



THEOLOGIZING

IN THE ERA OF KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Edited by
DR. MATHAI KADAVIL OIC
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in the Era of Knowledge Society

Proceedings of the 9th Biennial Conference of Indian Leuven
Alumni Association Meeting (ILAAM)

6th – 8th February, 2018 at Niveditha, Aluva



Edited by
Mathai Kadavil OIC

Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society

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Vice-Chancellor

MESSAGE

It is with a sense of delight that I convey this message as ILAAM Conference on Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society, is publishing the proceedings of the conference. It is indeed timely to remember the commitment and hard work of the organizers and the commendable successes of the past seminars organized. I am looking forward to see the proceedings of the as ILAAM Conference on Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society getting published in near future.

It is an appreciable fact that the Conference has resolved to focus on Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society, a topic that deserves attention in the current scenario which could successfully initiate a discourse for the betterment of lives. I am sure that ILAAM Conference on Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society, will keep on contributing more effectively in order to achieve the ultimate goal for which it was organized. I hope the presentations, discussions and other activities that are going to be held during that period will be of great help and will definitely leave new milestones.

I hope that the extra step taken by the organizers of conference in bringing in the alumni as the key speakers shall be a great stimulus for the participating institutions.

I convey my greetings and good wishes on this happy occasion and also wish you all the best for the future too.

Prof (Dr) Sabu Thomas
Vice Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi University

Introduction

Interesting to study the logistics of thought. It started with the journey of foragers. Later, as they settled down with agricultural farms and tamed animals, they created a new story of civilizations. Exchange of ideas between civilizations and jotting down their memoirs was another leap forward. Sacred Books, myths, philosophy, astrology, medicine and so on were deposited as treasuries of wisdom. Invention of printing revolutionized the logistics of thought. The critical thinking of Renaissance and the spread of education contributed a lot in refining and rebuilding the pathways of wisdom. The invention of computers and internet exploded with information at our finger tips. The researches to overcome the limitation of our brains through dataism is writing new stories. Today the exponential growth of knowledge goes beyond all estimation.

Theology also has a similar story. The Holy Bible narrates the story of foragers and civilizations. It has the story of vast variety of knowledge. The transition of Christian faith from the Judaistic contexts to hellenistic, semitic and to other cultures narrate the story of the growth of Christian Philosophy. The critical questions posed from time to time in particular of renaissance helped the Church to refine and to redefine her philosophy and theology. At the advent of modernity and post-modernity, theology took new turns incorporating various branches of theology. Today, we are living in the Era of Knowledge Society. It is in this context that ILAAM 2018 has taken up the theme Theologizing in the era of knowledge society. The papers presented in the conference is collected in this volume for further study and discussions.

Mathijs Lamberigts who gave the keynote address to the Conference set the agenda for theologians in dialoguing with the world. He has drawn our attention to the critical thinking posed by enlightenment and modernity which widened the horizons of theology. He also demarked the methodological distinctions needed in the study of theology and science. For him, theological reflection should engage in “finding the meaning of knowledge, which is always progressing.”

Abraham Mulammootil who presented the theme of the conference called our attention to explore Christian response in the era of knowledge society. He outlined the exponential growth of knowledge which triggers

development of society and its evolutionary step towards Meta-intelligence. The challenging role of theologians is to study the impact of Meta-intelligence and machine super intelligence in the decision making. He set the model of Pope Francis who is engaged in responding to the new situations from a Christian perspective for our theologizing.

Martin Sebastian Kallungal drew our attention to the “The Enduring Relevance of Ignorance” in the knowledge society. He started his enquiry analyzing the meaning of knowledge from an epistemological perspective. In particular, he focused on the epistemic dimension of ignorance. The main thrust of the paper lies in his reflection on the relevance of ignorance in dealing with Justice, Moral excuse, Ignorance and Spiritual growth. He concluded by drawing our attention to the tree of knowledge and the tree of life set in the Garden of Eden recalling the perennial tension between the pursuit for knowledge and life.

Mathew Chandrankunnel’s “Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality and Virtual reality: - A Continuum” focused on the meaning of reality at different levels. He critically examined how the meaning of reality is changing from classical physics to Quantum Mechanics and later to Augmented and Virtual realities. He draws our attention to the new scenario where people are striving to enter into a level of experience with newly invented technical devices.

G Cosmon Arokyaraj’s “God-talk and God-walk through the eyes of the Marginalized Dalits” is a brilliant attempt to do the God-talk, process of theologizing, and God-walk, the experience of God’s presence, through the eyes of the marginalized. He draws inspiration from the life and experience of the marginalized people in understanding God who is walking with them in history. It is a challenging invitation to learn the life, culture and experience of the marginalized and to recognize their basic identity and dignity in developing theology.

Paul Pulikkan draws our attention to another dimension from the social fabric of India through “Church’s Response to Hindutva: Reflections from Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya.” The hindutva movement calling for Hindu supremacy is moving with the hidden agenda of making India a Hindu nation. In this context, Brahmabandhap Upadhyay, who called himself Hindu Catholic is set as an example to assert the Indian Christian Identity and proposes a new ecclesial model of interrelated communities.

It is an invitation to Christians to knit themselves to the cultural fabric of India.

Sr Helen's "A Network Model for the Hierarchical Church" is a response to the yearning of human hearts towards an egalitarian society where hierarchical domination cease to exist. In her attempt she draws our attention to the real meaning of hierarchy as divine-human hierarchy. She proposes to deconstruct the hierarchy of domination found in the life of the Church through a network model rooted in the life of the Trinity.

Finally **Thomas Padiyath** is making an attempt to draw "The Fault Line in the Knowledge Era and theologizing." The abundance of knowledge available in the era of knowledge tempts people to relativize with the other. Relativism also found way in theology and there are different attempts cautioning the danger of relativism. In this process it is proposed that the theologians have a great responsibility in deciding truth claims.

Let me thank all who were behind organizing the IX ILAAM Conference from 6 to 8 February, 2018 at Niveditha, Aluva. In particular I acknowledge with gratitude Prof Mathijs Lamberigts, the then dean of the faculty of theology of KU Leuven, and the other faculty member for their enduring support to ILAAM.

With gratitude I remember Prof Sabu Thomas, Vice Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam and a research collaborator in the faculty of Polymer Science of KU Leuven and thus part of ILAAM. He has graciously inaugurated the IX ILAAM Conference and sent a message to this book.

The papers presented at the Conference and later sending articles to this volume by the eminent member speakers of ILAAM deserves special thanks.

Let me also most sincerely acknowledge the services rendered by George Rajmohan IMS who painstakingly contributed in refining the language of the book, Fr Shaiju Mathew OIC and Shani for designing the cover and setting the pages. Thanks also to Fr Varghese Thykoottathil and team of Bethany Press for their timely service and to St Mary's Malankara Seminary Publication who has generously agreed to publish this volume.

Dr Mathai Kadavil OIC
President, ILAAM

Keynote Address

Dr Mathijs Lamberigts

By way of introduction to this important conference and the issues at stake, I would first like to share with you a topic which is very dear to me, the problems the Church constantly had and has when dialoguing with the world. The Church puts itself under the authority of Scripture, the revealed word of God. She rightly does so, but, I would argue, this can never be by excluding progress on the basis of sciences, sciences which are always human sciences, thus sciences which are developed by human beings, who are themselves to be qualified (and recognized) as images of God. In other words, the Church should be careful when distrusting sciences and should do it on the basis of knowledge of the dossier, not on the basis of prejudices. For I do think that everybody knows cases where sciences, because they are driven by human beings' ambitions, offer results that are untrustworthy, but this is not the same as a kind of a priori opposition. Distrust is not the same as critical attitude.

1. On Bible and Doctrine

Let me explain this idea, taking an example about Bible Study. At the time of the Enlightenment, natural scientists and others remarked that some Biblical insights were not confirmed by the discoveries in natural sciences. The approach developed in natural sciences was soon adopted by historians who wanted to explain

the Bible historically and ‘scientifically’, thus not taking into account its divine, inspirational character, for this is something that escapes such approaches. This led to the birth of the historical-critical method of Bible reading, a method which took into account insights as offered by rationalistic philosophy, Biblical archaeology, and the comparative religious sciences. This approach, by its very nature, excluded what is not measurable, justifiable. This is not a critique on that method, it is a side line observation: one cannot criticize a method for not discovering God when the approach is about human beings and their behaviour. In any case, the approach would become very popular in the second half of the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th century, Leo XIII showed some hesitation with regard to the use of this historical-critical approach. In 1893, he published the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, in which he described the need and value of the study of the Bible, for this was indeed the soul of theology. In his encyclical, the Pope criticized the so-called rationalistic approach which, making use of methods available in natural sciences, read the Bible as a mere historical book, thus neglecting its inspirational character and divine authorship. Moreover, even although Scripture was infallible, it was only part of supernatural revelation: “(...) supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, is contained both in unwritten Tradition, and in written Books” (PD 1). The interesting point here is that unwritten Tradition is put on the same level as Scripture. It will be clear that such position can become problematic when disagreements appear: if the unwritten Tradition receives the same authority as the written Scripture, the way to arbitrariness is opened. In any case, such a view does not take into account that authority is invoked on the basis of non-verifiable claims.

Distrust towards the historical-critical method was clearly at stake in the so-called Modernist Crisis of the beginning of the 20th century, in a sense a clash between clear dogma’s from above and bottom

up searching methods¹. The Catholic exegete, Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), had questioned the idea that God was the author of the Bible, not in the sense that the Bible was not inspired by God, but in the sense that God had “written” the Bible himself. Furthermore, Loisy was of the opinion that the Pentateuch was not the work of Moses, for Moses was describing his own life and his passing away in the Pentateuch. Genesis I-V could not be considered as a literal, historical story of historical events. Scriptural doctrine was characterized by development and evolution. God revealed himself but through human language, per definition situated in time and space. Thus, Loisy questioned the absoluteness of the concept “divine inspiration” as a kind of one way direct communication from heaven to earth.

Needless to say that Loisy’s positions had repercussions for the nature of Sacred Scripture, its inspiration, and the authorship of its books; Sacred Scripture often seen as a message given by God without any interruption between the messenger, the message and the receiver. Loisy’s reading of Scripture considered (at least in the beginning²) truth as a dynamic concept: Biblical truth was constantly in the making, and thus constantly related to concrete contexts. Pius X explicitly condemned these new approaches as the summary of all heresies (cfr. *Pascendidominicigregis*, September 8, 1907), for, in his perspective, truth was meta-historical and thus unchangeable³.

¹ One should add that some of these searching methods were not only searching for knowledge but also for arguments against religion.

² After his condemnation, Loisy maintained that he had held his outspoken positions long before being suspected, a position which, on the basis of the preserved material, is not correct.

³ The problem with meta-historical truth is that it is not accessible for human beings, because they live in concrete histories, are changeable and constantly change, thus contributing to constant change of historical circumstances.

2. Theology and Sciences: Methodological Distinctions

I will not discuss the further developments in this controversy. However, for this conference, the debate might still have some inspirational validity. Must research in the sciences (positive and human sciences) serve and underpin doctrine given from heaven or is doctrine something which is constantly on the move, to be discovered, to be questioned, to be clarified? From a methodological point of view, the Modernist controversy is very interesting: are Biblical scholars obliged to respect and support the space given by the Highest Authority, or should the Highest Authority reinterpret doctrine in light of what is offered by research on Biblical texts⁴. This question also has its impact for other disciplines, but does not request an either/or argument. The Big Bang-theory was the result of the research of a Belgian priest, Georges Lemaître, a man who time and again emphasized the difference between results based on scientific research and one's faith. In other words, one is dealing with different discourses, and one thus must respect these differences in approach. The holding together of faith and reason is an important Christian characteristic, but one should respect their relative autonomies.

Furthermore, what causes unrest in one period, can be welcomed in another period. At the time of Pope Pius X, the new approaches caused unrest and distrust. At the time of the Council, many of the "Modernist" insights were welcomed as right and refreshing. Thanks to the support of strong institutions (Catholic universities, schools of theology and religious orders), the contributions made by theologians were a defining characteristic of Vatican II.

Fifty years after Vatican II, theology finds itself in a fragile and controversial position, at least in academic contexts, dominated by the presuppositions of natural sciences. In fact, many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences are questioned with regard to

⁴ This term is often used when speaking of the pope.

their “scientific” profile (sociology and psychology often long for the “hard” science approach, the latter forgetting that it was a child of philosophy and often depreciating its own “clinical” aspect), but this does not really help us. If theology continues to remain relevant, at least the following questions must be answered. On the anthropological level: where does it belong in culture, society, universities, and the sciences? On the theological and spiritual level: how can theologians do justice to the word of God today, respecting the needs of Christians and the societies they live in. How can theologians respect the discourse of their discipline in such a way that it does not contradict the scientific approaches, but also does justice to human beings’ aspirations. Lemaître never gave up science and faith, because he respected the independent approaches of the two and did not consider them as contradictory. Theologians should do the same.

Vatican II set up a process one can qualify as a path to reconciliation. Overcoming a long tradition that defined truth in hostile opposition to other positions, the Council expressed truth respecting other religions and other worldviews. Such a dialogical approach in the search for truth resulted and results in new questions. In particular, the theology of religions but also the dialogue with natural sciences have become an inevitable but not endangering challenge for the Church. Beyond the various concrete questions involved in it, this new attitude shows first and foremost that Christ, after the way, the truth and the life (John 14,6), can help us move forward on the road to reconciliation and this with all men and women of good will. It might well be that in a time of growing scientific specialization, resulting in growing fragmentation, and growing globalization, resulting in homogenization, theology might be one of the academic branches that would be able to offer answers to a fragmentation that promotes ego-centric or ethnocentric self-interest. Theological discourse should concentrate on a story that counts for all, holds together all, makes sense for all. At the same

time, theology should concentrate on a story that does respect the differences between human beings and their needs: techno-scientific approaches, globalized economy, and the new media run the risk of creating a “theoretical” homogenization that “forgets” the differences in needs, personally, in communities, regions, nations, continents. Theology should promote the uniqueness of every human being as an image (and likeness) of God, thus being a constant critic of all and everything that suppresses the other.

3. The Self-Understanding of Theology

Theology understands itself as *scientia Dei*. Its object is the reality of God, insofar as He reveals Himself. Its method is *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith that seeks understanding, or reason enlightened by faith (*credo ut intelligam*)⁵. At the same time, even the biblical canon acknowledges that “No one has ever seen God,” (Jn 1:18), and in this respect believers, atheists and physical scientists agree. So, if God is not part of the visible, tangible reality, how can He be the subject of science? Moreover, theology presupposes faith: how can it still be a science that pretends to pursue ‘unbiased’ knowledge? How does the knowledge of faith relate to the knowledge of science? To answer, we must be prepared to defend what is ‘reasonable’, what is ‘rational’ and what, in fact, counts as ‘scientific’? Moreover, we should not forget that these are historical concepts, and here Christians should feel at ease, for Jn. 1:18 continues with Christ, incarnated and part of history. However, the questions mentioned here must be taken seriously if theologians want to be taken seriously themselves.

Theology as an academic discipline must offer verifiable results. This is clear in the case of exegesis, Church history, and applied ethics. But it should also be the case in systematic theology,

⁵Needless to say that one also needs faith in order to do research in natural sciences. Without axioms accepted by all, one cannot do interchangeable and thus research, controlled by the peers.

especially when dealing with God, the Trinity and the like, where principles such as analogy or proportionality, belonging to a different vocabulary, have proved to be suitable.

What people say about God is said by human beings, but these human beings are images of God and thus not completely unfamiliar with God. Revelation as a communication of God is perceived by human beings as meaningful, truthful and right. Theology examines what communication and interpretation mean and do, how they interact. Theologians of all religions and denominations must do this, simply because the overwhelming majority of human beings are faithful and they are the object of reflection. Reflection on the meaning of life in the context of communication is a core business of theologians, and should be universally transferable (not in the sense that all agree but in the sense that all understand in a way that they can rationally accept or refuse). The first step is the knowing and on that level one can find much agreement. The next, necessary, but more complicated step is understanding, for here humanities (and by implication theology) bring in interpretation, explicit or implicit rankings and the like. Hermeneutics must respect facts, but facts without interpretation are nothing comparable to a collection of stamps. Human beings are more than the sum of data, for they are matter *and* spirit, nature *and* history. It should be clear that theologians need much knowledge (they must know the data) but also tools to understand. In short, the reduction of rationality and science to positive sciences and verifiable knowledge is merely a reduction of human beings to data. Humanities and social sciences do more; they respect findings and results, and reflect upon the questions and challenges that these sciences offer to theology.

In passing, it should be said that theology in its different disciplines meets many other disciplines of humanities and social sciences: Biblical studies has to do with linguistics, history, philology, and theological ideas. Pastoral theology dialogues with sociologists, psychologists (of religion), anthropologists, and decision makers

(in and outside ecclesiastical structures); moral theologians and systematic theologians talk with doctors, philosophers, political scientists, business schools and the like, while Church historians meet a whole range of approaches, methods and the like.

In other words, theology is a house with many windows open to dialogue with other disciplines. Self-understanding should not be reduced to self-sufficiency. Theologians should understand themselves not only as specialists in their respective research field(s), but must also keep in mind the unity of theology in its different disciplines. The ultimate reason for this unity lies in God's salvific plan for the world and for all humanity (cf. Eph 1:3-10; 1 Tim 2:3-6), which is the deepest expression of catholicity.

So far, we have spoken about theology as a science and its relationship with other sciences within the university. The question that still remains is whether theology has also a special contribution to make to the university as a whole. The answer, of course, is yes—theology can indeed make a contribution to the identity of the university. If as an academic community the University is the place where reality is deeply examined and at the same time the development of humankind and its culture is the main purpose of all scientific research, then theology might accomplish its task by helping to integrate all the wisdom from each of the scientific subdomains. By keeping a permanent and fruitful relationship with the other disciplines, theology might indeed be extraordinary helpful in the search for human meaning. Yet theological reflection should always also be committed to finding the meaning of knowledge, which is always progressing.

To conclude: the topic chosen for this ILAAM-conference is an excellent, challenging and relevant one. It is good that theologians focus on topics that matter.

Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society

Rev. Dr. Abraham Mulamoottil

Introduction

The Alumni Conference “Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society” explores the Christian response to the era of a globally transformative and trans-modern social, political, economic and exponentially advancing technological society and the humanity of ‘Homo sapiens’ who are just biochemical subsystems heading towards a world of abundance, a unit of information of complex networks and clouds running on permanently monitored powerful algorithms nearing towards ‘Homo Deus’, the next step of the evolutionary ladder towards “Meta-Intelligence”.

In the absence of traditional religions replacing the impending “Dataism”, a universal faith in the power of algorithms would become sacrosanct. Seemingly, in this dystopian vision overarching fiction, a theological challenge is impending and an adequate response to inspire and guide the transformation of humanity on and off our planet and the consequence of the existence of cyborg of organic and inorganic matter is the objective of the Conference.

1. The Era of Knowledge Society

Knowledge Society is the globally upcoming, transformative, and trans-modern social, political, economic, and exponentially advanced technological civilization where the next evolutionary step of humanity heads towards Meta-Intelligence.

Cognition, both human and artificial, is fundamental to knowledge society as it relies on the fact that only the human and artificial brains can process the huge amounts of information and data available from different sources and turn it into knowledge. The emergence and exponential growth of information and communication technologies thus creates the condition for a new social, political and economic system in a post-communist and post-capitalist society. The boundaries of this society grow in accordance with the ever-expanding network of World Wide Web, social media, globalization and exponentially growing technologies such as artificial intelligence, 3D printing, cloud computing, robotics, synthetic biology, nanotechnology and other associated technologies.

Starting as a new economic paradigm, which Peter Drucker termed “Post Capitalist” in 1992¹, knowledge society has already commenced emerging globally. Since 1994, the European Commission has been seriously debating the competitive advantages associated with this shift towards an intangible knowledge-based economy in the 21st century.² Today, knowledge has become one of the primary means of production besides capital and labour. With the emergence of global transformation, also termed in a restrictive sense as globalisation, highly successful knowledge economies, aided by networked information technology, have emerged all over the world .

In the discussion on knowledge society/economy, people use the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘information’ interchangeably, and generally understand it in the context of computer science/IT/

¹ Peter F. Drucker, The New Society of Organizations, Harvard Business Review, September-October, 1992, p. 1. <https://hbr.org/1992/09/the-new-society-of-organizations>, Peter F. Drucker, Post capitalist Society, Butterworth-Heinemann, Routlage, (Indian Edition) New York, 1993, p. 1.

² UNESCO, “Towards Knowledge Societies”, UNESCO World Report (New York: UNESCO Publishing 2005).

electronics/software. However, it is important to note that the key is not electronics or software but ‘cognitive science’ and the human brain that is the intangible asset, which can process and apply knowledge to create immense socio-economic value. Again, the management guru, Peter Drucker explained the economy in this society as having three main characteristics - ‘borderlessness’ where knowledge travels more effortlessly, ‘upward mobility’, which is available for everyone, and ‘potential for success and failure’ where anyone can acquire the “means of production,” i.e., the knowledge required for the job, though everyone can’t be a winner.³ Knowledge society/economy anticipates a transparent, equitable, inclusive and responsible community.

