppositions.

²⁹⁰ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 241

²⁹¹ Cf. ‘People’s Theology’ was the title of one of the issues of *Jeevadhara* in the year 1992. It contains some of the papers and deliberations made at a seminar conducted in Kottayam on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of *Jeevadhara*.

First, the recognition of the religious traditions of India as part of God's universal plan of salvation is a decisive point whose consequences could be seen in the whole approach to theology. That is to say, Christian theology in India starts from the basic consciousness that the Christian community is a recipient of a double-heritage: Indian and Judeo-Christian. Based on this presupposition, a number of comparative studies between Christian and Hindu traditions were made.

Second, this study signals a shift from this religio-philosophical approach to an experiential and existential approach: The crucial question here is not whether what Christianity holds and teaches is *also* found in other religions. It is not even a question of adaptation and inculturating a well-defined Christianity into Indian cultural world, but rather it is whether we can re-interpret Christian faith through our Indian experience and our cultural and religious heritage. Wilfred says this is of utmost important from a hermeneutical point of view.²⁹² He explains it by saying that instead of looking for something corresponding in Indian tradition as God and Man, one person with two natures and One God in three persons, one can try to express the mystery of Jesus in terms of *guru*, *Satyagrathi*, *jivanmukta* or *avatar*. This is very similar to African theology, which sees Jesus as ancestor or proto-ancestor or as chief. This approach is different from looking for Indian terms to express the Chalcedonian Christological formula. Wilfred further believes that if God manifests himself in and through Indian religious and historical experiences, as believed by many Indian theologians, these traditions and experiences are the concrete ways through which Indians can experience and understand what God has revealed in Jesus Christ. So, the Indian socio-political reality and the history of the Indian people are to be taken seriously

²⁹² Wilfred, "Dogma and Inculturation," *Vidyajyoti*, 53 (1989), Pp. 345-353

into consideration in interpreting Christian faith.

Third, we have explored a comprehensive approach. Since the majority of Indian people follow Hinduism as their religion, it is natural that Indian theology has inclined to have the Hindu religious tradition as its chief support. There are few countries in the world similar to India, which have such a wide variety of languages, cultures and religions. For Wilfred, this composite nature of Indian culture, tradition and history must be seriously taken into account in theologizing because it has become an urgent necessity with the equation of a Hindu nationalist identity *Hindutva* as Indian identity.²⁹³ Hence it is critically vital for Indian theology not to lean exclusively on any one tradition, but to be truly pluralistic in its approach and use of resources.

Fourth, Indian theology has started moving in the direction of *integral theology*—a theology that will overcome dichotomies and will reflect on various issues from a holistic perspective. Till now the theological enterprise is confined to a group of intellectuals and academicians and not become truly people's theology. Wilfred believes that the people-based paradigm for Indian theology is indispensable to overcome the gap between theory and real life-situations.²⁹⁴ The moment theology becomes *people-based* it will also become automatically *integral*—comprising all dimensions of life and not only the intellectual aspect. Only in this way, Wilfred thinks, a holistic or integral theology can be concretely realized.²⁹⁵

Today, Indian theology has also reached the second ring of theologians who are not missiologists, but teaching theology in the Western theological faculties. They also, of late,

²⁹³ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*, p. 245

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

have come realize the contribution Indian theology can make for the interpretation of Christian message. Wilfred states that the real problem is with the third inner ring of theologians who continue to deceive themselves that the Western theology has universal application, and that it is *the* point of reference for all other theologies.²⁹⁶ He further says that these hard-core theologians' walls of securities are beginning to tumble like the walls of Jericho. He also believes that the realization is growing that no particular theology can *the* theology; that every people, every nation has its own way of living, expressing and theologically reflecting on the Christian faith.²⁹⁷ In the way that Latin American theology of liberation has already shaken the assumptions and foundations of traditional Western theology, emerging Indian and Asian theologies are going to be even a greater challenge.

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²⁹⁶ Ibid., P. 247

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

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