In contrast to an almost object-centered industrial economy, knowledge society produces an intangible economy that envisages both qualitative growth and qualitative measurements (intangible assets). The industrial economy bases itself on a win-lose logic: the object shared is lost forever. On the other hand, the logic of knowledge society is win-win: when knowledge is shared, it never loses itself. In other words, knowledge society/economy promotes sharing rather than sheer proprietorship of knowledge and resources.⁴

2. The Age of Exponential Growth

Peter Drucker wrote in 1993, “Every few hundred years throughout Western history, a sharp transformation has occurred. In a matter of decades, society altogether rearranges itself—its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structures, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later a new world exists. And the people born into that world cannot even imagine the world in

³ Abraham Mulamootil, *E-Rupee to Reinvent India*, D C Press, Kottayam, India, 2014.

⁴ Marc LUYCKX GHISI, *THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY, A Breakthrough Toward Genuine Sustainability*, Cochin, 2008.

which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. Our age is such a period of transformation”⁵.

Twenty-five years have past after this prophetic note and it is interesting to recapitulate the paradigm shifts and impacts that have happened in the last century not only to the Western society but also to the whole world. The bottom line is that change is coming faster than ever considered possible. Ray Kurzweil, inventor, entrepreneur, and visionary, said in 2009 while introducing ‘The Singularity University’⁶ that the level of change happening now is exponential rather than linear. The exponential growth of technological capability will continue unabated. For example, the computational power in our cell phone today is a million times smaller, a thousand times more powerful, and a million times cheaper than a couple of decades ago. Likewise, the amount of DNA data we sequence is expected to double annually every year. Its cost has come down by half every year. The value of an average hour of human labour rose from \$30 to \$130 with the information technology revolution. The pace of information technology growth is highly impactful and fundamental to the economic progress triggering Knowledge Society⁷.

⁵ Peter F. Drucker, *Post capitalist Society*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Routlage, (Indian Edition) New York, 1993, p. 1.

⁶ “Singularity is the hypothesis that the invention of artificial super intelligence will abruptly trigger runaway technological growth, resulting in unfathomable changes to human civilization” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_singularity. see also, *Singularity hypotheses: A Scientific and Philosophical Assessment*. Dordrecht: Springer. 2012. pp. 1–2. Singularity University is a non accredited private institute whose stated mission is to educate, inspire and empower leaders to leverage exponential technologies to address and solve humanity’s global grand challenges. <https://su.org>

⁷ https://www.ted.com/talks/ray_kurzweil_announces_singularity_university/transcript

3. The Age of Abundance

Majority of the news channels and digital devices bring us negative news 24X7. This pessimistic view of the world describes threats, famine, societal decay, tsunami warnings, cyber attacks, drug wars, mass destruction, tornados, recession, doomsday, climate crisis, species extinction, water and energy shortage, etc. So, there is little wonder that the people think the world is getting worse.

In this milieu, the tremendous progresses humanity has made in the last century goes largely unnoticed. In the coming three decades, humanity has the potential to create a world of abundance.

Over the last hundred years, the average human lifespan has more than doubled; average per capita income adjusted for inflation around the world has tripled. Childhood mortality rate has come down by a factor of 10. Additionally, the cost of food, electricity, transport, and communication have dropped a 1000-fold. According to Steven Pinker, a Professor at Harvard University, “violence has been in decline for a thousand year, and today we may be living in the most peaceable era in the existence of our species”⁸ Global literacy has gone from 25 percent to over 80 percent in the last 130 years. We truly are living in an extraordinary time and many people fail to recognize this. We live in a world of abundance says Peter Diamandis, “Abundance does not mean creating a life of luxury for everybody on this planet; it is about creating a life of possibility. It is about taking that which was scarce and making it abundant. Scarcity is contextual, and technology is a resource-liberating force”⁹. Peter Diamandis illustrates the fallacy of abundance and scarcity by using the example of the story of Napoleon III in mid-

⁸ Steven Pinke, Violence Vanquished, The wall Street Journal, September 24, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111904106704576583203589408180>, see also, Steven Pinke, The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined, Viking, 2012.

⁹ Peter Diamandis, *Abundance is our future*, at TED 2012, https://www.ted.com/talks/peter_diamandis_abundance_is_our_future/transcript

1800s. Napoleon III was astonished by utensils made of aluminum, the most valuable metal on the planet, at that time worth more than gold and platinum brought by the King of Siam. Aluminum, considered a rare metal, was used in constructing the apex of the Washington Monument¹⁰. But then the technology of electrolysis came along and literally made aluminum a cheap metal that we use as a commodity today.

Peter Diamandis elaborates the abundance owing to the exponential growth of technology. Our planet is showered with 5000 times more energy than we use in a year. 16 terawatts of energy hits the Earth's surface every 88 minutes. Energy is not scarce but available in abundance. The cost of solar-generated electricity dropped 50 percent than diesel generated in India and elsewhere in the world showing that by the end of this decade, it will be the cheapest, easily accessible source of energy. Now we talk about water wars, but we live on a planet covered 70 percent by water. Of course 97.5 percent is salt water, two percent is ice, and we fight for a half a percent of the water on this planet but here too, there is hope. There is technology coming online, not 10, 20 years from now, but right now—nanotechnology and nanomaterials to solve the scarcity of water and energy.

We have access to more knowledge and information than the kings at the end of the last century and even the Presidents and Ministers who lived 15 years ago. Advancements in information and communication technology has completely revolutionized our perspectives and dematerialized by digitizing GPS, FHD video and still images, libraries of books, music, medical diagnostic technology etc., and the economic system is demonetized into cell phones¹¹.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_Monument#Aluminum_apex

¹¹ Ray Kurzweil The accelerating power of technology, TED, 2005 https://www.ted.com/talks/ray_kurzweil_on_how_technology_will_transform_us/transcript

4. The Fall of “Homo Sapiens and the Emergence of Homo Deus

Yuval Noah Harari, a historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who has the gift of synthesizing material from a wide range of disciplines in inspired and exhilarating ways. Recently published two books: The first book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, was recommended by the world’s most influential people like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Barack Obama and Tom Hanks; and was translated into 40 languages. This global bestseller laid out the last 75,000 years of human history to remind us that there is nothing special about our species. The accidental emergence and the blind hand of evolution lie behind the ascent of man. Homo Sapiens are just one possible way of being human, an evolutionary contingency like every other creature on the planet with no divine rights. No matter how, there appeared distinctive cognitive capacity for Homo Sapiens to believe in things existing purely in the imagination. So they developed faculty to believe on fictions such as God, Nation, money and human rights. They also acquired unique capacity to convince in large numbers, to cooperate, and to form groups and teams where their preceding kinfolks lost grip. Harari explains that:

“Ever since the Cognitive Revolution, Sapience have thus been living in a dual reality. On the one hand, the objective reality of the rivers, trees and lions; and on the other hand, the imagined reality of gods, nations and corporations. As time went by, the imagined reality become ever more powerful, so that today the very survival of rivers, trees and lions depends on the grace of imagined entities such as the United States and Google.”¹²

The book ended with the thought that the story of homo sapiens could be coming to an end. The humans are at the summit of their power but they may also have reached their limit.

¹² Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens, A brief History of Humankind*, Vintage, London, 2011, 2014, p. 36

The second book, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* released in 2017, makes the case that we are now at a unique juncture in the story of our species. “For the first time in history,” Harari writes,

“more people die today from eating too much than from eating too little; more people die from old age than from infectious diseases; and more people commit suicide than are killed by soldiers, terrorists, and criminals combined. In the early twenty-first century, the average human is far more likely to die from bingeing at McDonald’s than from drought, Ebola or an al-Qaeda attack”.¹³

In other words, homo sapiens now live in a world of abundance and dominance where humanity could not only simply conquer nature but could also nearly defeat its own worst enemies like war, famine and disease. The 21st century humans will acquire unparalleled ability to control the world and will train their sights on higher objectives - the challenges of the third millennium - immortality, bliss and divinity- ideals of liberal humanism¹⁴. Eternal happiness and Everlasting life are the goals and are easily attained due to the breakneck development of fields such as information technology, biotechnology, genetic engineering, regenerative medicine and nanotechnology. Humans are tending to amortal state. For example, with Google’s Calico, whose modest mission is to slow the aging process, Harari’s views of a radical transformation seems quite feasible¹⁵. “In seeking bliss and immortality,” he writes, “humans are in fact trying to upgrade themselves into gods¹⁶.”

¹³ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 2

¹⁴ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 323

¹⁵ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 32

¹⁶ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 49

Unlike God, future super-humans and techno-elites could still die in some war or accident but will eventually split off from the rest of humanity rendering others economically useless and die off. Harari envisages an elite caste of Homo sapiens evolving into something unrecognizable: Homo Deus with intelligent design, editing their genomes and eventually merging with machines.

However, the project of modernity, which was built on the idea that individual human beings are the source of meaning as well as power, is not true any more. We moved from an age where divine authority sponsored our institutions and values to a human-centered age of liberal individualism, where values were self-generated. In the approaching post-humanist horizon, free will and individualism are, he says, illusions. The life sciences are now undermining free will and individualism, which are the foundations of humanism. The modern belief that individuals are in charge of their fate was never much more than a leap of faith. Individual human beings are relatively powerless creatures. Harari describes scientific research that, in his eyes, proves that the “free individual is just a fictional tale concocted by an assembly of biochemical algorithms”¹⁷. As it dawns on mankind that free will is an illusion and external algorithms can predict people’s behaviour. Harari believes liberal democracy will also collapse. Some people who are holding tenets of modernity – liberalism, democracy and personal autonomy have to give up the fight.

According to Harari, the triumphs of humanity will go forward to complex networks that treat human beings as units of information and nothing but data-processing machines run on powerful algorithms. The fate of humans depends on the efficiency of the data and the algorithms and how effectively they could be manipulated for good or worse. Individuals will become just a

¹⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 354.

collection of “biochemical subsystems” monitored by global networks, which will inform us second by second how we feel. This model has been around for about 400 years through the institution of the modern state that is really just another data-processing machine. The states don’t have a conscience, which is what allows them sometimes to do the most fearful things, the heartlessness. The AI of the robots will be more powerful machines that are far more efficient than states. Moreover the states find it almost impossible to keep up with the pace of technological advance. However, it is important to review that behind every state there would be real flesh-and-blood human beings who preserve the autonomy of the individual and bring back heart to a heartless world and face to a faceless bureaucracy. Even those groupings – corporations, religions, and states are now part of a vast network of interconnected information.

Real power always resided with networks. A techno-religion such as “Dataism” will emerge that treats everything in terms of data processing and whose supreme value is the flow of information. The main faithful followers of Dataism are residing in the Silicon Valley placing their faith in information as the only true source of value. “We”, humans, being nothing more than an accumulation of information points, contribute to the data processing system that at the same time collects the information needed. Our likes and our experiences will merge. Our lifespans could also be hugely extended. Dataists believes that immortality is the next frontier to be crossed.

Meanwhile, the redundancy of labour, supplanted by efficient machines, will create an enormous “useless class”, without economic or military purpose¹⁸. In the absence of religion, overarching fictions will be required to make sense of the world.

¹⁸ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 358.

Again, if nothing in our approach changes, Harari envisages that “Dataism”, a universal faith in the power of algorithms, will become sacrosanct.

According to Harari, the super-intelligence will work in three main ways. Firstly, by taking our organic body and tinkering with it with things like genetic engineering, speeding up natural selection and actually replacing it with intelligent design, not the intelligent design of some God above the clouds, but our intelligent design. Secondly, by creating cyborgs combining organic with inorganic parts like brain-computer interfaces, bionic hands or eyes or ears with organic parts like our brain. Thirdly, inorganic beings that do not even need an organic brain¹⁹ can be created completely using artificial intelligence .

An immediate implication of super-intelligence will be medical breakthroughs of the 21st century that will switch from healing the sick to upgrading the healthy. Not only the repair of the memory damaged by Alzheimer’s disease or dementia and so forth will be carried out easily but also the memory of completely healthy people will be upgraded. In the coming decades, humans and their brains will merge completely with their smart phones and computers and be able to connect on memory immense databases outside one’s own brain.

Social implication of the upgrades of brains and introduction of artificial intelligence would be countless, although in the beginning it will cost a lot and will be available only to a small, elite group. For the first time in human history we might see economic inequality being translated into biological inequality. And once such a gate opens, it becomes almost impossible to close it because then the rich will really be far more capable than everybody else.

¹⁹ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, pp. 85-86, 408-410,

Finally, Harari announces his bold thesis: that “once technology enables us to re-engineer human minds, Homo sapiens will disappear, human history will come to an end, and a completely new process will begin, which people like you and me cannot comprehend.”²⁰

Harari tries to explain that the data-driven transformation process is growing exponentially and that things are moving so fast that is impossible to imagine what the future might hold. In 1800 it was possible to think meaningfully about what the world of 1900 would be like and how we might fit in. The history and the future are understood till today as a sequence of events in which human beings play the leading part. But the world of 2100 is at present almost unimaginable. We have no idea where we’ll fit in, if at all. We may have built a world that has no place for us. In short, he says, “Once artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence, it might simply exterminate mankind”²¹.

The individuals signing up first to this religion, Dataism, will be entered into a new super-elite group that needs enormous levels of education and should have thorough knowledge in syncing one’s personal identity with intelligent machines.

Harari declares that “Homo Deus” is not a book of prophecy rather it speaks about the different possibilities that might happen. Homo Deus makes us feel as if we are standing at the edge of a cliff after a long and arduous journey that doesn’t have any significance any more. We are about to step into thin air and might fall. Harari suggests global governance is the only solution to control the growth of bioengineering and artificial intelligence i.e.,

²⁰ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, pp. 381,

²¹ Youval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus, A brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage, London, 2017, p. 381.

decisions are to be made on a global level, not on a national level. Traditionally, people said that nationalism is dangerous because it leads to war. But now nationalism is far more dangerous because not only does it lead to war, it may make us helpless to cope with dangers that might rise from artificial intelligence or the implications of bioengineering²².

5. The Age of ‘Cultural Alzheimer’s’

The extraordinary rate of exponential growth during these years and over the coming years may give birth to a tendency of developing Alzheimer’s, to society as a whole and to culture itself. As a passionate futurist, Peter Diamandis says that humanity is “heading towards a human-scale transformation, the next evolutionary step into what I call a “Meta-Intelligence,” a future in which we are all highly connected — brain to brain via the cloud — sharing thoughts, knowledge and actions”.... “The rate of human evolution is accelerating as we [make] transition from the slow and random process of “Darwinian natural selection” to a hyper-accelerated and precisely-directed period of “evolution by intelligent direction.”²³ So, the unceasing change seems to be a constant trend of our time ahead and it will receive a kind of Alzheimer’s to the individual and the group (society). The culture of Alzheimer’s kills the capacity of remembering the stories that humanity acquired and received not only in the last decades but even in the past year. Collective memory and consciousness are

²² TED Dialogues with Yuval Noah Harari by Chris Anderson, Nationalism vs. globalism: the new political divide. https://www.ted.com/talks/yuval_noah_harari_nationalism_vs_globalism_the_new_political_divide, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/24/homo-deus-by-yuval-noah-harari-review>,

²³ Peter Diamandis, Within the Next 30 Years: Humanity Will Be Transformed by Exponential Growth, <https://medium.com/singularityu/within-the-next-30-years-humanity-will-be-transformed-by-exponential-growth-6fa89ddfc087>, also, Peter Diamandis, From Natural Selection to Intelligent Direction, <https://futurism.com/peter-diamandis-thinks-were-evolving-toward-meta-intelligence/>

the shared pool of knowledge, experience, information, beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes in the memories of two or more members, which operate and unify as force within society or group. Collective memory is also sustained through a continuous production of representational forms and artifacts. Today mass media including digital forms retain majority of these contents effectively, independently and freely²⁴. Here comes, the ready and intense debate on the treatment of individual freedom and collective consciousness. In the mainstream political system, the religious world and among the general public, people are unaware that there could be an immense disruption that could significantly impact individuals and society through the emergence of “Meta-Intelligence”. Moreover, they may be naive to know that humanity in the future will be monitored by global networks all highly connected, — brain to brain via the cloud. Individuals will be informed second by second through sharing their thoughts, knowledge and actions by the data-processing machines via algorithms. Eventually, the story of Homo sapiens could be coming to an end. A small, breakaway republic of super humans and technelites will eventually split off from the rest of humanity.

A Postscript

A paradigm shift is taking place due to the emergence of artificial intelligence in all fields of society²⁵. Correspondingly, how meta-Intelligence and machine superintelligence may affect human decisions are yet to be assessed in the theological discussions. Technologically centralized power increases every stage of human

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_memory, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_consciousness

²⁵ Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, Oxford University Press (2014), Nick Bostrom, What happens when our computers get smarter than we are?, TED2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/nick_bostrom_what_happens_when_our_computers_get_smarter_than_we_are/transcript

activities imminently. Mass surveillance and global governance will become a reality shortly²⁶. The issues of free will, human autonomy, the limits of human freedom and rights are discussed more elaborately today and tomorrow. The value of human beings tend to be measured on the complexity of the networks and clouds running on permanently monitored powerful algorithms.

The recognition of Oxford Dictionary's word of 2016 that we now live in a "post-truth" world and it has led to a much needed emphasis on checking the facts. It has become clear that we live not only in a post-truth world but also that we live in a post-data world. The more difficult it can be for us to tell the difference between what's real and what's fake. It's as if we know more but understand less. Verification and evidence become essential quality when we move from a post-truth world to a pro-truth world²⁷. Moreover, to live in a "common reality" has become more complex. "We just can't step outside of our own perspectives; we can't step outside of our biases. Every time we try, we just get more information from our perspective. So, this line of thought goes, we might as well admit that objective truth is an illusion, or it doesn't matter, because either we'll never know what it is, or it doesn't exist in the first place"²⁸.

This postscript is a critique of the theological discussions in India which seems shy away from discussing and assessing the issues emerging in knowledge (society) era. The official Church fully embrace the theory of evolution as, in October 2014. Pope

²⁶ Amnesty International UK, Mass surveillance, Evidence of global opposition to US mass surveillance, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/mass-surveillance-us-nsa-edward-snowden-gchq>,

²⁷ Alex Edmans, TEDx London Business School, "What to trust in a "post-truth" world", https://www.ted.com/talks/alex_edmans_what_to_trust_in_a_post_truth_world.

²⁸ Patrick Lynch, "How to see past your own perspective and find truth", TED2017,

Francis made statements: “When we read about creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God as a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so.”...”The Big Bang, which today we hold to be the origin of the world, does not contradict the intervention of the divine creator but, rather, requires it.”...”Evolution in nature is not inconsistent with the notion of creation, because evolution requires the creation of beings that evolve”²⁹.

Pope Francis’s world vision seems contextual, which attracts many both religious and political leaders. In September 2015 at the United Nations, he unveiled a “new universal agenda” for humanity. He said, “Man, for all his remarkable gifts, which “are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology” (*Laudato Si*’, 81), is at the same time a part of these spheres. He possesses a body shaped by physical, chemical and biological elements, and can only survive and develop if the ecological environment is favourable. Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity”³⁰. During his trip to Ecuador, Pope Francis spoke of the need for “a new economic and ecological world order” in which the wealth of the planet is “shared by everyone”³¹. Pope Francis denounced global capitalism

²⁹ Pope Francis, Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences Address, the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Bust In Honour of Pope Benedict XVI, 27 October 2014, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141027_plenaria-accademia-scienze.html

³⁰ Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organizations, Pope Francis, 25 September 2015.

³¹ Pope Francis, Meeting with Political, Economic and Civic Leaders, San Francisco Church, Quito (Ecuador) Tuesday, 7 July 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150707_ecuador-societa-civile.html, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/pope-wraps-ecuador-leg-of-south-america-trip-after-calling-for-new-ecological-economic-order>

and refers to its excesses as the “dung of the devil” and called for “a new global political authority” that would have the resources necessary “to deal with the world’s economic problems and injustices”.

To connect this essay, ‘theology in the era of knowledge society’, would be relevant to share the context of India. Leaving K. U. Leuven in 1998 happened to me a parting from the study of theology. I started a postgraduate institute of IT to champion the new image and identity of India as a land of computer wizards³². It became a convincing fact that IT revolution and education can only bring development in India for making it a new resourceful society. My theological education in Europe brought a renewed consciousness that “God’s intervention and Church relevance should be contextual”³³. I joined the ‘Nehurian movement’ of integral development agenda of India that it is essential to invest in higher education, science and technology, atomic energy, and space science etc. for building a modern country. Consequently, the liberalized economy of the 90’s ushered in an “opportunity-gain” era which initiated enterprises of the intellectual Indian diaspora who were somewhat “lost during the era of ‘brain drain’ that started since 60’s from the Indian IITs (Indian Institute of Technology)”. Taking advantage of promising opportunities of the 90’s

³² Chancellor Gerhard Schroder first voiced the idea that Green Card should be issued to attract IT specialists from India to Germany. He said, “We want to make our advanced technology available here and we will compete with countries like the U.S. for India’s best brains” (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1628259.stm.) The old image of India in Europe during my stay was as “a land of snake charmers, bullock carts and slums” which knowingly or unknowingly presented in the media particularly in the visual media. In contrast, india was one of the wealthiest economies in the world in the european “age of discovery” of new land, resources. and wealth. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_India_under_the_British_Raj.)

³³ Abraham Mulamoottil, doctoral dissertation “Contextual Theological Approach to Chrriatian Identity in India”, Leuven, 1998.

liberalisation policy of India which played a key role in building “brain circulation”, started investing the resources of the Indian diaspora back in their country of origin. Recently, the non-residents Indian investment received a new term as it is called “Nostalgia Economy”, which affected substantially the economic growth of India³⁴.

Having said the social and economic context of India, doing theological reflection in this land ought to have social commitment at the onset. The social engagement of the Church of India, in particular of the local Churches in Kerala should be in my view prophetic. However, recently the Church in Kerala seems lost its moral authority and credibility due to entanglement of sex abuse cases and mismanagement of finance³⁵. It is alleged that there is rampant abuse of power and positions in all levels of hierarchy. A nun said recently that “the church needs to listen to women and

³⁴ AnnaLee Saxenian, Silicon Valley’s New Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Public Policy Institute Of California, San Francisco, CA, 1999. http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_699ASR.pdf V. Rajaraman, History of Computing in India 1955 - 2010, Supercomputer Education And Research Centre Indian Institute of Science. Bangalore, 560 012. 2012 http://www.cbi.umn.edu/hostedpublications/pdf/Rajaraman_HistComputingIndia.pdf. pp. 46-47 “Nostalgia Economy” is an emerging socio-economic model of the Non-Resident Indians/Non-Resident Keralites (NRI/NRKS) to invest in the projects of the country of origin. “Nostalgia Economy” has already contributed significantly in transforming Kerala as an investment destination. The LULU Group, for example, has become a role model of this emerging socio cultural and economic investment of the NRI/NRKS.

³⁵ Recently, Kerala Bishops Council dismissed the crime of a priest from Catholic Diocese of Mananthavady (Wayanad) in Kannur District, Kerala, who was found guilty of raping and impregnating a 16-year-old girl by the POCSO court. <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/article/kerala-priest-father-robin-vadakkumchery-pocso-court-rape-impregnate-minor-mananthavady-diocese/367056>, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/father-robin-gets-20-years-ri-for-raping-minor-girl/articleshow/68029360.cms>.

not just the priests and bishops”³⁶. Pope Francis challenged the church’s rule of foot-washing rite to women in gesture of inclusion. It upset many traditionalists and raised questions whether it would raise the issue of women’s ordination. However, Kerala Syrian Church leaders rejected even the possibility of admitting women in feet-washing ceremony linking to “local church tradition” which cannot be changed³⁷.

Though the bishop as chief catechist and the theologian as critical assessor, both have two very distinct, yet interrelated vocations. The professional theologian has to help the church critically assessing whether the theological notions are faithful to the gospels. The Indian Church seems theologically lean and critical thinking is not entertained in any level. Theological education and reflection should be read continuously where St. Anselm of Canterbury described theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, (“faith seeking understanding”). The methodology of “marginal hermeneutics”, reading the Church tradition and theology from the margins seems relevant in this context³⁸. It is explained with the

³⁶<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/kerala-priest-fr-robin-found-guilty-raping-and-impregnating-16-yr-old-girl-96819>, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/09/world/asia/nun-rape-india-bishop.html>

³⁷ <https://international.la-croix.com/news/indian-church-bars-women-from-feet-washing-ceremony/4940#>, “The papal decree is against the traditions followed by the Eastern Churches,” it read. “The decree is applicable only to the Roman Missal. Thus, the change does not concern the liturgical practices of the Eastern churches.” <https://scroll.in/article/834499/feet-washing-ritual-women-step-forward-after-two-kerala-churches-refuse-to-follow-pope-francis>, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/women-celebrate-washing-the-feet-ceremony/article17928571.ece>, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-significance-of-the-christian-foot-washing-ritual-in-india/7307>.

³⁸ Abraham Mulamoottil, *The Tent of the Pilgrim of Exile*, St. John’s Metropolitan Cathedral: An Embodiment of the Indian Christian Identity, Peacepeopleplanet.org Publication, Tiruvalla, 2016, P. 109. Hermeneutics as the theory and methodology of interpretation is taken from the Greek mythological deity, Hermes who was considered the messenger of god and the

analogy of a book. Book as written record is not a closed entity. It is used properly to read and reread continuously. Well written book can be read easily from top to bottom if it is given proper margins. Book has several margins; margins at all sides; there are proper spaces between the lines. Moreover, the reader reads books from above with sufficient margin and with personal convenience and views. That means, personal perspective gives reading “continuity and discontinuity” from “the views of the writer”. ‘A Tradition’ whether it is christian or any entity to be interpreted continuously by a theory of understanding of its continuity and discontinuity for innovation. That means, a tradition like religion, ideology, philosophy, education, culture, government, cooperation etc. generally looks as a static entity or a reality with immutable constituents. If it is not allowed to be interpreted continuously, tradition acts changeless, unmoveable, unresponsive, lifeless, unimaginative, etc. However, when social and technological changes are happening exponentially rather than linearly, innovation and sustainability become inevitable for the survival and continuity of any tradition. In short, interpreting from the margins or marginal hermeneutics seems fundamental to the church’s innovation and sustainability³⁹. The Church should go for innovations to encourage ‘discontinuity from tradition’ and promote an adaptive transition to the era of a globally transformative and trans-modern social, political, economic and exponentially advancing technological society.

inventor of language and speech. The multiple roles as interpreter and mediator between the gods and between the gods and men made Hermes an ideal representative figure for hermeneutics.

³⁹ Abraham Mulamootil, Toward a Quintuple Bottom Line in Higher Education Institutions: Sustainability Practices in Higher Education, Journal of Management for Global Sustainability Volume 7, Issue 2 (2019): 83–99.

The Enduring Relevance of Ignorance

Martin Sebastian Kallungal

Introduction

The contemporary society in general and the emerging economy in particular are largely shaped and powered by knowledge. The vast majority of the people around the globe are not even aware that they have been exported to what everyone calls a knowledge society. Nevertheless, the question that interests us in this paper is the place of ignorance in knowledge societies. Is ignorance relevant in our life? Although the makers and beneficiaries of knowledge societies might quickly answer this question in negative, everyone knows that ignorance has its value. The value of ignorance lies, primarily, in being the opposite of knowledge. As Pierre Le Morvan and Rik Peels rightly observe, in many languages across different linguistic families a cognate of 'ignorance' is constructed as an antonym of a cognate of 'knowledge.' *yediah* – *iyediah* (Hebrew), *vidya* – *avidya* (Sanskrit), *jnâna* – *ajnâna* (Hindi), *zhîshi* – *wúzhî* (Chinese), *viden* – *uvidenhed* (Danish) are some random examples.¹ But, more than being a mere opposite, it may be contended that ignorance is the originating as well as safeguarding condition of any possibility of knowledge.

¹ Pierre Le Morvan and Rik Peels, "The Nature of Ignorance: Two Views," in *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, edited by Rik Peels and Martijn Blaauw, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 15-16.

Instead of proving this contention conclusively, I will, however, make an attempt to draw attention to the enduring relevance of ignorance in thought and life. In the following, I will first make some preliminary remarks on the plight of ignorance in knowledge-talks in general, and then, second, zoom in and focus on some areas of life and thought where ignorance has a crucial role.

Knowledge/Ignorance: Some Preliminary Observations

A branch of intellectual inquiry that is exclusively concerned with knowledge is epistemology. Traditionally, epistemology is understood as theory of knowledge; and, knowledge is widely understood as justified true belief. Ignorance, then, is seemingly the opposite of knowledge, and for that reason, epistemologists do not take ignorance seriously. In the emerging knowledge societies, ‘knowledge’ does not refer to *episteme*, the root word from which the title, epistemology, is derived. ‘Knowledge’ in knowledge societies refers to information. Considered from a traditional epistemological point of view, with the emergence of knowledge societies, knowledge has degenerated into mere information; and still worse, it has become more of *doxa* (common belief or opinion) and *techne* (craft or art), which are contrasted with *episteme*. Yet in the contemporary times, in spite of the thick conceptual connection between *episteme* and epistemology, some epistemologists do not think that the science of knowledge is about knowledge only. Many epistemologists think that it is about ignorance as well. Results of researches carried out in this line in the Western intellectual tradition have been admirably collected in a book entitled, *The Epistemic Dimension of Ignorance*, edited by Rik Peels and Martijn Blaauw, published by the Cambridge University Press in 2016.² We will come back to this fine work soon. In the Indian religious thinking, not only in epistemology but also in metaphysics and ethics ignorance plays a role in

² For details, see the footnote above.

determining the human condition. For instance, let us briefly consider the thought of Sri Aurobindo who identifies seven kinds of ignorance.³

Knowledge for Sri Aurobindo is undoubtedly the knowledge of the One gained by the realization of the Being. Ignorance is conceived as the self-oblivion of Being which is perceived through an experience of separateness in the multiplicity. The aim of human life is to achieve integral knowledge, which one attains when the seven-fold ignorance is cancelled by a seven-fold self-revelation within human consciousness. Each self-revelation will involve a discovery of something that each instance of ignorance misses. See below how it works between ignorance and knowledge.

(i) *Original Ignorance* is the ignorance of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming. Because of this ignorance, humans take the partial facts of being or the temporal relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence. Knowledge of the Absolute as the origin of all will cancel the original ignorance. (ii) The ignorance of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self is known as *Cosmic Ignorance*. For want of knowledge of the immutable Self, humans take mobility and mutation of the cosmic becoming in time and space as the whole truth of existence. As knowledge of the cosmos as Self's becoming or manifestation dawns, cosmic ignorance vanishes. (iii) *Egoistic Ignorance* is the ignorance of the true universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, the infinite unity with all being and becoming. Due to this ignorance, humans take their limited egoistic mentality, vitality and corporeality for their true self and consider everything other than that as not self. Knowledge of the world as one with the knower in the consciousness of one's true self is the antidote to egoistic ignorance. (iv) *Temporal Ignorance*

³Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine II*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 19(Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1973), 654ff.

is the ignorance of the eternal becoming of humans' being in time. Because of this ignorance, humans take their earthly life as limited to a small span of time, in a small field of space. It is the knowledge of psychic entity and its immortal persistence in time beyond death and earth-existence that cures humans from this sort of ignorance.

(v) *Psychological Ignorance* is the ignorance of one's complex being even within the temporal order. Due to this ignorance one fails to recognize the subliminal aspects of one's being, and takes the surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalized experiences as the whole of existence. An experiential awareness of the greater and inner existence behind the surface mind is the knowledge that counters psychological ignorance.

(vi) *Constitutional Ignorance* is the ignorance of the true constitution of one's integral self. Often humans take their mind or life or body or any two of these or all the three as explaining all that they are. Due to this wrong perception, they lose sight of that which constitutes them, determines by its hidden presence, and emerges in the operations of all above said faculties. A self-revelation received on the nature and function of mind, life and body in its true relation to the self within and the superconscient, spiritual and supramental being above them alone can remedy the constitutional ignorance. (vii) *Practical Ignorance* is the result of the above said six kinds of ignorance. Due to practical ignorance, "we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world [...], return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, [and] grope blindly for a changing goal."⁴ Practical ignorance can be cancelled by the knowledge of the true harmony and true use of thought, will and action of the knower. Thus, for Sri Aurobindo, knowledge of oneness is the knowledge *per se*; and, the knowledge of multiplicity is ignorance.

⁴*The Life Divine II*, 654-55.

Ignorance is also some knowledge but a kind of knowledge that is to be perfected by getting itself integrated into the true knowledge.

The most pertinent preliminary question, then, is: what is knowledge/ignorance? Although one can find interesting overlaps in the thoughts of many philosophers and theologians across the world, the Indian and the Western approaches to the nature of knowledge/ignorance are characteristically different. The former is integral and the latter is intellectual. In any case, it is good to start with a widely accepted differentiation of the kinds of knowledge. First, there is factual knowledge, that is, knowledge that a specific proposition is true. For instance, that there are twenty-six letters in the English Alphabet is factual knowledge. Second, there is objectual knowledge, that is, knowledge about certain object. For instance, knowing what Christian discipleship is, or, knowing what swimming means is objectual knowledge. Third, there is procedural knowledge, that is, knowledge of how to do something. For instance, knowing how to follow Christ (in contrast to what discipleship is), or, knowing how to swim (in contrast to what swimming means) is procedural knowledge.⁵ What, then, is ignorance? Put plainly, it is lack of knowledge in any or all of the above three senses.

Place of Ignorance in Thought and Practice

Having said that knowledge and ignorance are practically inseparable, and that ignorance deserves an important place, not only in epistemology but also in other aspects of life in new knowledge economies, let us consider, in the following, some cases that illustrate our point.

Ignorance and Justice

What is a fair agreement situation among free and equal persons when the purpose of the agreement is fundamental

⁵ For more on this distinction, see K. Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford/Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 5.

principles of justice? Many thinkers say that it is knowledge; but John Rawls says that it is ignorance. In order to remain fair and impartial in judgments, Rawls argues, the parties are to be deprived of all knowledge of their personal characteristics and social and historical circumstances. A “veil of ignorance,” thus, becomes the defining feature of what Rawls calls “original position.”⁶ The original position refers to the fair and impartial point of view that is to be adopted in our reasoning about fundamental principles of justice. Rawls’ original position reminds us of David Hume’s account of the “judicious spectator,” Adam Smith’s “impartial spectator,” and Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative. Original position is a hypothetical perspective that we can adopt in our moral reasoning about the most basic principles of social and political justice.

John Locke says that a social contract that ensures socio-political justice transpires when the parties making the agreement are free and equal persons who know everything about themselves and each other. Given this knowledge, Locke hopes that, while starting from a position of equal political right, the great majority of free and equal persons will rationally agree to alienate their natural rights of equal political jurisdiction in order to gain the benefits of political society ruled by the leaders they elect. What Locke envisions is a legitimate constitutional monarchy, but what comes about in effect is a class state, a state wherein a small class of variously powerful ones exercises political rights, holds offices, exercises social influence, and enjoys covetous benefits and responsibilities to the exclusion of everyone else. In Rawls’ estimation, Locke’s social agreement results in this unacceptable outcome because it transpires under unfair conditions of the original position, where the parties have complete knowledge of their characteristics and situations—their gender, wealth, social class,

⁶ See, John Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” available at <https://www.csus.edu/indiv/c/chalmersk/econ184sp09/johnrawls.pdf>

talents and skills, religious convictions, weaknesses, needs, etc. Socially powerful and wealthy parties then can rely on the knowledge of their vulnerabilities to extract favorable terms from those in less favorable positions. Consequently, the parties' judgments are biased by their knowledge of their circumstances and are insufficiently impartial.

The remedy for such biases of judgment is to redefine the initial situation. Rawls situates the parties to his social contract in such a way that they do not have access to factual knowledge that can distort their judgments and result in unfair principles. Rawls's original position is an initial situation wherein the parties are without information that enables them to shape principles of justice favorable to their personal circumstances. "Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength and the like. We shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."⁷ This veil of ignorance deprives the parties of all knowledge of particular facts about themselves, about one another, and even about their society and its history.

To establish the principles of justice that we all ought to embrace we need to imagine ourselves to be in a situation of ignorance. This means that a thorough examination of epistemic dimension of ignorance can help us to know what kind of ignorance "the veil of ignorance" requires.

Ignorance and Moral Excuse

In the Christian religious sphere, ignorance is always a reason for forgiveness. See how Jesus prays: "[...] Father, forgive them;

⁷ John Rawls, *The Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 12.

for they know not what they do [...]” (Lk 23.34). Similarly, ethicists also sometimes count ignorance as a moral excuse. Not all kinds of ignorance can be excused. Ethicists make some famous distinctions. There is blameworthy ignorance and blameless ignorance. The former is not an excuse whereas the latter is. For instance, one may falsely believe that a cup of soup contains no poison whatsoever where the soup is actually poisoned. If someone blamelessly holds such a belief one’s innocent ignorance excuses him/her from serving it to a friend. But, imagine a situation in which one suspends judgment on the proposition that the soup is poisoned. In such a situation, where the soup is actually poisoned and yet one is lacking verified true belief in the fact that it is poisoned, one is still ignorant. But, here ignorance does not excuse, at least not fully. So, the culpability depends on the kind and degree of ignorance.⁸

Another traditional distinction might help us to clarify this point: acting *from* ignorance and acting *in* ignorance. To act from ignorance is to act in a way in which one would not act if one were not ignorant; whereas to act in ignorance is to act in a way in which one would still act even if one were not ignorant. Acting from ignorance can be excused, but acting in ignorance is culpable. The ignorance in *acting in ignorance* is not simply not-knowing, but also not-caring-to-know. This is the kind of ignorance that is being referred to Acts 3:17, “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.”

Blameworthy ignorance does involve an exercise of mind, but futile. St. Paul warns Ephesians about this: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and

⁸Rik Peels and Martijn Blaauw, “Introduction,” in Peels and Blaauw, (eds.), *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, 4-5.

they have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” Acting in ignorance is like drinking alcohol for nutrition. There is indeed an act of drinking, but futile because alcohol gives empty calories with no nutrients. The point I am driving home is this: what kind of ignorance is involved in each act is an important question.

Ignorance and Belief in God

Justine McBrayer has recently sketched a taxonomy of various roles ignorance plays in religious theories and practices.⁹ In his reading, in our efforts to theorize about the existence of God, nature of divine reality and divine-human relations ignorance has an important role. Let us consider the question of existence of God. In both the commonplace God-of-the-gaps arguments as well as different prudential arguments, ignorance is an important factor. In the God-of-the-gaps arguments, the strategy is bringing out data that cannot be explained, against which a God who can explain is posited. That is, ignorance occasions the knowledge of God. Prudential arguments like Pascal’s Wager motivate one to believe in the existence of God regardless of sufficient evidential knowledge. For the point of the prudential arguments is simple but persuasive: If God exists, believers will be rewarded with all goods of the eternal life whereas non-believers will not. In case God does not exist, believers are not going to lose much because there is no substantial difference between the goods secured by the believers and non-believers. Therefore, even if one is ignorant of any evidential ground for the existence of God, it is prudent to be a theist. Conversely, ignorance is the reason for the atheists as well as agnostics to maintain their intellectual attitude of disbelief towards God’s existence. It is still more interesting to note that it is once again using ignorance that some thinkers block arguments for theism as well as atheism. The fine-tuning argument – that the

⁹ Justine McBrayer, “Ignorance and Religious Life,” in Peels and Blaauw, (eds.), *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, 144-159.

fine-tuning of the universe points to the existence of a supremely powerful designer like God – is often countered by appealing to human ignorance. The point of the counter argument is that we know precious little about the true structure and dynamism of the universe to make any absolute statement about the way how the fine-tuning is made. Similarly, the argument for atheism in reference to evil – that gratuitous evil in the world leads us to deny the existence of a perfectly good and powerful God – is also countered by appealing to human ignorance about the actual moral situation of the world.

Ignorance and Spiritual Growth

It has been observed that Augustine in his later writings considered ignorance and difficulties or compulsion (*ignorantia* and *difficultas*) as culpable. In his earlier writings, he had viewed them as conditions, which diminish responsibility, but later he regarded them as penal conditions, characteristics of fallen humanity. Ignorance and difficulties are impediments to voluntary action. Referring to these two impediments, Augustine says that a fallen person acts wickedly either because “it is not in his power to be good” or because he does not “see what sort of person he ought to be.” A person can wish to do good, but fails to do it due to difficulties. Similarly, due to ignorance a person does not even have the knowledge of the good that would lead him/her to wish to do what is right.

In his account of the distinct stages of the human spiritual regeneration Augustine speaks about the role of ignorance and difficulty in the gradual decline in moral responsibility.¹⁰ He writes: “Before the law we follow the desires of the flesh, under the law we are compelled by those desires, in grace we neither willingly

¹⁰ For a succinct presentation of the same see, T. Chappel, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Voluntary Action and Akrasia* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1995), 130-133.

follow them nor are compelled by them, in peace there are no desires of the flesh.”¹¹ *Before the law, under the law, in grace, and in peace* are the four stages of moral and spiritual regeneration.

In the first stage, i.e., *before the law*, where there is complete ignorance, there are no difficulties simply because one is full of concupiscence. At this state, one follows one's natural inclinations. Since one has no idea that what one does is wrong, one simply approves everything one does and does bad things spontaneously. In the second stage, i.e., *under the law*, ignorance has no important role to play. The law leads one to perceive one's desires and action as evil. However, one makes unsuccessful struggles against what is now recognized as evil desires. In Augustine's reading, the struggle is unsuccessful because one is not struggling to avoid evil for the sake of God, rather one is struggling to avoid evil for one's own sake. Here the struggles are powered by the wish to avoid troubles in life. In such a situation, although one is aware of the unwholesome nature of what one does, one is suddenly pulled along the weight of worldly desires. In the third stage, i.e., *in grace*, there is no ignorance, and the power of compulsion is lesser than earlier. One now begins to experience success in one's struggle with sin. The carnal desires of the body do remain, but they do not subdue the mind to consent to sinful acts. In the fourth stage, i.e., *in peace*, there is neither ignorance nor compulsion. Since sin is defeated and extinguished from every part of one's being, there is neither ignorance nor compulsion. This state of peace and harmonious integration with the Spirit is only reached in the life of resurrection.

Following Aristotle, everyone thinks that knowledge is a prerequisite for exercising moral virtues because it is more than plain that a virtuous person “must be in certain condition when he does [a virtuous act]; in the first place he must have knowledge; secondly he must choose the acts, and choose for their own sakes;

¹¹Chappel, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom*, 131.

thirdly, his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.”¹² But, in some contemporary philosophers consider this as a very intellectualized picture of moral virtue. Julia Driver, for instance, argues that it is ignorance, and not knowledge that is required for exercising moral virtues. In addition, she names a number virtues as virtues of ignorance that include practices like genuine modesty, blind charity that ignores the faults of the beneficiary, impulsive courage, instinctive forgiveness, etc.¹³

Ignorance and Various Intellectual Pursuits

In so-called apophatic discourses in philosophy and theology, ignorance has a crucial role. A common core of apophatic traditions is that we are necessarily ignorant of the transcendent reality in general or God in particular. We can find ideas along these lines in the writings of ancient Indian sages as well as Jewish, Christian and Islamic medieval thinkers. The idea of learned ignorance expounded in the famous work, *De Docta Ignorantia* written by Nicholas of Cusa deserves a special mention here. In the contemporary times the apophatic tradition is revived by many analytic philosophers.¹⁴ Epistemic inability on the part of the knower and the eclipse of mystery on the side of the object one seeks to understand are two important aspects in both philosophy and theology. Honest awareness about these aspects endows one with intellectual humility and awe before the unknown. The situation is not different in other branches of inquiries.

Agnotology, a new field of research which investigates culturally induced ignorance or doubt, is noteworthy here. Often ignorance is induced by purposeful publication of misleading and

¹² Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics* II.4.1105a 31-34 available at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/aristotle-the-nicomachean-ethics>

¹³ Julia Diver, “The Virtues of Ignorance,” in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol.86, No. 7: 373-384.

¹⁴ See, for instance, J. Jacobs, “The Ineffable, Inconceivable, and Incomprehensible God: Fundamentality and Apophatic Theology,” *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed., J.L. Kvanvig, vol. 6. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 158-176.

inaccurate scientific data. Agnotologists unmask the unholy trading of ignorance and show how cultural influences induce ignorance.¹⁵ Scientists and philosophers of science begin to openly admit that science is actually driven by ignorance. Stuart Friestein, a professor of Neuroscience at Columbia University, clearly spells out how ignorance drives science. He tells us that there is a world of difference between how science is actually pursued by scientists and how it is widely perceived by the public. Let me quote him at length:

when most people think of science, I suspect they imagine the nearly 500-year-long systematic pursuit of knowledge that, over 14 or so generations, has uncovered more information about the universe and everything in it than all that was known in the first 500 years of recorded human history. They imagine a brotherhood tied together by its golden rule, *the scientific method*, an immutable set of precepts for devising experiments that churn out the cold hard facts. [...] That's all very nice, but I am afraid it's mostly a tale woven by newspaper reports, television documentaries, and high school lesson plans. Let me tell you somewhat different perspective. It is not facts and rules. It is black cats in dark rooms. [...] It's groping and probing and poking and some bumbling and bungling, and often by accident, light is lit and everyone says 'oh wow, so that's how it looks'; and then it is off into the next dark room looking for the next mysterious dark feline.¹⁶

Having known the true driving force and actual pursuit of science, Friestein began to teach his students at Columbia a course entitled "Ignorance." He laments that "we are failing to teach the ignorance,

¹⁵ R.N. Proctor and L. Schiebinger, (Eds), *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Stuart Firestein, *Ignorance: How it Drives Science?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-3.

the most crucial part of the whole operation.”¹⁷ Ignorance is not merely a provocative word for Firestein. He does not mean any usual bad connotations of ignorance, such as willful stupidity, indifferent to facts and logic, uncritical eschewal of contrary ideas, etc. Ignorance, in his view, is a serious matter: “a particular condition of knowledge: absence of fact, understanding, insight, or clarity about something. It is a case where data don’t exist, or more commonly, where the existing data don’t make sense, don’t add up to the coherent explanation, cannot be used to make a prediction or statement about something or an event. This is knowledgeable ignorance. It leads us to frame better questions, the first steps to getting better answers.”¹⁸

Conclusion

The book of Genesis chapter 2 tells us that there were two trees in the Garden of Eden: tree of knowledge and tree of life. The first man and woman ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which became a sin against God and the cause of all pains in human lives. God saw that humans might eat from the tree of life as well. Therefore, “He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3.22-24). Has God stationed anything to guard the tree of knowledge? Apparently, nothing, I suppose. But, we could still do something: stay away from the tree of knowledge lest it may inflict pain on us. Ignorance is nothing but staying away from knowledge that hurts oneself and others. Let the (O)ther live with its intimate otherness inside the cloud of ignorance. As it reads on the front cover of *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* “not ignorance, but ignorance of ignorance is the death of knowledge.”¹⁹

¹⁷Firestein, *Ignorance*, 2.

¹⁸Firestein, *Ignorance*, 6.

¹⁹Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoe, *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies*, (London and New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2015). This quote is attributed to Alfred North Whitehead.

Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed reality and Virtual Reality:- A Continuum

Dr Mathew Chandrankunnel CMI

What is reality? Something which we can experience through our five senses! Touch, hear, see, smell, taste and feel. Thus we see a stone, a tree, an animal, which we can also touch and feel; taste a food, liquid; smell the fragrance or a rotting material; hearing a melodious music or the honking of a horn, all these are experienced by our senses and we consider them as reality which can be experienced by our senses. However, when we come across the atoms, subatomic particles like meson, neutron, neutrino, they could be experimentally verified and to some extent we confer them physical existence. DNA, chromosome, genes and other biological entities could also be considered as physical realities as they could be observed through the instruments. Consider the number 4, does it have a reality as such? Distinctly does it exist? It remains as a mathematical entity which does not correspond directly to a physical entity! Suppose that you are reading a novel and visualizing the actions does it correspond to a reality? Or in another case when you are sleeping, having a dream of living in a mansion, does it have any correspondence with reality? When you are watching a film, to what extent does it have a correspondence with reality? Some are physical realities which could be encountered with our senses and physically existing without our observation while some entities exist there because of our perception and some which exist and can only be perceived by fabricated instruments. Some are

physical entities which can correspond to external objective reality while entities are conceptual, metaphysical or mathematical entities and some are imaginative entities which have no physical correspondence! Entities like soul, mind etc., are defined as metaphysical entities and according to some followers of scientism, namely scientists deny their existence. Anything that is not observable is according to these hard core scientists, these entities are nonexistent and have no correspondence to reality. However, the contemporary science and technology are fusing the augmented, mixed and virtual entities except these of the metaphysical through the fabricated instruments to make you feel that there is not much difference between reality, augmented reality and virtual reality. To some extent you can feel and experience a variety of entities through the fabricated technological devices that make you feel that you will not be able to distinguish between physical reality, augmented reality and virtual reality. There is a lot of scope for the virtual, augmented, mixed realities in environment such as entertainment, business, education, psychology, healing and medical fields, these new developments related to reality which may also have repercussions on our concept of reality itself.

Classical Physics

Before going to delve deep into the augmented and mixed realities and virtuality, one need to be aware about what is reality itself. As I explained earlier, it is physics that explained about the reality much better than metaphysics or ontology. Whatever we can experience with the five senses and that are observable are termed as a physical reality. Classical Physics defined it through the laws of physics and the absolute notions of space and time. Everything exists in the objective space and time which are known as absolute substances without beginning and end. However for time there is a beginning but no end and flows towards eternity just like an arrow. Hence it is also known as the arrow of time. Any

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observable physical reality exists in this space and time and moves according to the laws of motion of Newton. There is an objective reality which could be observed by an observer absolutely detached from the reality and the observation would not inflict any impact on the reality. Absolutely, detached objective reality is the possibility of classical physics and the observational results are always deterministic. Knowing the present state of a system and since the laws are available, one can predict the future of any observation with absolute certainty which is known as determinism. Theory of relativity proposed by Einstein almost followed the deterministic outlook of classical physics though he relativized space and time to space-time.

Quantum Mechanics

However, when Quantum Mechanics evolved in the beginning of the twentieth century, this objective, detached observation and reality collapsed. Any observation would influence the observation which enabled Niels Bohr to express that “the observed is observed”! According to the Copenhagen interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, there is no reality and it is expressed only through the measurements. Reality is created only at the context of measurement and any measurement could be influenced by the observation. The objective, detached observation and the existence of the objective reality is denied in Quantum Mechanics. The principles of uncertainty, complementarity and probability together redefined the reality as context dependent and indeterministic. The absolute unknowability, uncontrollability and un-measurability catapulted the classical conceptual frame work into a disarray and confusion. Like the classical physics and the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics could not clarify the measurements and the consequent results making the stalwart classical physicists like Einstein and others to call quantum mechanics incomplete and there developed a quantum schism. The fundamental problem in

Quantum Mechanics was the collapse of the wave function. The state of the system is defined by the wave function ψ and when a measurement is made this wave function which has infinite possibilities (superposition principle) collapses into a single measurement. How does it happen could not be explained by any of the developers of Quantum Mechanics and it remains as still an unexplained mystery. This quantum mechanical effect plays a subtle role in the new developments of the expansion of the reality into mixed, augmented and virtual reality.

Augmented and Virtual Realities

The quantum mechanical developments enabled concepts like quantum computation, quantum teleportation, quantum cryptography and other allied disciplines evolving a technology of communication revolution of high speed internet connecting the whole world in a myriad ways. Using new technical devices like head set reality is distorted and augmented and you are led into a new level of experience even without distinguishing them. As an example on TV sets you can add on football, tennis or any other playing materials by merely waving your hand. This is a simple augmented reality. You are there along with the TV set and your hand movements will change the ball that is virtual. This is indeed an augmented reality. An year ago or two there was the Pokemon play which was also an augmented experience of reality. On your own smart mobile phone now there is a navigation system which will incorporate you with the surroundings. If you are in a place and looking for directions please switch on this programme and you will experience that you are in the middle of the environment. If you want to find a location and you are walking the programme will accompany you if you are in the right direction. If you are in a wrong direction, that will guide you as you may have already used the navigational systems in the car. These are simple forms of augmented reality without the support of heavy devices. However

Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed reality and Virtual Reality:- A Continuum with the head sets and other devices, you are led into much richer and unbelievable experiences.

Virtual reality replaces reality taking you to the unknown horizons of experience. Using Snapchat lenses HTC Vive, Oculus Rift or Google Cardboard uses can be catapulted into a totally imagined environments like flying on a dragon or walking on the surface of the moon. Augmented reality that adds on to the reality, projecting data on the environment you are already aligned with. These are powerful technologies that have a lot of promise and work with different consumer base. These technologies can enable us to enhance human experience even to the level of unexpected extents.

Implications

Augmented reality could be utilized to go to the next level of ecommerce. Shoppers can try the materials in the context of their own house environment or office context in order to check how effectively they could utilize the product. With depth sensing camera, one can augment the data by manipulating the light from the surroundings with additional data according to the utility leading to a new augmented realization. Backgrounds can be edited either removing or adding additional realities and enhancing the experience of the context. It seems that Apple and Google are adding to their smart phones these devices and hence the augmented reality experience could become an everyday experience. France has already introduced the AR/VR curriculum in the educational levels and thus the conceptual clarity is already introduced into the young age by which new technological developments could be made these innovative minds. Microsoft windows are now coming up with the VR enhanced programmes which will totally change your experience about the world and now moving to creating one's own virtual world.

These devices could be employed in almost all fields like education where the teaching quality could be enhanced with much more experience. Learning could become more of an experience rather than memorizing data. Construction and creation of new environments would definitely catapult the imaginative capacity of the students. In the warfare simulation of the enemy countries' terrain, war zones, capabilities all could be studied and put into the destroyer mode. Medical assistance like surgery, medicine interaction with the body, scanning and the progress of cure of diseases, all could be further studied with the help of AR/VR. A parent who is further way could experience in holding his child and play with the child with the internet connectivity and with the aid of AR/VR. In Psychological healing processes, trauma, psychosis, neurosis could be healed using the new environmental changes with the aid of AR/VR.

It seems that Mark Zuckerberg bought a device known as Oculus for two billion dollars some five years ago and now companies like Sony, Samsung, HTC and Google are investing huge amounts in AR/VR which will transform the way we experience our world and our own everyday living by constructing and creating a new fascinating world.

God-talk and God-walk through the eyes of the Marginalized Dalits

Dr G. Cosmon Arokiaraj

As I am presenting my reflections on the marginalized people my specific focus will be on the Dalit community as it is the largest marginalized group not only in India but also in South Asia.¹ Moreover, they along with the Tribals constitute the social base of Indian Christian community.

God-talk refers to the process of theologizing with the marginalized Dalits, for them and on behalf of them. God-walk points to the experience of God's presence in the sufferings and struggles of Dalit community for a fuller life.

Let me start with an important recent event of national importance: The Bhima Koregaon violence and the spirited response to it from the marginalized Dalit community in India.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution of India visited the Bhima Koregaon memorial on January 1, 1927. It has been a tradition for Dalits to gather at the spot on the first day of the New Year. This day is an important day in Dalit history because

¹ *Caste-Based Discrimination in South Asia: Situational Overview, Responses and Ways Forward* (Study commissioned by the European Commission to the International Dalit Solidarity Network, June 2009). Caste discrimination is one of the most serious human rights issues in the world today, adversely affecting more than 260 million people globally. The majority of people suffering from caste discrimination are Dalits (or outcastes) living in South Asia.

the British East India Company's soldiers defeated the army of Peshwa Bajirao II in the Battle of Koregaon on January 1, 1818. The East India Company's battalion consisted of about 500 Mahar (Dalit) soldiers. For Dalits and future generation of Dalits, the victory was not only a military one but a victory over centuries of caste oppression by the Peshwas. For them to visit the site is like a pilgrimage, an assertion of pride for the community. According to Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of Dr. Ambedkar, it was a beginning of "a social liberation movement from caste prejudice." On January 1, 1918, Dalits gathered as usual to commemorate the event. The numbers were large this year because it was the bicentenary of the battle. But the celebration was disrupted by the Hindutva forces. They attacked the Dalits who had gathered which left one person dead and many injured. This led to the bandh (massive protest) on January 3, in Mumbai and other parts of the country.²

Memory and Imagination of the Marginalized Dalits

For a Dalit, the "Vijay Stambha" (pillar of victory), the monument at Bhima Koregaon, is a memory of historical relief from social oppression. It is an extension of meaning going back to the French Revolution, freedom, equality and fraternity or social democracy.³ Dalits have been at the receiving end of being handed down history and its dominant and convenient interpretations. Now, those who have been in the dominant position from where they could hand down history to Dalits are now at the receiving end. They have imposed a traditional interpretation of Bhima Koregaon, i.e., it was a victory of colonial power against native Peshwa rule. However, for Dalits it was an expression of Dalit valour. In this context, memory and counter memory occur. Here, the act of

²LYLA BAVADAM, "Dalit Defiance," in *Frontline*, vol.35, no.02, (2018), p.4.

³ GOPAL GURU, "Memory and Meaning," in *Frontline*, vol.35, no.02, (2018), pp.25-27.

God-talk and God-walk through the eyes of the Marginalized Dalits countering is not by argument, debate and discussion but by violence perpetrated by dominant caste forces.

Ambedkar saw in the defeat of Peshwa forces by the Mahars in the Koregaon battle an end to a socially oppressive rule and the assertion of equality, justice, freedom and dignity. In order to mobilize the Dalits in favour of the liberal values, he used the Battle of Koregaon as a pedagogical tool. These values were important for the self-affirmation of Dalits and social freedom was necessary to envisage Indian nation. Ambedkar wanted the nationalists to appreciate the social aspect of Indian nationalist imagination-political freedom from the colonial rule.

According to the dictates of the Code of Manu (*Manusmriti*), Dalits were not supposed to join the military which was reserved for the Kshatriyas, the second group in the Hindu social order. However, Shivaji Maharaj had several Mahars in his army. According to a Marathi saying, it is only courage that matters in deciding the martial character of a person, and not caste. (*Jyachi talwar khambir toch hambir*). Perhaps this might have motivated the Mahar soldiers to fight as a part of the British army. Hence, Dalit (Mahar) soldiers were not mere armed forces used by the East India Company against the native rulers but they wanted to manifest their bravery and wanted freedom from caste oppression.

In analyzing social, historical processes, committed scholars and social activists often give strikingly different interpretations of reality. According to the sociology of knowledge, the ideas of individuals would tend to be influenced by their social location. A leader's social location-in the sense of his/her group's position in the social hierarchy and in the societal power structure- strongly influence a leader's definition of priorities, of objectives and strategies of action. ⁴

⁴ M.S.GORE, *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993) pp.287-288.

Ambedkar envisaged a nation that includes all social and ethnic groups. Hence he made use of the victory of the Battle of Koregaon to teach not only Dalits but also the mainstream nationalists who privileged political freedom over social freedom. He wanted a nation where the marginalized Dalits would live as dignified co-humans with others both as individuals and a community. The struggle to be co-humans with others is going on even today fighting against caste oppression and untouchable practices in the society and within the Christian community.

Pre-understanding and Dalit Pre-understanding

Culture is the multilayered model of reality, which determines patterns of behaviour. Culture includes both a surface layer, which are the patterns of behaviour, and a deep layer, which is the worldview that drives behaviour. Pre-understanding flows from the world-view. Duncan Ferguson provides us with a working definition of pre-understanding: “a body of assumptions and attitudes, which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality, or any aspect of it”.⁵

When a person encounters new information in life, his or her response is to interpret it in light of his or her current worldview.

According to Ferguson, there are four types of pre-understanding. Informational pre-understanding is the knowledge a person already has, before attempting to interpret new information. Attitudinal pre-understanding is the “disposition” by which a person approaches new information. Ideological pre-understanding has two aspects: general and particular. The general aspect is the way a person views “the total complex of reality”, while the particular aspect is the way a person views a “particular subject”. Methodological pre-understanding is the model a person uses to

⁵ DUNCAN S. FERGUSON, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta GA: John Knox Press, 1986) p. 6.

understand new information. It is important to note that the four types of pre-understanding usually do not operate in isolation from one another, rather, they often overlap, with varying degrees of influence.

Dalit pre-understanding has to be understood in all its complexities such as assertive obedience, noisy contemplation, disorderly order etc. It has a complex web of oral wisdom, written discourses, movie stories or television serials from the religions, cultures or literature of the native land along with the impact of their historical successes and failures. This is operative both amidst the non-Christian as well as Christian Dalits. Dalit God-talk has to encounter the above aspects of Dalit pre-understanding. Moreover, along with these factors, Dalit interpretation is very much influenced by the liberal and modernist values of solidarity, identification, liberation.

Dalit Religious World

According to Kancha Ilaiah, a Dalit-bahujan scholar, the gods of Brahminism (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Vamana, Krishna, Rama) are gods of prosperity, luxury (suitable to today's consumerist society), self-indulgence, violence and cunningness. The wives of these gods (Saraswathi, Lakshmi, Paravathi) are subservient, delicate, dependent, without property, illiterate, and so on. The upper caste women internalise these roles of women gods and, thus the casteised patriarchy of Brahminism is maintained and perpetuated.⁶

The God who is the centre of Dalit religiosity is a very humane God. He is very approachable. He shares in the joys and sorrows of His devotee. This God is concerned not only about His devotee's

⁶ KANCHA ILAIAH, *Why I am not a Hindu?: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, culture and political Economy* (Calcutta: Samya, 1997[reprint], first published in 1996) pp.71-90.

daily bread but also about all his needs: offspring, good crops, health, wealth, success in undertakings, suitable spouse, etc. for instance, Kancha Ilaiah speaks about the Dalitbahujan goddesses pochamma, Kattamaishamma, Polimeramma, Yellamma, Mangalamma, Maremma etc. and gods (potaraju, Beerappa) of Andhra Pradesh region. In his opinion, they are “culturally rooted in production, protection and procreation.” Besides, there is little or no distance between the goddesses and gods and the people when the people talk to goddesses: “Mother! We have seeded the fields, now you must ensure that the crop grows well, one of our children is sick, it is your bounden duty to cure her...”⁷ Thus, Dalit religion is more concerned with *bhukti* (having a good life here on earth) than *mukti* (final liberation). In the words of Aloysius Pieris, it is a “cosmic religiosity” of the poor which is more oriented towards this-worldly life, not in a materialistic sense but life’s basic needs.⁸

While comparing the biblical world with Dalit world-view, Maria Arul Raja observes, Dalits are comfortable with Yahweh as the deity of a large family (kula deivam) or of an ethnic group of people (namma sami). They give a positive response to the biblical image of the Protector-God (kaaval deivam) and Powerful God with expression of wrath (the Lord of Hosts). They are ready to accept the God of mobility (ark of Covenant) than God of stability (Temple at Jerusalem as God’s feet). For them, the ark of Covenant represents the on-going solidarity of God as Emmanuel (God-with-us) than God who is alienated from them at Temple.⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-101, 91.

⁸ ALOYSIUS PIERIS, *Fire & Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996) pp.56-157.

⁹ A. MARIA ARUL RAJA, “Dalit Cultural Streams as Dialogical Partner with the Church,” in *Selected Social, Pastoral and Theological Reflections on Dalit Reality* (New Delhi: CBCI Commission for SC/ST/BC, 2010) p.55.

Memory of the Murdered Martyrs and the Dead

Dalits were guarding the villages and were murdered while protecting the people or for breaking the caste norms. These martyrs were eventually deified (kolayil uditā deivangal). Symbols such as formless stones, sandy mounds, tree or metal spear or statues represent them. Very often these statues hold rustic weapons, are depicted with brisk postures and expressions of wrath and bravery. The story of the death of Jesus who opposed the legalistic norms of the religious and political realms and got killed, captures well the imagination of Dalits as protecting god and god-with-them expressing deep solidarity in their suffering and struggle against caste repression.¹⁰

Dalits have a great respect for the dead. The food consumed or the materials used by the dear dead ones are specially offered to them on their graveyard. A fellowship meal is shared during each event of remembering the dead. Memory and meal are part and parcel of the Dalits remembering the dead. Maria Arul Raja observes that the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and Eucharistic meal as his body broken and his blood shed as a ransom for many are quite appealing to the Dalit spiritual realm. Eucharist as a meal in memory of the dead who was killed as the martyr for having had table fellowship with the impure is also in line with Dalit sensibility. Paul's admonition to the Corinthian community to be more inclusive by incorporating the weak attracts the attention of Dalits in building a community.¹¹

Sacrificial Meal, Culture of Prophecy and Apocalyptic View

For the marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, animal sacrifice to their gods and goddesses is counted to be religiously significant. In the sacrificial context, blood is a symbol of fertility

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

and mediates the people with their deities. It ratifies a performed agreement between the people and the deities. The people offer sacrifice to compel the deities to pledge for their welfare. This comes closer to the biblical world of sacrifice of animal blood. The sacrificial blood functions as atonement, expiation, contracting covenant, reconciliation between parties involved. In the biblical and Dalit worlds the sacrificed meat is shared as a communitarian meal.

Dalits experience deprivation in different realms. They address this situation through oracles (*kurisollurathu or saamiaattam*) proclaimed through the medium of possessed human beings. These prophetic oracles are considered as the enunciation of God's will. Prophetic defiance against the unjust order of the rulers is endearing to the disobedient Dalits to the hierarchical norms of caste system.

Maria Arul Raja observes "Abounding in rich symbolism, the wounded psyche of the victims seek to subvert or reject the existing order imposed on them while continuing to project and dream an alternative order in its place." The subjugated use the apocalyptic visions as weapons against the dominating forces. Both the Dalits and the biblical subalterns express their implicit consciousness about their genuine concerns through apocalyptic visions.¹²

THEOLOGY ATTUNED TO CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE DALITS

Human beings express themselves and their constructive imaginations in various ways. Theological configurations in the West, in Sathianathan Clarke's view, "have on the whole taken for granted the equivocal relationship between theology and language," and largely ignored other modes of human expressions. In Indian

¹² *Ibid.*, p.59.

situation, there is a lot of symbolic interaction, and when people express themselves, generally, they combine their words with other modes of communication such as through actions (gestures and postures) and through deliberate non-action and silence. In the case of the subaltern communities, particularly, one has to pay more attention to how they articulate their “deepest thoughts and feelings” through unconventional modes of expressing themselves.¹³ Pointing out the limitation of the realm of words to grasp and interpret the common peoples’ experience, Jyoti sahi, an Indian Christian artist, writes: theologians need “to liberate the symbol from its secondary position to the word, as part of a much bigger programme of finding the sources of insight in the common people.”¹⁴

If theology wants to represent the multifarious character of the discourse of the entire community, it needs “a modal recalibration.” Sathianathan Clarke opines that it is not only enough for Indian Christian theology to promote the inclusion of the hitherto excluded subaltern communities but more important than anything else is to provide “space for their particular mode of expressing and communicating their reflections.” Forbidden to hear or learn or use the sacred scripture in the written form, the Dalits manifested their rich religious expression “in non-textual/non-scriptive forms, i.e., music, painting, dance, weaving, song, architecture, etc,” Dalit communal symbolic interaction is thus a multimedia configuration in the folklore form. If Indian – Christian theology wants to become a peoples’ theology and articulate or critically reflect on their symbolic expressions, it must go beyond the text and language in

¹³ SATHIANATHAN CLARKE, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Chennai: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.22.

¹⁴ JYOTI SAHI, “Dance in the Wildness,” in *Doing Theology with Asian Resources*, Volume 2, ed., YEOW CHOO LAK (Singapore: ATESEA, 1995) p.113.

its traditional sense. “Theo-logia (literally, words or language about God) in India, thus, ought to become inclusive of theo-graphia and theo-phonia.”¹⁵

Let me sing a song composed by a Dalit Christian describing the present condition of the Christian community and the yearning for a community of equals, a Church of equity and equality.

Saathiya Thiruchabaiye Nee Iraivanin Thiruchabaiya
(Casteist Church! Are you the Church of God?)
Ithuthaan Christhava Vaazhkaiah? Ithuthaan Yesuvin Neriya?
(Is it Christian life? Is it the way of Christ?)
Maatruvoo -3 Illai Veroru Thiruchabai Aaguvoom.
(Let us change the situation, otherwise let us become other Church)
Thani thoombh Thani kallarai ithuthaan Christava Vaazhkaiya – 2
(separate bier, separate cemetery, is it Christian life?)
Oonai vadivil thalaivargal aattai vizhungum vethanai
(leaders are in the form of wolf and they swallow the sheep)
Siluvai vadiva koilgalelleam Christuvin koilgalaaguma?
(Are cross-shaped churches, churches of Christ?)
Saathiyai gaakum koyile Saabathai valarkkum koyile
(It is a church that guards caste and it is a curse)

We could hear a cry of righteous anger (prophetic anger) with yearning for a true Church of Christ or a separate Church!

As Felix Wilfred points out a theological hermeneutics has to be explored based on the oral tradition of the marginalised and the performance perspective closely attached to it; after all, oral tradition is not unfamiliar to Biblical tradition.¹⁶

Sathianathan Clarke along with A. P. Nirmal affirms that the experience of pain – pathos is the source of knowledge about God.

¹⁵SATHIANATHAN CLARKE, *Dalits and Christianity*, p.248.

¹⁶FELIX WILFRED, *From the Dusty Soil: Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity* (Madras: University of Madras, 1995) p.248.

Clarke rightly points out that A.P.Nirmal fails to take seriously the symbolization of this experience of pain-pathos that is manifested by Dalit religion. Their own religion and culture, which have sustained them through centuries, cannot be avoided. By expressing themselves through their particular cultural and religious forms the Dalits have built up their identity. Liberation in a holistic sense has to interact with these representations of the Dalits.¹⁷ Clarke identifies drum as an essential symbol in the life of Paraiyars, one of the untouchable communities in Tamil Nadu, South India. According to him, the drum could provide a key to explore and expound the collective religious themes of the indigenous communities for whom drumming is prior to and complementary to the “sacred Word”. It is no doubt may be in a posture of resistance to the co-opting or rejecting power of the dominant forms of the orientations of literacy that one locates the function of the drum. This intimate relationship between drumming and the voicing of the Divine can be noticed in certain Native American tribes and African communities. It is also the mode of expression among the Dalit communities.

As Minz rightly observes, “the self - understanding of the Dalits and the Tribals cannot be completed without discussing their problems along with the God/Gods they worship”¹⁸ For instance, the Dalit deities are female deities, they are sovereign. If the male associate is there, he is there as brother or son or the gate-keeper. Dalit religious expression is also characterised by male- female equality and we find that it is women who plays a dominant role through their oracles during rituals; most of these oracles are protest oracles. There is social and economic equality among them.¹⁹

¹⁷ SANTIANATHAN CLARKE, *Dalits and Christianity*, p.46.

¹⁸ NIRMAL MINZ, “Dalit – Tribal: A search for a Common Ideology,” in *Toward a Common Dalit Ideology*, ed., ARVIND P. NIRMAL (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1988) p.106.

¹⁹ KANCHAI ILAIAH, *Why I am not a Hindu?* pp.100-101.

Maria Arul Raja observes: “Mother nature has profusely endowed the Dalits with aesthetic gifts. By the art of the Dalits the leather from the dead carcasses is transformed into fine shoes and into refined music, and the muddy soil into a green carpet.”²⁰

Dalit discourse for integral liberation predominantly addresses the question of basic identity as dignified co-humans with others both as individuals and as a group. It affirms an inclusive ideology to uphold the on-going struggle for annihilating caste-system, effective eradication of untouchability to create a new humanity. It proposes a vision of promoting life of every creature to the full extent. God-talk of Dalits, by critical engagement with Dalit discourse and with the collective religious world of Dalits can promote human flourishing of Dalits. It can counter the hegemonic tendencies of the Indian Christian theology and also the homogenising tendency of the Hindu communalistic forces.

²⁰ A.MARIA ARUL RAJA, “Harmony in the midst of Anarchy: The Anatomy of the Spirit of Dalit Liberation,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 63 (1999) pp. 416-428.

Church's Response to Hindutva: Reflections from Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

Dr Paul Pulikkan

Introduction¹

The 21 century church in India encounters grave challenges from the Hindutva forces. The church as a minority religion and as a dialogue partner in the multi-religious, multi cultural and multi ethnic context must respond in a responsible way to these new situations. As a relevant response in these contexts, we present the views of the noted Indian Christian theologian Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) who called himself Hindu Catholic. His reflection on Trinity and cultural pluralism would help us to envisage a paradigm of interrelatedness, that could be fostered among different communities and religions in India, and effectively answer to the call of monolithic homogeneity propounded by Hindutva forces.

The Hindutva Agenda

'Hindutva' movement is the nationalist right wing of Hindu ideology, calling for Hindu supremacy in the religious, cultural, political, social spheres of life. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940) Madhav Sadashiv

¹ This essay is based on our study *Church in Pluralist Society of India: Response to the Hindutva from the Ideals of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907)* in *Eastern Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 2017 (1) 36-56.

Golwalkar (1906-1973) are the ideologues and protagonists of Hindutva whose political outfit is BJP (Bharatheeya Janata Party – Indian Peoples’ Party). These leaders were generally inspired by the nationalist movements in Europe (Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy) and took them as model.²

To understand Hindutva, it could be useful to have a grasp of their key agendas.

1. They would want to include all the tribals, dalits into the Hindu fold. In the National Census of 2001, they were included as Hindus. Sikhs, Jains and Buddhist were included in the broader Hindu religious groupings, although these religions themselves have rejected the same.

2. The Hindutva ideology wants a similar assimilation also with Christians and Muslims.³ If that is not possible, the Muslims and then Christians must be forced into submission.

3. An economic political agenda is crucial to the ideology. The upper class Hindus are warned that they would lose their grip over the economy; hence, they should call for the cancellation of the reservation quota for the Minorities and backward classes.

4. Hindutva has succeeded in instilling an unreasonable fear among the Hindus on the future demographic shift favouring Muslims and Christians. This prompts them to think that they would be a minority in the land and that their economic interests would have to be sacrificed in future.

² Indian Theological Association, *The Challenge of Hindutva: An Indian Christian Response*, 23rd Annual General Body meeting and Seminar, Final Statement, n. 6, in *VJTR* (Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection) 65 (2001) 131-143, p. 132. Cf. J. Mattam and P. Arockiadoss (eds.), *Hindutva, an Indian Christian Response*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2002.

³ F. Gonsalves, *God after Godhra, Communalism and the God of Community* in *VJTR* 66 (2002) 634-652, p. 641, f.n. 28.

Hindutva on the Indian Church

The general attitude of the Hindutva on the Indian Christians can be summarized along these lines. They do not accept the apostolate of St Thomas in India as historical. According to Hindutva thinkers, Christianity came to India in 4th century. The Portuguese, who came to India in 1498, forcefully converted the locals to Christianity with the military power. A policy of forced Christianization and conversion was followed by the British who uprooted the tribals in the north eastern states of India and elsewhere by converting them into Christianity. The Hindutva group confronts Christianity theologically also –especially the ideas of Christ as the only mediator, Christians as chosen race, the nature of Christianity as basing on single God, Prophet and Book, like Islam. For them interreligious dialogue practiced by Christians is an apology for Christian claim for superiority in theology and rituals.⁴ Former BJP ideologue Aroun Shourie asked for a substantial change in the attitude of Christians towards Hindus: the Christians must renounce all claims of conversion, at the same time acknowledging that there is equal possibility of salvation in all religions.⁵ All those who oppose the ideas of Sangh Parivar (All the umbrella associations of Hindutva) are repeatedly called pseudo secularists and enemies of Hindus.⁶ Freedom of religion, freedom of conversion of religion and the practice of minority rights are

⁴ V. Kundukulam, *RSSum Chraistava Sabhayum* (Malayalam - *RSS and Christian Church*) Alwaye: S.H. League, 2000, pp. 19-28.

⁵ Cf. A. Shourie, *Harvesting our Souls, Missionaries, Their Design, Their Claims*, Rupa & Company, 2006.

⁶ P.R. Ram, "Hindutva Offensive: Social Roots and Characterization" in P.R. Ram (ed.), *Secular Challenge to Communal Politics*, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Bombay, n.d, as quoted by L. Stanislaus, *Mission Challenged: Problems and Prospects*, in *VJTR* 64 (2000) 171-189, p. 173, f.3.

opposed by the Hindutva. K.S. Sudarshan, former president of Sangh Parivar, had even warned in 2000⁷ that they would revise the Constitution, formulate a uniform civil code and annul article 370 which accorded special status to Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP government, after its reelection by a massive majority in 2019 April, has cancelled art. 370 and is looking forward to launch other measures.

The national pervading culture is Hindu culture. Muslim, Christian and other cultures are local.⁸ Church's social activities and campaigns for social justice are rejected as ploys for raising money or effecting more conversions. Inculturation is seen as another method for conversion as by this, one would feel that there was no distinction between Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduization of India's tribals and dalits is an open agenda of the Hindutva politicians. They visualize an imaginary all-encompassing universal Hindu nation that existed from the times immemorial. They glorify "Rashtra Purusha" – the corporate national personality – with the conclusion that Hindu society is the very manifestation of God himself, including all people of India.

However, this depiction of history is, according to the Indian historian K.N. Panikkar, not only a distortion of history but its denial; it is 'methodologically unsound and thematically retrogressive'.⁹ The Hindutva ideology is characterized by one country, one people and one culture and one language. This compulsive and arbitrary moulding of the Indian state is imaginary and something that never existed. Apart from a genuine desire of many well meaning Hindus¹⁰ for a genuine revival of Hinduism on

⁷ *Economic Political Weekly*, Sept 16, 2000, p. 3395-3401.

⁸ V. Kundukulam, *RSSum...*, pp. 45-49.

⁹ F. Gonsalves, *God after Godhra*, p. 644

¹⁰ P. Pulikkan, *Nostra Aetate, The Indian Church and the Hindu Religion* in G. Routhier (ed.), *Réceptions de Vatican II. Le concile au risque de l'histoire et des espaces humains*, Leuven, 2004, 153-173, p. 173.

its ideological and spiritual basis, the Hindutva programme of thought and reflection is a socio-economic phenomenon with its deep political ramifications and implications.¹¹

Present Scenario

According to J. Lele, the Hindutva has three intentions – hegemonic, homogenizing, and pedagogic.¹² The ideology evidently calls for the hegemony of the Hindus. All the castes and subgroups were to be co-opted in Hinduism in order to have a universal Hindu homogeneity. This “pedagogic violence”, according to Lele, discredits the history, symbols and religious traditions of the non-Hindu groups.¹³ This is all the more evident in the preparation of the school text books with the clear intervention in the national/state curriculum committees of schools and colleges. Like the Marxists in Kerala who had attempted to have the text book in red colours,¹⁴ the Hindutva forces like to impose a suffronization of the schools, with their own reading of history, without ever basing on the academic excellence and scientific objectivity.¹⁵ The New Education Policy of 2019 makes a plea ‘to restore India’s inner

¹¹ Shashi Tharoor, *Why I Am a Hindu*, London: C. Hurst & co, 2018. Tharoor, after a scholarly analysis of the tenets of Hinduism, reflects on Hindutva and the perils India would face if the religious ‘fundamentalists’ are given the upper hand.

¹² J. Lele, *Hindutva, the Emergence of the Right*, Madras: Earthworm books, 1995, p. xvii. Lele is Professor of Political Studies, Sociology and Rehabilitation Therapy at Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada. R. Heredia, *Subaltern Interrogations of Hindu Nationalism*, in *VJTR* 66 (2002) 822-836.

¹³ R. Heredia, *Subaltern Interrogations*, p. 915.

¹⁴ The left wing Kerala Government tried to impose Marxian agenda in the Kerala text books in 2008.

¹⁵ Under BJP rule, astrology was introduced as a department by the UGC (University Grants Commission) a government apex body that monitors higher educational institutions in India.

vitality, recognise her strides in science and other branches of knowledge long before the Europeans, and the need to develop a 'civilizational consciousness'. This is well accepted but there is a genuine fear on a hidden agenda where one wants to rewrite Indian history in the school syllabi.¹⁶

One reason for the attacks by the Hindutva forces on Christian educational institutions was that the dalits and the tribals were becoming self reliant through education and conscientization projects, which was strongly resented by the local landlords who could not then exploit these marginalized.

This was evident in the violence against Christians in Orissa in 2008.¹⁷ "The main reason for violence against Christians is to ensure that the welfare, educational services offered by them do not reach the Adivasis and that they remain poor and illiterate, that the status quo in these areas prevails so that the democratic space for these wretched of the society is blocked.....".¹⁸ However, Church's mission for the subaltern groups is all the more urgent but paved with many risks since sinister methods are used to discredit those social workers who work for the marginalized: they are labeled as secessionists, anti nationals, and as a threat to national integration.¹⁹ Many foreign missionaries who have spent decades of their lives in selfless service in India are denied visa for further stay.

¹⁶ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/national-education-policy-2019-will-the-nep-be-able-to-tackle-challenges-faced-by-the-system/story-guBeHTJNj8ysUWJuvtagaI.html>, accessed 2.12.2019.

¹⁷ L. Bavadam, *Shock and Pain*, in *Frontline*, Sept. 26, 2008, 9-11, p. 11.

¹⁸ Editorial, *Indian Currents*, 8-14, Sept 2008, 8-10, p. 9.

¹⁹ J. Lele, *Hindutva, the Emergence of the Right*, p. 100.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and a New Ecclesiological Model of *Interrelated Communities*

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907), a prominent Hindu Christian thinker of his times, sought to harmonize his Hindu identity with Christian existence.²⁰ Some of his ideas could help us to formulate significant ecclesiological responses to Hindutva. A child of Indian nationalist movement, he converted to Catholicism in 1891. He used the ideals of Upanishadic Vedanta to express Christian dogma. He, together with other compatriots, like Tagore and Vivekananda, wanted to bring 'a collective cultural identity' to India. It was a common Hindu heritage, based on the classical Hindu ethos.²¹ In his conversion to Catholicism, he was totally dedicated to Jesus Christ, whom he called the "Man of Sorrows, the *Despised Man*". Upadhyay's espousal of new life caused great resentment and opposition both from his family members and his Hindu colleagues. He took a sanyasa form of life, confirming his earlier decision to lead a celibate life. At the same time, he had opposition from the official church, especially the papal delegate Wladyslaw Zaleski, for his theology and work. His three passions were Vedanta, Catholic faith, commitment to *Swaraj* (self rule).²² His ideas are mainly visible in the journal he published *Sophia*.

²⁰ S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's Significance for Indian Christian Theology*, Bangalore: ATC, 2008. J.J. Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

²¹ Indian Theological Association, 30th Annual meeting, 2007, Final Statement, S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic*, 186-202.

²² S. Painadath, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's Inspiration for Intra-religious Dialogue and Inculturation in A Hindu – Catholic...*, 87-98, 87-88.

One of the important contributions of Upadhyay is his explanation of the idea of double belonging in the Church and in the Hindu heritage.²³ He liked to call himself as Hindu catholic, Hindu by birth and culture, Catholic by faith and rebirth. As he formulated, “his Hinduness was God’s gift through nature, his Christianness God’s gift by a special and unmerited grace”.²⁴ Born as Brahmin, Upadhyay explained his Hindu identity as *samaj* dharma (community) and the adherence to the church as *sadhana* dharma (religion). Samaj was the cultural milieu of his birth and he would fulfill the obligations of the caste. But he would have the freedom to follow his own *ista devata* (the deity of his choice) which was his belonging as practiced religion. This distinction has helped later to the formation of communities like *Isu-panthis* and the *krist-bhaktas* (Christ devotees) in North India.²⁵ According to Upadhyay, an ongoing dialogue between the Hindu culture of dharma and Christian faith, between Hindu Vedanta and Christian spirituality, has to take place in the Catholic Church in India.²⁶ Unfortunately, Upadhyay depended too much on Scholastic mould to interpret this encounter between Vedanta and Christianity, as neo Thomism was the officially accepted method for catholic theologians of the day. Further, the subaltern movements and problems are neglected by Upadhyay, who seems to have believed

²³ J. Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) and his Significance for our Times*, in *VJTR* 71 (2007) 165-184, p. 174.

²⁴ Final Statement, S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic*, 195.

²⁵ S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic*, 196; Jerome Sylvester, *Khristbhakta Movement, Hermeneutics of a Religio-Cultural Phenomenon*, Delhi; ISPCK, 2013.

²⁶ S. Painadath, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay’s Inspiration*, 94.

that an Inculturation of Christianity in the vedantic matrix would be enough for the liberation of India.²⁷

Upadhyay's exposition of vedantic idea of Trinity as *Saccidananda* (Sat, Cit, Ananda – Being, Intelligence, Bliss) is his main contribution to Christian theology. The methodology of double belonging proposed by Upadhyay can be based on his Trinitarian theology and we think it has got ecclesiological implications in the light of the challenges from Hindutva ideology.

Brahman knows Himself and from this self knowledge proceeds His eternal beatitude. Brahman is related of necessity only to the image of His own being, which is reflected in the ocean of his knowledge. "This relation of Being (Sat) to itself in self-knowledge (Cnit) is one of perfect harmony, bliss (Ananda)".²⁸ Upadhyay relates this idea with the Christian Trinity: the knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by His knowledge is the Son; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of mutual love, the breath of love from the Father to the Son. Thus, Upadhyay gave a Christian interpretation to the vedantic concept of Brahma as Saccidananda.²⁹ His Trinitarian theology speaks of God as internally related. He writes: "...God to be is, according to the Christian revelation, to be related internally in a three-fold way. It is necessary for the Supreme Being to beget his infinite Self in Thought, and breathe the breath of Love, his own Spirit, towards the Only Begotten. So there are three necessary terms in the

²⁷ Cf. also J. Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, p. 180.

²⁸ K.P. Aleaz, *A Prophet to be reclaimed: Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, the Indian Christian Nationalist*, in *Third Millennium* 10 (2007) 1, 10-15, p. 14

²⁹ *Ibid.* Upadhyay specifically states that the Hindu triad is not like the Christian triad; the former, according to him, is a phenomenal aspect of the Divinity. The triad exists in time only. "When the Universe ceases to be, Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Siva the destroyer lose their existence". The Christian Trinity is not phenomenal.

Godhead distinct in relation but one in essence. The Infinite is eternally, and not phenomenally, tri-une”.³⁰

A balanced and adequate God image of interrelatedness is needed in order to counter the homogeneous, monolithic culture and God-concept the Hindutva proposes.³¹ We should present suitable divine images based on the Indian tradition (Cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20). Following Upadhyay’s explication of Saccidananda, we can come forward with a Trinitarian model, developed from an Indian ecclesiological approach. Today, Trinity as a community of persons existing in mutual relationships is an important paradigm for understanding human relationships and community.³² “The network of human relationships modeled upon the Triune God, being a unity-in-diversity, is neither an oppressive uniformity that steamrolls diverse personhoods nor a discordant collectivity that threatens communitarian unity”.³³ This God-concept as unity in plurality is an antidote to the artificial homogeneity and uniformity proposed by the Hindutva forces for the Indian ethos: “since God

³⁰ J. Lipner and G. Gispert Sauch, *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Library of Indian Christian Theology, UTC, Bangalore, Vol. 1., 1991, p. 142.

³¹ F. Gonsalves, *God after Godhra*, p. 647.

³² F. Gonsalves, *God after Godhra*, p. 648; cf. the vast literature on this: T. Peters, *God as Trinity. Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1993; A.J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion. Trinitarian Description and Human Participation*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996. J.A. Bracken, *The Holy Trinity as a Community of Divine Persons*, I & II in *The Heythrop Journal* 15/ 2,3 (1974), 166-182, 257-70; J.J. O'Donnell, *The Trinity as Divine Community: A Critical Reflection Upon Recent Theological Developments* in *Gregorianum* 69/1 (1988) 5-34.

³³ F. Gonsalves, *God after Godhra*, p. 649.

is not a Monad but exists as a Community of Persons, consequently by fashioning itself into the image and likeness of the Divine Community, human society gradually grows into the fullness which is both one and relational".³⁴ Human society's dynamic growing into the Trinitarian paradigm and the Trinity's intervention into the human history is a dynamic process of the Trinitarian economy. The Holy Trinity encounters the unjust structures and inhuman practices, enters these realms in order to renew them and continually recreate them. Thus, Trinitarian theology challenges each one of the concerned against the oppression of the minorities and suppression of the divergences.

Leonardo Boff writes: "Society is not set in its unjust and unequal relationships, but summoned to transform itself in the light of the open and egalitarian relationships that obtain from the communion of the Trinity, the goal of social and historical progress. If the Trinity is good news, then it is particularly for the poor and the oppressed".³⁵ As Moltmann powerfully states "in the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender".³⁶ The Trinity symbolizes the human kenosis and the pleroma (fullness). Trinitarian theology helps us to move from hopelessness and helplessness in the unjust structures of the present society to a prophetic action over the patterns of power and domination.

The process of eternal relationships in the Trinity can be a model of ecclesial life. The church, patterned on Trinity, is not a static reality but a dynamic one, in the process of reaching out to the peoples of all ages. The being of the church (Sat) ever knowing

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1986, p. 158.

³⁶ J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, Harper & Row, New York, 1974, p. 244.

(Cit) – is in constant communion with the realities of the different peoples such as religions, culture, socio-political situations and in this it become truly a Synodal church. It walks with the people. The etymology of Synodality comes from the Greek words “with” and “path”. The faithful are *sunodoi* “companions on the journey,” as the document “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” by the International Theological Commission stated.³⁷ American church historian Massimo Faggioli states: “It means that the church has to live its life as a church, as a journey where the entire people is called to be part of this life. There are no bystanders, there is no audience in this journey.” The papacy of Francis gives voice to the peripheries and the excluded and grounds the church in the reality of the world beyond the sacristy.³⁸

Such a growing communion with all peoples, especially, the marginalized and those on the peripheries, will bring about mutual love (bliss), forming them into a single community of people who base themselves on the Kingdom values. What could be the meaning of this mutuality: there are different levels of interrelatedness or belongingness that could be possible to exist between the church and different people and groups (outside the Church) of the Indian society. The church’s concern should not be merely the interests of its own members but also those outside her fold. A broad and profound communion can be achieved with the different sections of the Indian society, especially those in the peripheries and the

³⁷ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html, accessed 5.3.2019.

³⁸ https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/10/26/greater-inclusion-synod-could-complicate-collegiality-among-bishops?fbclid=IwAR23dEsdXHXD2KcLgQN82FJVuw-r_r6OboA-jR6LPGOHoMFhbrcuZd4j7tk, accessed 28.10.2018

subaltern groups, in order to bring an effective response to the elitist Hindutva concept of society. Concluding its reflection on Upadhyay, ITA Statement of 2007 affirms the unitive vision of this great thinker: "Divine grace transforms all human pursuit into the new creation. It is within the global process that we look at the religion and culture today. The Christ event gives us Christians the light to perceive the Divine, while other symbols enlighten the minds of others. Hence is the need for great respect in inter religious encounter and inter cultural solidarity".³⁹

Upadhyay's New Openness to Cultural expression

Upadhyay lived and worked in an era marked by resurgent Hindu cultural revival that is visible in the second half of the 19th century and continued in the 20th century. The reasons for such a revival were: 1. The denigration of the Indian cultural symbols and ethics by the British colonizers as is evident in the letters written by the officers to England. The same trend was followed by several European missionaries working in India. Often the Indian religions and Hindu deities were presented in poor light etc. 2. Perceived threat from Christian evangelicals and their efforts for proselytization.⁴⁰

Slowly as a reaction towards imperial rule of the British, a national and cultural space was gradually created. The Orientalist interpretation of the Indian past was accepted by the many nationalist leaders: this presented the Indian culture, religion and spirituality as being superior to the West. S.Vazhappilly observes that an example of such stereotype was the projection of the

³⁹ S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic...*, p. 200.

⁴⁰ S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic...*, pp. 189-90. Subhash Anand, *The Emergence of Hindutva*, in Mattam and P. Arockiadoss, *Hindutva, an Indian Christian Response*, 103-222, 128-130.

superiority of Indian culture and spirituality by Vivekananda.⁴¹ Slowly the national and cultural space was merged; Hindu thinkers began to identify the national with the Hindu cultural revival. However, there are two significant trends visible here, which has serious implications for us today: one group, like Aurobindo Ghose, Vivekananda and Balagangadhar Tilak,⁴² stressed the overarching presence of Hindu religion in Indian society and identified the national ethos with the Hindu culture. Another group, led by Rabindranath Tagore, called for a pluralistic conception of Indian identity. “This stream of nationalism tried to discover a shared and historical past of cultural pluralism as the basis for unity; they fostered a critical openness to the question of identity”.⁴³

Although there is uncritical acceptance of caste distinction and an apparent lack of openness to the non Aryan cultures of India in Upadhyay’s thought, he could still provide us valuable insights into combining cultural revival with the Christian values. Upadhyay was a patriot and nationalist. Any yet his patriotism and nationalism, like Tagore, were open to another tradition – Christian. He wanted to reform the Hindu culture and to regain its spiritual greatness, warning on the pitfalls of atheism, polytheism and pantheism and shallow secularism.⁴⁴ His novel concept of double affiliation - or better multiple belonging - offers possibilities and problems for practice of Christian faith. One can have genuine and meaningful

⁴¹ S.Vazhappilly, *Implications of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay’s Cultural Nationalism and Construction of Identity*, in S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic...*, 28-54, 37.

⁴² Vazhappilly is critical of Upadhyay and includes him also in this category. However, he is silent of Upadhyay’s openness to Christian tradition.

⁴³ S.Vazhappilly, *Implications of Brahmabandhab...*, p. 42.

⁴⁴ S. Painadath and J. Parappally (eds.), *A Hindu – Catholic...*, p.192.

encounters with the Hindu culture. And yet we may also ask, since faith has truly communitarian expression in liturgy and rituals, how could people in multiple belonging situations comfortably express their rituals? On the other hand, sociological and missiological situations in many countries would require us to think afresh on a new pattern of Christian existence. Here the question is - how the many non Christians who want to be genuine followers of Jesus can have an authentic model of faith expression, remaining in the Hindu ethos. Upadhyay's thoughts could lead us to further reflection in this regard.

Conclusion:

Although the ideas of Upadhyay are not comprehensive, his thoughts such as the double belonging, and especially, his Trinitarian vision as Saccidananda could be an opening for church's being in communion with multifaceted structures of the Indian religions and cultures. As Pope Francis has clearly articulated in *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 116, churches have an urgent need of dialoging with the cultures around it: "The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, "remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root".⁴⁵

Unfortunately in the present India, the Indian nation seems to be identified by Hindutva forces with a type of Hindu culture, characterized by domination and subjugation of other divergent cultures and faiths. According to Felix Wilfred, secularism in its

⁴⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 40.

truest sense means “that the state itself does not become partisan to any particular group, nor does it privilege any particular religion”.⁴⁶ The equidistance to all religions is essential to secularism. The problem with the secular nationalism, Wilfred notes, is that the ideals of such nationalism are not kept in its practice. This happens as the state is being run under the pressure of the numerical majority which creates the government. Religious nationalism is still much more dangerous, as it can impose its agenda under a democratic garb.

Receiving inspiration from Upadhyay, the church’s response in today’s India can be one of promoting humanistic nationalism.⁴⁷ Such humanistic ideal of nationalism works against the sole maintenance of the interests of the upper-class and looks forward to the equality of all classes.⁴⁸ This is true especially in the case of India, where the current economic policies create a number of the marginalized groups. The humanized nationalism takes “a very positive view of plurality and consider the diversity of cultures and religions as a richness from which the whole nation benefits”.⁴⁹ The Christians must give a united witness to the values of the gospel with prophetic courage. They must live and share the values of the Reign of God in the public space and participate in the nation building with the ideals of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the whole

⁴⁶ F. Wilfred, *Nationalism and Religion, Ambiguities and Conflicts*, in *Jeevadhara* 31 (2001) 255-278, p. 263.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267. L. Stanislaus, *A Christian Response to Hindutva* in *VJTR* 68 (2004) 753-773, p. 754.

⁴⁸ F. Wilfred, *Nationalism and Religion*, pp. 267-268

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

world is one family) – non violence, peace, solidarity, harmony and equity. These resonate with Jesus' vision of the Reign of God.⁵⁰

The antidote to the challenge of Hindutva is Church's interrelatedness, an ideal inspired by Upadhyay whom we can call a real pioneer of Indian Christian theology. The church's interrelatedness with different spheres of Indian society, a natural extension of the methodology of double belonging proposed by Upadhyay, must be further reflected with regard to its practical implications. This interrelatedness could help the church for prophetic action in today's word of subjugation, oppression and inequality. Church's ongoing mission is to be enriched by the socio cultural, religious heritage of other religions. Its attempts to share its riches with others are in tune with the spirit of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. This is an urgent mission for the church in India to side with the poor, as the gap between the rich and the poor daily widens; often the media projects a glittering India but the church shall not forget a parallel India of the rural poor, the subalterns, who live without rights, without religious freedom, who are not even considered as humans by political parties except at an election time.⁵¹

⁵⁰ J. Pulikan, *Challenges of Religious Nationalism in India today – A Theological Response*, 41 Annual Meet and Conference of Indian Theological Association, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2019, p. 316.

⁵¹ L. Bavadam, *Shock and Pain*, p. 11

A Network Model for the Hierarchical Church

Dr Sr Helen

Introduction

Whereas an egalitarian or non-hierarchical set-up in all walks of life is the yearning of every human heart, the hierarchical system determines the structure of every institution including the Church. As a matter of fact, almost all Christian churches evince some sort of hierarchical structure. An assumption in this regard is in place: “Hierarchy’ is the clergy of the Catholic Church or of an Episcopal Church’¹. Since hierarchical language has connoted social inequality and subordination for so long, which, is evinced in the form of discrimination, suppression, marginalization, isolation, clericalism ..., it is extremely difficult to purge the terminology of these connotations².

Is hierarchy *necessarily* dominative, discriminatory, sexist, and static, or are these traits abuses of hierarchy? In our pursuit of investigating this concern, we analyze the etymological, theological and ecclesiological significance of the term ‘hierarchy’ and propose an alternative: a network model, which is characterized by decentralization, interconnectedness and interdependence.

¹See, https://www.google.co.in/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=TQrQWKfhEu_s_8AeezpvYBw#q=hierarchy+definition&dobs=Hierarchy, accessed 20.07.2018.

² Hierarchy is generally equated with authoritarianism and oppression in which power flows from the top down, and lower members are constrained by force. This model is prominent in animal groups (e.g. pecking orders) and military hierarchies.

Hierarchy – Terminological Clarification

The term ‘hierarchy’ contains profound significance. In the term ‘hierarchy’, the Greek ‘*hier*’ meaning ‘sacred’, is the prefix of the noun ‘*arche*’, means ‘origin’, ‘principle’ or ‘rule’. This illustration when referred to the Church, ‘hierarchy’ may be taken to mean as the mystery of the Church’s sacred / divine origin / rule. Hence, the etymological sense renders the Church most certainly *hier-arche* – ‘sacred in her origin’ and ‘governed by sacred rule’ – the two essential components of the Church.

The Church is sacred in her origin. This is because her foundation lies in the divine/ God who is Trinitarian. As an ‘assembly’ or ‘community’ she is ‘called out’³. The purpose of her being ‘called out’ is ‘to be sent’, in order to carry out the mission, which can be termed as the Church’s ‘divine rule’ in action. When seen from the Trinitarian framework, the Church is the one who is called by God the Father, sent by Jesus Christ⁴ and empowered by the Holy Spirit – for the sake of mission. McBrien puts it distinctly: ‘The Church is the whole body, or Congregation of persons who are called by God the Father to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, the Son, in Word, in sacrament, in witness, and in service, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, to collaborate with Jesus’ historic mission for the sake of the Kingdom of God’⁵. McBrien, while underlining the intimate bond between the Trinity and the Church, draws our attention to the assumed ecclesial communion by the following

³The Hebrew *kahal* and Greek *ekklesia*, from which derive the words ‘ecclesial’ and ‘ecclesiastical’ meaning an assembly or community which is ‘called out’ for a purpose. Richard P. McBrien, *101 Questions and Answers on the Church* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2003), 8-9.

⁴In a specific manner, the Church has her origin in Jesus, identified by his person and work. His work/ mission was to gather together not the just or righteous but to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 8:11-12; 10:6; Lk 13:28-29). The Twelve called by Jesus were entrusted with the same mission..., as rulers and judges (Mt 19:28; Lk 10:1-20; 22:30).

⁵Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 723.

words: “the Church is the whole body, or Congregation of persons who are called” A similar description of the Church is put forth by the Council affirming that the Triune God is the source and pattern of ecclesial communion. The Council declares, ‘the Church is a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’ (*LG*, 4).

The terminological clarification of ‘hierarchy’ demonstrates the crux of this paper, namely, the Church is not an organization of superiors and subordinates in which the former garner power and lord it over the latter. In her origin, in her rule, and also in her existence, the Church as the *hierarche*, is egalitarian. This aspect is evident in her inception and initial growth. A cursory survey of the same follows.

Only Divine-Human Hierarchy

Jesus clarified to his disciples that the concept of power which accords superiority does not pertain to the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 20: 25). If in the worldly standards, status and power procure respect and greatness, in Jesus’ understanding, ‘greatness’ is a gift of God. Paradoxically, one achieves greatness only by taking the form and task of a servant. At receiving the charge of Jesus’ mission, the apostles observed his precepts loyally. A clear instance appears in Acts 15:23. In addressing the church at Corinth regarding requirements for membership in the Church, the Apostles and Elders – whose head was Peter – provide guidelines through a letter; it begins as follows: ‘The apostles and elders, **your brothers**. As a matter of fact, Peter, the head of the Church, was not the head of all the early Christian communities. J McCue informs: “If Peter exerts leadership so do the others, and there is no reason to think that these others were to act only in virtue of Peter’s authority. They too were sent by the Lord”⁶. Besides, in times of dispute,

⁶ James McCue, “The Roman Primacy and the Development of Dogma,” *Theological Studies*, (June, 1964): 187.

Peter is not the arbiter; they come to a common decision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). Peter is a coordinator in the Church who visits different churches and exhorts the believers to be faithful to their commitment to Christ. The 'head' of the Church is Jesus Christ (Col 1:18-19)⁷.

Hierarchy in its present form was not part of the Early Church either. The New Testament Church was very simple in its organization. When people obeyed the gospel, the Lord saved them and added them to His church (Acts 2:47). All of these were members of the one body, over which Christ was the supreme head (Col 1:18; Eph 1:20-23). This, would have been the only structural organization of the Early Church. There had been no earthly headquarters, no kind of ecclesiasticism, no system of superior organizations, no titles such as 'Holiness', 'Eminence', 'Excellency', 'Reverend'...The first letter of Peter speaks of communities in Asia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Pontus (cf. 1 Pet 1:1). These communities did not have a structural hierarchy. "Neither Gospels nor Acts propose any kind of fixed order"⁸.

The early Christian communities were 'local churches'. They themselves celebrated the supper of the Lord, and the community as a whole was responsible for correcting abuses (cf. 1 Cor 11f). Their structures were rather simple and 'congregational'; the members themselves, according to their own gifts and talents, shared the various teaching, healing, prophetic and administrative functions in the community (1 Cor 12:1-11).

⁷Christ as the head of the Church is to be understood in the sense of he being the 'source' of the Church; this is because he is the head of creation. He is the vital principle from whom the Church derives its existence and meaning, and this is so by reason of his resurrection. This interpretation of the head, gains support from the other reference to the Church as a body (cf Col 2:19).Evrett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 96.

⁸Richard Zenhle, *The Making of the Church* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers Inc., 1969),83.

In each local congregation, there were elders or bishops and deacons [a plurality] (Acts 14:23; Phil 1:1). Each congregation, i.e., individual local church was autonomous – free to conduct its own affairs under the oversight of its bishops, subject only and always to the authority of Christ the Head⁹. The ‘bishops’, a reference to plurality, refers to the same person as the ‘elder’ (Titus 1:5,7). We understand that there was no distinction between an elder or a bishop. In other words, the successor to the apostolic college was not an individual but the episcopate, the college of bishops¹⁰. For the first few centuries, the bishop was elected by the people or the clergy and the people together elected the bishop¹¹. Adherence to Jesus’ guidelines concerning the exercise of authority continues in the person of Clement of Rome, the successor of Peter. In his first epistle (96 C.E), he demands obedience not to his own personal authority, or to the office; he exhorts obedience to the authority of the Roman Church as a community, and not that of an individual¹². Accordingly, beginning from the Apostolic College, through the early centuries of Christianity, the Church endeavoured to follow the precepts of Jesus regarding power; she mirrored the values of the Kingdom of God as perfectly as possible.

Eventually, when several people started eyeing for ‘seats at the right and left side of Jesus’, the entire scenario changed. In their struggle for supremacy, various patriarchates, five in particular, namely, Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch attempted to exercise supreme jurisdiction over other churches;

⁹Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy* (N.Y.: Norton 1968), 17.

¹⁰ For a survey regarding the controversy on the subject matter see, James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 1-179.

¹¹As cited in J.M.R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 69.

¹² James McCue, “The Roman Primacy and the Development of Dogma,” *Theological Studies*, (June, 1964) 169.

they also claimed to designate the ‘universal bishop’ who would be the supreme head of the church. The stage being set for a stair-step fashion of administration – hierarchy – in the Church is evident in the resolve of the patriarchates. The Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) clearly rejects the claim for the ‘universal bishop’. It decreed that the bishops in the different provinces would be of equal rank and authority, and that each one would be free to conduct his affairs independent of any other province or bishop. The Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) in its 28th canon reiterated the same.

The Church not only rejected the claim to supremacy, she also denounced anyone who assumed titles of sovereignty. In 588 C.E., John the Faster, the bishop of Constantinople, assumed the title of the ‘Universal Bishop of the church’. Pelagius II (579-590), the bishop of Rome at that time, condemned the act as unlawful and obstinate saying, ‘Regard not the name of Universality which John has unlawfully usurped to himself, for let not of the Patriarchs ever use this so profane appellation. You may well estimate what mischief may be expected rapidly to follow, whenever among priests such perverted beginnings break forth...’ Gregory the Great (590-604) successor to Pelagius II in Rome, too, denounced bitterly the action of John the Faster in Constantinople: ‘To consent to the adoption of that wicked appellation is nothing less than to apostatize from the faith’. He further said, ‘I, indeed confidently assert that whosoever either calls himself, or desires to be called Universal Priest, that person, in his vain elation, is the precursor of Antichrist, because, through his pride he exalts himself above the others’¹³.

It is significant to note that Pelagius II and Gregory the Great did not claim that John the Faster was usurping something that belonged to the bishop of Rome¹⁴; rather, they said that no bishop, in Rome,

¹³ Charles Hastings Collette, *The Novelities of Romanism*, (London: Religious Tract Society, 1864), 3-5.

¹⁴ Gregory the Great is the bishop of Rome; he is listed in the list of Popes; hence, he is certainly an authentic authority on the issue.

Constantinople or anywhere else, should be called universal bishop and that, until that time, no one was considered the supreme authority of the Church. The words of Pelagius II that ‘...let none of the Patriarchs ever use this so profane appellation’ and the words of Gregory the Great that ‘no one of my predecessors ever consented to use this so profane appellation... and adoption of such appellation is nothing less than to apostatize from the faith’, mirror vividly the Church’s stance on the exercise of power in the Church. She has curbed effectively any attempts for supremacy; and no hegemonic rule was permitted to creep inside her portals.

As a conclusion it can be stated that till the year 604 C.E., no ‘supreme authority’ existed in the Church. History vouchsafes to the fact that the title of the ‘Universal Bishop’ which gradually came into existence in the Church has been the result of usurpation by the mighty and never a sanction of the ‘divine right’¹⁵. Moreover, all the bishops were always subject to the authority of Christ the Head. Even the great chosen leaders of Israel – Abraham (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8; James 2:23) and Moses (Ex 33:11) – are referred to as the friends of God and never the chieftains. Jesus calls his disciples his friends (Jn 13:13, 14); however, he is still their Lord and Teacher (Jn 13:13-14). The leaders of the Church, who are friends of God/ friends of Jesus are unique. They demonstrate specific characteristics. They love one another, they obey God’s commandments, they understand God’s truths, they are chosen to bear fruit that remains, and they never lord it over others.

The foregoing illustration can be summed up by asserting that the early history of Christianity as well as the biblical history validate the fact that the Church at her inception as well as at the initial

¹⁵Cf. The climax to the struggle for supremacy came in 606 C.E. when emperor Phocas, a usurper on the civil throne in Constantinople, crowned the bishop of Rome, Boniface III, the first universal head of the church. Cf. *The Development of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy* [http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/Development of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy.html](http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/Development%20of%20the%20Roman%20Catholic%20Hierarchy.html), accessed 12.05.2018.

years has been an egalitarian body with equal rights, equal status and equal opportunities; the Church also succeeded in nipping any effort to stifling the mission of the Church. The illustration guides us to claim that there can be no human-human hierarchy; if at all there exists any sort of hierarchy, it is the divine-human hierarchy.

Hierarchy as Domination??

Hierarchy is defined as ‘a system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority’¹⁶. However, people fail to realize the ephemerality of the relative status or authority and identify themselves with the position they hold. They also lord it over others. The scenario turns out to be authoritarian, dominative, patriarchal and static; such mode of operation renders the status/ authority which is hierarchical in nature, to be suspected as a menace that threatens communion and otherness.

Certain category of people like feminists desist hierarchy. This is because “ideas and projects in the relational feminist tradition feature a non-hierarchical, egalitarian vision of social organization”.¹⁷ S Brookfield, an Educationist holds that “...societies in which inquiry, reflection, and exploration are the prerogative of a privileged minority, are likely to be static, ossified, and hierarchical”¹⁸. The Hindu caste system, the class system in European history, slavery in several parts of the world, and the subordination of women to men in all religions and cultures evince the worse evil effects hierarchy can breed. It would be irrational to deny that hierarchies with their institutional relations of superiority

¹⁶https://www.google.co.in/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=TQrQWKfhEu_s8AeezpvYBw#q=hierarchy+definition&dobs=hierarchy, accessed 20.12.2018.

¹⁷Joann Wolski Conn, “New Vitality: The Challenge from Feminist Theology,” *America*, Oct. 5(1991): 217.

¹⁸Stephen Brookfield, “Understanding and Adult Learning,” *School Library Media Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (1988): 99.

and subordination, have been and are oppressive, sexist, and static. The Church is not exempted of such peril!!

Hierarchy in the Church

While deliberating on the topic of ‘hierarchy in the Church’, the schema drawn on the theme of ‘church authority’ to be discussed in the first Vatican Council, seems to be serving as an appropriate starting. It declared as follows:

The Church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights. It is a society of unequals, not only because among the faithful some are clerics and some are laymen, but particularly because there is in the Church, the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach, and govern, and others not¹⁹.

The clear-cut statement both validates and advocates the unequal setting of the Church. As a matter of fact, it is a deviation from the precepts of Jesus and the lifestyle of the Early Church. Conceding that the lay faithful are accorded an uneven position in the Church, we would like to account for the depressing condition of females – a different species altogether in the Church. Their inclusion in the leadership positions, which comprises active involvement in decision-making, seems a distant dream. More so, ‘the present day Church seems to be more than satisfied with some flowery statements about the role of women in the Church, its exalted feminine symbolism, and the ‘valuable’ contribution and support of women, especially the religious women, to Church activities’²⁰. Females definitely differ biologically from males; however, they share equally in the capacity of living in the truth (rationality) and love (relationality)²¹.

¹⁹ Quoted by Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 35.

²⁰ Jacob Raju, “The Catholic Church and Gender Sensitivity,” *Integral Liberation*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 2013): 117.

²¹ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 8.

The sacraments mediate grace in the Church. However, it is a no-entry zone for several faithful. The sacramental power, which situates the ordained ministers on the upper rung of hierarchy, is discriminatory and exclusivist towards females. As a matter of fact, when the ordained ministers mediate grace, they do so not apart from the faithful, but in relation of mutuality and communion with them; they are in communion with the members rather than in superiority over them²². Moreover, the sacramental power pertains to the area of function and not to dignity or holiness, which Pope Francis has highlighted clearly: “When we speak of sacramental power we are in the realm of function not that of dignity or holiness ... our dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. In the Church, functions do not favour the superiority of some vis-a-vis the others. Indeed, a woman, Mary is more important than the bishops” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 40). Is not the Church’s discriminatory and exclusivist attitude a contradiction to the marks of the Church?

Besides stowing the privileges of decision-making and administration of sacraments for oneself entirely, the Church hierarchy emits other degenerative side effects. Clericalism is the typical undesirable effect. It is immortalized in the indictment from the 19th century French political leader Leon Gambetta: “Clericalism, there is the enemy”! Clericalism is the ‘policy of maintaining or increasing the power of a religious hierarchy’. The clerical structures reinforce hierarchy and domination, which, automatically exclude females from policy formation in the Church. In fact, clericalism ‘implies elitism, the superiority of the priesthood over the laity’²³. To realize the dream of every faithful – to be full

²²Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, “The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit,” *Theological Studies* Vol. 62 (2001): 476.

²³ For details see, Pauline Chakkalakal, “Discipleship of Equals: A Biblical-Theological Perspective” in *Women as Equal Disciples: Unfinished Task of*

citizens of the Church –, the faithful need to be constantly reassured that “the Church receives the fullness of the Spirit only in the totality of the gifts made by all Her members. She is not a pyramid whose passive base receives everything from the apex”²⁴.

The imbalanced set-up of the Church has been facing constant dissents. Founders of well-known Religious Orders had their specific inspiration, which was directed against bureaucratization in the church – a characteristic phenomenon from the Middle Ages to the First Vatican Council. St Francis of Assisi objected to the ecclesiastical capitalism in his day (bureaucratic Catholic Ethic?), preferring instead to direct the attention of the faithful and leadership to the less complex evangelical precept of poverty as practiced in the early Church. St Dominic sought simplicity in doctrine with his ‘Order of Preachers’, and St Ignatius of Loyola emphasized a basic missionary quest for souls. The accent was laid on ‘a return to the simple and sacred’ and ‘a rejection of the complex and more profane’.

A brief note on the Church liturgy is in place at this point. Liturgy bonds the faithful to the Church in a unique manner. But, the authoritarian and oppressive mode of hierarchy renders the bond precarious, and even fizzle. As we know, the liturgical celebrations are more ritualistic and sterile than life-giving and life-promoting. The ‘community spirit’s, which is radically committed to the welfare of each one in society, is absent in these celebrations. Above all, they lack social thrust. The liturgical prayers and hymns mirror the reality. It has been observed that the word ‘justice’ appears rarely

the Church, eds., V. Saldanha, V. Theckanath, J. George (Delhi: Media House (Streevani& MSI, 2016), 247. See also “Dangers of Clericalism,” *The Tablet* ([https:// www.the-tablet.co.uk](https://www.the-tablet.co.uk)) via CNUA, June 6, 2011. Clericalism and its depressing consequents are widely reviewed in the Article.

²⁴Congar, “*Pneumatology Today*,” 449.

in our prayers and that most of the liturgical prayers are overwhelmingly heaven and God-oriented²⁵.

The above analysis appeals for a hierarchy that has self-critique as its integral feature, willingness to change as its pledge, and yearning for constant renewal as its compulsion and commitment. In the words of Van den Heuvel, “The Church is there for the world, for the welfare of the world. I cannot accept any other starting point for thinking about the Church. The Church proves her identity by existing for others, and it is only there that she gets her authority”²⁶. Seeking the welfare of others and striving for this cause would mean curbing any detrimental practices in the Church. The following section looks for a model imparting alternatives to the unreasonable Church hierarchy.

A Network Model for the Hierarchical Church

The Network Model offers us profound insights to deal with concerns related to the hierarchical set-up of the Church. Network Model, in the age of ‘Knowledge Society’ – theme of the Conference–, is a database model; it is designed as a flexible approach to representing objects and their relationships. A unique feature of the network model is its schema, which is viewed as a graph where relationship types are arcs and object types are nodes. Unlike other database models, the schema of the database model is not confined to be a lattice or hierarchy; the hierarchical tree is replaced by a graph, which allows for more basic connections with the nodes. To be specific, the network model consists of certain benefits which, the hierarchical model lacks. The benefits include (i) the ability to manage more relationship types, i.e., one-to-one as well as many-

²⁵ J. Velamkunnel, “Formation of the Religious and Service of the Poor”, *Vidyajyoti* (August 1980): 326.

²⁶ A.H. Van den Heuvel, *The Humiliation of the Church*, (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1966), 30.

to-many relationships; (ii) easier way of accessing the data; (iii) data integrity – connection between the parent and the child segments because it depends on the parent-child relationship; (iv) greater independence compared to the hierarchical model²⁷. Taking the cue from the Network Model, we elaborate on a more appropriate model – the Trinitarian model.

The Trinity as Embodiment of the Network Model

The Trinity is the perfect representation of the network model. The *hierarche*, the sacred origin/ rule derives from God who is three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The union between the three persons is captured brilliantly by Thomas Scirghi, an Orthodox theologian. He expounds: ‘the Triune name is an expression of the intimate unity and relationship of the three’²⁸. The notion of *perichoresis*, a word roughly translated as ‘interpenetration’, or ‘permeation without confusion’ elucidates the relationship of the three persons as ‘the dynamic activity of exchange in which persons are who they are because of their relationship to each other’.

Furthermore, the dynamic activity existing between them is not exclusive. In other words, Trinity is not an inward-looking entity. The exchange of love existing between the Father and the Son opens up through the Holy Spirit towards the whole of creation²⁹. In other words, God is never in isolation and never static but engages

²⁷ What is Network Model? – Definition from Technopedia, <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/30613/net-work-model-databases>, accessed 03.04.2019.

²⁸ Thomas J. Scirghi, “The Trinity: A Model for Belonging in Contemporary Society,” *The Ecumenical Review* 54, No. 3 (2002): 333-342.

²⁹ Boff describes the dynamic activity between the three persons thus: “Each person is open to the other, accepting the other unconditionally, giving the best one has to other and receiving from the other in kind”. Each divine person is affirmed by affirming the others, and through surrendering to the others. Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 3.

in an eternal communion – it is networking between/ among the three persons of the Trinity and their relationship with humans and the whole creation. Boff terms this communion as the ‘mystery of inclusion’ – the three opening the divine community to the outside and inviting human beings to share in their community of life³⁰.

The Trinitarian model offers guidelines for a life of communion. The Church hierarchy, in its functioning, exhibits domination, marginalization, sexism, exclusion... These traits are anti-Kingdom in their bearing. The following section endeavours to seek alternatives to this reality.

Alternative Value-System for the Hierarchy

The Network Model illustrated through the Trinitarian model can be represented by the terms ‘decentralization’, ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘interdependence’. The concept of ‘decentralization’ is clarified by the term ‘subsidiarity’; the concept of ‘interconnectedness’ connotes associations that are ‘mutually joined’/ ‘mutually related’; and ‘interdependence’ is a quality or condition of being mutually reliant on each other. The themes discussed such as the Early Church, the *hierarchie*, and the Trinity both entail and echo these three features powerfully.

A decentralized mode of operation defined the Early church. It was ensured that ‘moving down’ does not evaporate respect – a crucial concern in hierarchy. The Elders of the church maintained the rhythm by exceptional means such as, communicating clearly and consistently with all collaborators about the day-to-day affairs of the church, which prevented the members from feeling that they are mere spare parts of a machine; by inviting and considering their concerns and looking for ways to address the concerns that arose most often; and when disagreements occurred, by continuing to speak to people with consideration and patience explaining decisions in terms of ‘hoped-for-outcomes’ as opposed to devolving

³⁰Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 54.

into ‘order-giving’ and ‘because I said so’ responses. Precisely this feature of respect attracted people to the new ‘contrast community’ called the Church at her inception. Women too joined the Church in large numbers because they experienced in her fold, acceptance, more freedom, and inclusion. In brief, the Church was a transformed body with mutuality and communion. A constant revisit to the Early Church would enable the Church to imbibe the spirit of decentralization and make it viable.

The Church, as the *hierarche*, is the assembly called by the Father, instituted by the Son and fostered by the Holy Spirit, the co-institutor of the Church. The three approach and execute the ‘divine rule’, namely, the Church’s mission, in a logic of interdependence. Subsequent to the Pentecost event, the Spirit occupies a specific role and place in the exercise: the Spirit fosters the Church’s ongoing organic growth³¹ and indwells each of the faithful. The personal indwelling of the Spirit in all the faithful has substantial implications for the life, structure, and mission of the Church. In other words, our common responsibility is the continuation of the reform of the Church such that ecclesial practices and structures faithfully express the Church’s sacred rule and origin (*hierarche*) and the communion of all members in the one indwelling Spirit of Christ³².

The interconnectedness between the three persons of the Trinity has been expounded by the pertinent term, *perichoresis*. It expresses perfectly the Trinitarian communion. The bond between the three persons, in conjunction with their bond with the community – which excludes no one – entails the responsibility of inclusion. This has taken place at the Incarnation of the Son of God, when God as the Trinitarian community entered into human history, making it

³¹ Yves Congar, “Pneumatology Today,” *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 167 (1973): 449. See also, Yves Congar, *This Church That I Love* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1969).

³² Gropp, “The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit,” 451-566.

possible to eliminate the barriers of discrimination and isolation and to create an inclusive community, a community of equals³³. This concerns God's life with human beings and human beings' life with each other. The bond of interconnectedness is not a one-time act; it is an exercise that requires to be sustained with relentless labours.

As a concluding remark to this section, we would like to underline that the world at large, while yearning for the above-discussed values of intrinsic worth, takes a revulsion to them. Repulsion breeds self-centredness and domination. Self-absorbed relationships end up to be competitive and defensive, so at best opportunistic and antagonistic. The situation could be countered by mutual sharing, mutual relatedness, and mutual reliance – making them function as a normative principle. However, in all areas of life, the best we do is to grow into responsive followers which leads us to take predominantly functional approach to life and ministry, rather than building legitimate mutuality³⁴. Mutuality is a relational power which is not controlled, influenced, and possessed but rather it is interconnected and interrelated by its very nature.

Concluding Remarks

Contemplating on the issue of Church hierarchy, this paper has been grappling to revisit the Church as a 'community of faith, hope and charity' (LG 8), and 'a communion of life, love, and truth' (LG 9), in which the 'primary task of the authority is to represent Jesus'³⁵. Taking into account our study, we would like to draw a few concluding remarks:

(1) The essence of hierarchy is the distribution of power. If power is defined as the 'capacity to produce change', this capacity should

³³Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 63.

³⁴ Richard Snyder, "Theological Education and Caesar's Household," *The Witness* 62 (October, 1971): 5-6.

be defined and allocated within the Church in a spirit of mutuality. In good hierarchies, power is pushed down and out. Here decisions are made not unilaterally but rather collaboratively with members of experience and expertise in the area, irrespective of sex-class-caste distinctions. This means that each person with responsibility delegates responsibility given the skills and capability of people. When autonomy and authority is shared with maximum number of people according to their ability of execution, the Church as a body turns out to be nimbler and better able to respond to change; in addition, her collaborators turn out to be more productive and contented.

(2) Hierarchy implies power. The Second Vatican Council presents power, which, in reality, is ‘authority’, as responsible leadership in the Church. Hence, authority is the ability to mediate freedom; when this fails, it turns into authoritarianism³⁵. The episode of Peter’s assignment supplies guidelines to transform the Church hierarchy into the *hierarche*. Peter is expected to follow the example of Jesus in tending the sheep. He is exercising his relationship with the sheep, who belong to Jesus. St Augustine wrote: “Jesus said: Tend my sheep as mine, not as yours”. Peter was not replacing Jesus, rather he was taking charge of the sheep of Jesus. St Ambrose says: “Jesus was leaving Peter to us as the vicar of love”. Jesus entrusts those whom he loved to one who loved him. Just as Peter’s pastoral care both reflected and demonstrated Jesus’ love for his sheep, the Church hierarchy should denounce all dominative, manipulative and competitive forms of power remembering that the pastor and the sheep are of the same species, and the shepherd in the Church cannot play the role of a shepherd who tends irrational sheep. Unless this is concretely realised in the life of the Church, the Church ceases to emerge as an effective sign of the Kingdom.

³⁵ Joseph Neuner, “Authority in the Church,” *Vidyajyoti* (June-July, 1980): 254.

³⁶ Aloysius Pieris, “Towards and Asian Theology of Liberation,” *Vidyajyoti* (July 1979): 261.

(3) The purpose for which the Church exists is the mission (divine rule). In a stair-step structured Church, which functions on the basis of the orders received from the higher-ups, the understanding of mission would be maintenance, adjustment, and compromise lacking confrontation, conflict or radical change – the necessary consequences of mission. In reality, the mission must determine the structures because the mission is the goal and the structures are the means sub-serving the goal. When oppressive structures are perpetuated, they abolish the mission of the Church, leaving her merely as a monument of pomp and prestige. Likewise, in carrying out the mission of the Church, both the clergy and laity must participate in a spirit of mutuality. This is because ‘through her individual members and her whole community, the Church believes she can contribute greatly toward making the human family and its history more human’ (GS 40).

(4) T. L. Nicholas maintains that any sizeable polis requires a reasonable hierarchical structure in order to function as a unified whole. This is because a hierarchical set-up contributes towards maintaining order, maximizing efficiency, and eliminating disorganization³⁷. The assertion and our study on the theme of Church hierarchy, guides us to propose an answer to the query posed at the beginning of this paper: hierarchy in itself may not be the culprit as are the abuses of hierarchy. This being said, we would like to accentuate that when the Church structures are made reasonable and simple vis-à-vis complicated and cumbersome, responsibility-oriented vis-à-vis status-oriented, communal vis-à-vis individualistic/ dominant..., and that the authority of offices in the Church is discerned with the help of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, the Church hierarchy functions truly as the *hierarche*.

³⁷For details see, Terence L. Nichols “Hierarchy and the Church,” *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (1995): 281-282.

The Fault Line in the Knowledge Era and Theologizing

Dr. Thomas Padiyath

Cardinal Francis George of Chicago made a comparison between the times of Pope John Paul II and that of Pope Benedict XVI. According to the Cardinal, during John Paul II's time, "there was a fault line in the Soviet empire that brought it down; its concern for social justice was corrupted by the suppression of Freedom ... [and during Pope Benedict's time and still during the time of Pope Francis] in the West, there is also a fault line between concern for personal freedom and the abandonment of objective truth".¹ The Cardinal has rightly described the contemporary phenomena, and it supplies a good starting point for our present discussion, namely, *The Fault Line in the Knowledge Era and Theologizing*.

There are many contemporary challenges to faith and theologizing in the knowledge era, either ideological or otherwise such as Atheism, Materialism, Pragmatism, Relativism, Secularism, Utilitarianism, Existentialism, Individualism, Agnosticism, Determinism, etc. However, because of the limited scope of this paper, we may focus only on three of them, namely, Individualism, Relativism and Atheism. Cardinal Walter Kasper once said: "Theology cannot choose its time. It has to convey the Christian

¹ John L. Allen, Jr., *The Rise of Benedict XVI: The Inside Story of How the Pope was Elected and Where He Will Take the Catholic Church*, New York, Doubleday, 2005, 166.

message to the men and women of its own era, and it has to give them an account of the Christian hope. A *theologia perennis* – a theology that is in principle timeless- is of no use to anyone, or to any period. This commits theology today to a critical and creative reception of modern thinking”.² And Cardinal John Henry Newman once said about one of the characteristics of the Church: “If Christianity be a universal religion, suited not simply to one locality or period but to all times and places; it cannot but vary in its relations and dealings towards the world around...”.³ Just one month before the opening of the Council, prophet of the Council Pope John gave a radio message (Sept 11, 1962) in which he made a distinction between *CHURCH ad INTRA* and *CHURCH ad EXTRA*. And inaugurating the second session of the Council on September 29, 1963, Pope Paul VI indicated four objectives of the Council: the expression of the Church’s theology, its interior renewal, the promotion of the Christian unity, and dialogue with the contemporary world. All these observations points to the fact that Theology be contextual as well. In other words, theologizing in any era cannot ignore the living context of the people. It is in this context we discuss theme.

2. The Situation of Men in the Modern World: Modern Relativism in the Offing!

The enlightenment and modernity was built up on the twin towers of autonomy and freedom. In the same way, Individualism and Relativism are the twin brothers delivered by modern sense of autonomy. For Immanuel Kant enlightenment was man’s release from the self-incurred tutelage. “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-

² Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York, Crossroad, 1989) 80.

³ Cf., M. LADISLAS ORSY, *Receiving The Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debate* (USA, 2009) 84.

incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* ‘Have courage to use your own reason!’ - that is the motto of enlightenment.” (1784) And modernity is known for its adherence to the autonomy of the subject. In *Veritatis Splendor* Pope John Paul II states, “The saving power of the truth is contested, and freedom alone, uprooted from any objectivity, is left to decide by itself what is good and what is evil (84). Finally, subjectivism was legitimized by the light of reason and thus, “once the possibility of the authority of the subjective view of individuals was accepted and given that the threat of the skepticism loomed large, the way was open for the subjectivism [or individualism] to become the only credible justification for claims to knowledge”.⁴

2.1 Human Autonomy and Its Impacts

Human being’s sense of freedom and knowledge is at its zenith yet “new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance.” “Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. Often however they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil” (GS 17).

One has to look for the *raison d’etre* of individualism and relativism in the modern culture, what all of us have inherited or in which we find ourselves. What I would suggest is that the situation of the contemporary man in the knowledge era is not different from that of the modern man. Thus contemporary man is placed in a dichotomous and imbalanced situation: on the one side, there is an imbalance in the person between the “intellect which is modern in practical matters and a theoretical system of thought which can

⁴ Maria Baghramian, *Relativism*, New York, Routledge, 2004, 55.

neither master the sum total of its ideas [and knowledge], nor arrange them adequately into a synthesis". On the other, there is an "imbalance [that] arises between a concern for practicality and efficiency, and the demands of moral conscience; At length there develops an imbalance between specialized human activity [and knowledge] and a comprehensive view of [life and] reality" (GS 8). Thus, contemporary man finds himself in the novel situation both as a master (cause) and a victim of modern developments (GS 8).

Modernity is characterized by autonomy and freedom.⁵ According to *Gaudium et Spes* the chief characteristics of modernity is a growing individualistic tendency. "Man as an individual and as a member of society craves a life that is full, autonomous and worthy of his nature as a human being; he longs to harness for his own welfare the immense resources of the modern world" (GS 12). Nowadays society and social relations become very narrow. Selfishness forms the very mindset of men today. Church clearly outlines the great danger of individualism. "For by his innermost nature man is a social being and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts" (GS 12). Love

⁵ The following statements of the GS can be read in this light:

1. On the one hand, there is the "abundance of wealth, resources and economic power" ... yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, and countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy."
2. Man's sense of freedom is at its zenith yet "new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance."
3. Still, humanity has very vivid awareness of its unity and interdependence, but at the same time, "it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces" ... "political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, ...
4. True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems. In other words, people fail to understand one another (GS 12).

of Freedom and Autonomy leads one to relativisation of all values which is the heart of relativism.

3. Relativism

Relativism is a term loaded with ambiguity. “If relativism means anything at all, it means a great many things. It is certainly not, though often treated as such, a one-line claim or thesis, for example, man is the measure of all things, nothing is absolutely right or wrong, all opinions are equally valid, and so forth.”⁶ According to Maria Baghramian relativism is “the view that cognitive, moral or aesthetic norms and values are dependent on the social or conceptual systems that underpin them and consequently a neutral standpoint for evaluating them is not available to us”⁷

How to define relativism? It is not an easy task! Relativism is a “multi-faceted phenomenon”.⁸ Different philosophical approaches can be working behind these trends such as context dependence, perspectivalism, mind-dependence, philosophical Manichaeism (Philosophical dichotomies: Subject vs Object, Mind-body, Fact Vs Value, etc.), cultural diversity, and imperative of tolerance. It is also an outcome of collapse of the old certainties, put forward by religion as well as science (Jankunas 10).

Relativism appears in different forms and ways. One of these kinds is the desire to be democratic in ecclesial life. The point is, “relativism emerges as the contemporary supplement of a wish to appear democratic, tolerant and humble about one’s ability to grasp truth” (Jankunas 107). In this attitude democracy is perceived as defending “the right of each person to his or her view point, so much so, indeed, it seems to imply a tolerance that asks one to

⁶ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Relativism, Today and Yesterday” in *Symposium in Response to Cardinal Ratzinger’s last Homily*, 228.

⁷ Maria Baghramian, *Relativism*, New York, Routledge, 2004, 1.

⁸ Some people Relativism appeared and still appears in many disguised forms such as liberation theology, religious and cultural pluralism, etc.

relativize one's own position and to shrink from putting them forward as *true*".⁹ In a more radical way Ratzinger comments on the same issue: "There is the intention, with different degrees of intensity, to extend the principle of the majority to the faith and customs. ... [The point is] what does not seem obvious to the majority cannot be obligatory".¹⁰ Still for some, relativism does not appear itself as a doctrine but "only an indecisiveness or lack of will in a world where doctrines are copious and fast proliferating" (Daniel Boyarin, cited in Jankunas 203).

3.1 Different Kinds of Relativism

There are different kinds of relativism, such as historical relativism, moral relativism, political relativism, sociological relativism, conceptual relativism, epistemological relativism, cultural relativism, religious relativism, alethic (pertaining to various modalities of truth) relativism and so forth.¹¹ A reductionist

⁹ Jim Corkery. "Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas 6-Resisting the 'Dictatorship of Relativism'" 3. cited in Jankunas, 107.

¹⁰ Ratzinger. "Relativism: The Central Problem of Faith Today" 235. Cited in Jankunas 107.

¹¹ According to Alethic relativism truth is dependent upon varying belief systems and attitudes of individuals and their corresponding social, political and cultural backgrounds. It is central to many relativistic positions since many claims can be recast as a question about the truth of judgements in those particular domains. Plato denied relativism for it being a self-refutation of truth (Jankunas 12).

One may identify three forms under which relativism is present in Theology: historical relativism, immanentism and evolutionism. Taking into account their working and effects it is right to say that the most general form of theological relativism expresses itself as moral relativism. According to Moral relativism the moral code of Christianity "varies in relation to the circumstances of the age, the degree of penetration achieved by man into the religious psyche, or the stage of progress the human race has reached" (The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 12, 223). In its most general form moral relativism is the "insistence that each people's values are *sui generis* and self validating, requiring that outsiders assess them by that group's own standard rather than by a universal one" Brown, "Cultural Relativism" 368 cited in Jankunas 276 footnote 59.

understanding of the concept Freedom, like that of Sartre and gradually leads to relativism and this finally takes one to the denial of any sense of transcendence. Once the sense of the transcendence is lost a natural corollary of it would be denial of God.

Relativism can be described either as positive or negative, the latter being termed as *total* relativism. Relativism can be defined positively by the ruling concepts of the day, such as tolerance, knowledge, dialogue and freedom. This approach to life and reality can be accepted and advocated provided they are limited by the one and valid truth to all. However positive relativism falls back to the negative when concepts lose their limits which are established by the objective truth. Relativism becomes an issue only if it oversteps its limits established by truth and becomes, in a sense, *total* (Jankunas 113).¹² Aidan Nichols makes a provocative statement that the characteristic feature of human cognition “by the start of the new millennium, [is that] the human faculty for registering comprehensive truth (not simply supernatural but even natural) was at a discount”.¹³

3.2 Relativism and Magisterial Teachings

The teachings of the Church responded to relativism at different occasions in various ways.

3.2.1 Relativism in *Gaudium et Spes*

Gaudium et Spes evaluates that there are certain imbalances in the world today.¹⁴ The very word ‘imbalance’ signifies lack of similarity between what is real and what one conceives to be real. So it implies

¹² Gediminas T. Jankunas, *The Dictatorship of Relativism: Pope Benedict XVI's Response*, 2010.

¹³ Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, cited in Jankunas xiii.

¹⁴ In our attempt to articulate the Church's response to the Challenge of Relativism what we can say generally is that the Council does not use the word relativism as such. However, one can see that Church is responding to such a relativistic mentality. One reads the following in GS:

and points to the trend of relativisation in our daily life. *Gaudium et Spes* states “Another imbalance occurs between concern for practicality and the demands of moral conscience”,¹⁵ certainly it means that there is some imbalance in moral conscience. By saying it *Gaudium et Spes* substantiates that there is a kind of moral relativism in the modern world. *Gaudium et Spes* also identifies epistemological relativism; “A third imbalance takes the form of conflict between specialization and an overall view of reality”.¹⁶ Here Conciliar fathers come across an epistemological relativism in today’s life. Because some takes different ideas with regard to reality and ultimately it is often conflicting.

Gaudium et Spes finds a revival of Protagorean relativism (man as the measure of all things) today. GS obviously stated this: “Meanwhile the conviction grows not only that humanity can and should increasingly consolidate its control over creation, but even more, that it devolves on humanity to establish a political, social and economic order which will growingly serve man and help individuals as well as groups to affirm and develop the dignity proper to them” (GS 9). Moreover, it is remarked that “Often he either sets himself up as the absolute measure of all things” (GS 12); something that Protagoras said centuries back find a rebirth here. Relativism is always against absolute truth. The constitution

1. Contemporary men are “kept from accurately identifying permanent values” and applying them properly to fresh discoveries. Thus, “buffeted between hope and anxiety” and “burdened down with uneasiness” men look for fresh answers (GS 4).

2. The “scientific spirit has a new kind of impact on the cultural sphere and on modes of thought. Technology is now transforming the face of the earth, ... human intellect is also broadening its dominion: over the past by means of historical knowledge; over the future, by the art of projecting and by planning (GS 5).

3. A change in attitudes and in human structures frequently calls accepted values into question (GS 7).

¹⁵ A. FLANERY ed., *Vatican Council II*, Vol. 1, GS 8 (Mumbai, 2010) 798.

¹⁶ A. FLANERY ed., *Vatican Council II*, Vol. 1, GS 9 (Mumbai, 2010) 798-799.

acknowledges it; “Many.... hold that there is no such thing as absolute truth” (GS 19).

3.2.2 Relativism and Other Contemporary Teachings of the Church

The Magisterium has responded to relativism and relativist tendencies in various ways and degrees. Pope Pius X and Pius XII of the last century deserve special reference in this regard. However, the Encyclical *Humani Generis* of Pius XII is said to be the first magisterial teaching to have direct reference to relativism. The encyclical attacks the application of contemporary philosophical trends to explain the doctrines of the Church: “It is evident from what we have already said, that such tentatives not only lead to what they call dogmatic relativism, but that they actually contain it. The contempt of doctrine commonly taught and of the terms in which it is expressed strongly favor it (16). Pope Paul VI in his *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) speaking against the *false philosophies* gives the following: In addition we are confronted with the doctrine of Naturalism, which attempts to undermine the fundamental conception of Christianity. Relativism, too, seeks to justify everything, and treats all things as of equal value. It assails the absolute character of Christian principles (49).

Moreover, the Holy Father (Pope Paul VI) asks the most crucial question in this context: “To what extent should the Church adapt itself to the historical and local circumstances in which it has to exercise its mission? How is it to guard against the danger of relativism which would make it untrue to its own dogmas and moral principles?” (87).¹⁷

¹⁷ For Plato and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) relativism is self contradictory. “it is not possible to relativize truth and yet maintain the objectivity of being. Clearly the relativization of truth presupposes an objective being as a point of reference and therein lays relativisms inconsistency” (*Prolegomena to the Logical Investigations*, London, Routledge, 1970, 132).

In contemporary times relativism appears in various disguised forms. Pope John Paul II, a tough fighter of relativism, in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) argues that human love for democracy and its fight against fundamentalism too may assume the form of relativism: “Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism (CA 46).

The Document *Dominus Iesus* gives a summary explanation to this phenomenon. “The roots of these problems are to be found in certain presuppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature, which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth. Some of these can be mentioned: the conviction of the elusiveness and inexpressibility of divine truth, even by Christian revelation; relativistic attitudes toward truth itself, according to which what is true for some would not be true for others; the radical opposition posited between the logical mentality of the West and the symbolic mentality of the East; the subjectivism which, by regarding reason as the only source of knowledge, becomes incapable of raising its ‘gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being’; the difficulty in understanding and accepting the presence of definitive and eschatological events in history; the metaphysical emptying of the historical incarnation of the Eternal Logos, reduced to a mere appearing of God in history; the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological

contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth; finally, the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.” (DI 4).

In *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict wrote: “26. On the cultural plane, compared with Paul VI’s day, the difference is even more marked. At that time cultures were relatively well defined and had greater opportunity to defend themselves against attempts to merge them into one. Today the possibilities of *interaction between cultures* have increased significantly, giving rise to new openings for intercultural dialogue: a dialogue that, if it is to be effective, has to set out from a deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of the various dialogue partners. Let it not be forgotten that the increased commercialization of cultural exchange today leads to a twofold danger. First, one may observe a *cultural eclecticism* that is often assumed uncritically: cultures are simply placed alongside one another and viewed as substantially equivalent and interchangeable. This easily yields to a relativism that does not serve true intercultural dialogue; on the social plane, cultural relativism has the effect that cultural groups coexist side by side, but remain separate, with no authentic dialogue and therefore with no true integration. Secondly, the opposite danger exists, that of *cultural levelling* and indiscriminate acceptance of types of conduct and life-styles. In this way one loses sight of the profound significance of the culture of different nations, of the traditions of the various peoples, by which the individual defines himself in relation to life’s fundamental questions. What eclecticism and cultural levelling have in common is the separation of culture from human nature. Thus, cultures can no longer define themselves within a nature that transcends them, and man ends up being reduced to a mere cultural statistic. When this happens, humanity runs new risks of enslavement and manipulation” (26).

Our education system has increases the knowledge of the students but it is not without its own dangers. Knowledge era has succeeded

to supply us with enormous knowledge but failed to give a comprehensive view and vision of life. The Church reminds us that “Greater solidarity at the international level is seen especially in the ongoing promotion — even in the midst of economic crisis — of *greater access to education*, which is at the same time an essential precondition for effective international cooperation. The term “education” refers not only to classroom teaching and vocational training — both of which are important factors in development — but to the complete formation of the person. In this regard, there is a problem that should be highlighted: in order to educate, it is necessary to know the nature of the human person, to know who he or she is. The increasing prominence of a relativistic understanding of that nature presents serious problems for education, especially moral education, jeopardizing its universal extension. Yielding to this kind of relativism makes everyone poorer and has a negative impact on the effectiveness of aid to the most needy populations, who lack not only economic and technical means, but also educational methods and resources to assist people in realizing their full human potential” (CV 61).

During his homily before the Conclave that eventually elected him Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger stated: “Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine’, seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires” (cited in Jankunas xii).¹⁸

¹⁸ This formula, “the dictatorship of relativism” is excellent. It is going to establish a new discourse in the same way as John Paul II’s idea of recovering a ‘culture of life’ from the ‘culture of death’ has framed the whole set of issues, from abortion to stem research, capital punishment and war” (Rene Girard, “Ratzinger is Right,” *New Perspective Quarterly* (Summer 2005) 43-48, here 43, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Stanford University).

Pope Francis in the Magna Carta of his pastoral vision, namely *Evangelii Gaudium*, highlights the dangers of relativism in various ways. While speaking with regard to the contemporary challenges of evangelization Pope Francis remarks the following: “In many places, the problem is more that of widespread indifference and relativism, linked to disillusionment and the crisis of ideologies which has come about as a reaction to any-thing which might appear totalitarian. This not only harms the Church but the fabric of society as a whole. We should recognize how in a culture where each person wants to be bearer of his or her own subjective truth, it becomes difficult for citizens to devise a common plan which transcends individual gain and personal ambitions” (EG 61). He states further that “The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism” (EG 64).

Evangelii Gaudium envisions that even the pastoral workers are not above this danger of relativism. “Pastoral workers can thus fall into a relativism which, whatever their particular style of spirituality or way of thinking, proves even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism. It has to do with the deepest and inmost decisions that shape their way of life. This practical relativism consists in acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, setting goals as if others did not exist, working as if people who have not received the Gospel did not exist. It is striking that even some who clearly have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission” (EG 80).

While underscoring the fact that realities are more fundamental than ideas Pope Francis states further that “It is dangerous to dwell

in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric. So a third principle comes into play: realities are greater than ideas. This calls for rejecting the various means of masking reality: angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom” (EG 231). What one can rightly suggest is that the recent Magisterial teaching have always warned believers as we as non-believers with regard to the dangers of relativism, in whatever form it may manifest itself.

4. Inter-Dependent Nature of Individualism, Relativism and Atheism

From the number of ideological challenges that one confronts today I have selected relativism because one can read out internal relationship between **Individualism, Relativism and Atheism**. GS itself makes such a claim. The following statement of GS can be read in this line. “Modern atheism often takes on a systematic expression which, in addition to other causes, stretches the desires for human independence to such a point that it poses difficulties against any kind of dependence on God. Those who profess atheism of this sort maintain that it gives man freedom to be an end unto himself, the sole artisan and creator of his own history. They claim that this freedom cannot be reconciled with the affirmation of a Lord who is author and purpose of all things, or at least that this freedom makes such an affirmation altogether superfluous. Favoring this doctrine can be the sense of power which modern technical progress generates in man” (GS 20). A penetrating reading of the statement will make clear that seeds of relativism are already disseminated in atheism and vice versa.

Precisely, as a result of the loss of the sense of Transcendence and the blurring of the demarcating line between the sacred and the

profane, the answers suggested and discovered often pertain to the temporal world. The challenge of the “masters of suspicion”, Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, added fuel to the situation and the questions concerning truth, goodness and beauty (value) are answered in the light of human autonomy and human criteria. Something finite and the temporal is taken to replace the traditional ultimate.

Truth and Goodness are considered to be relative and contextual. This approach to life, reality and experience resulted in a new hermeneutics of Truth, Goodness and values, which finds its most eloquent/powerful expression (form) in relativism. The ultimate goal of life and reality is read in terms of temporality. Where temporality reigns there is no room for transcendence, or sense of the Absolute. We read in GS that denial of God and religion are presented as “requirements of scientific progress or of a certain new humanism” (GS 7). In Paragraph 19 we read that “Many, unduly transgressing the limits of the positive sciences, contend that everything can be explained by this kind of scientific reasoning alone, or by contrast, they altogether disallow that there is any absolute truth” (GS 19).

In *Veritatis Spondor*, Pope John Paul II argues that modern man ends up in relativism because man has lost the sense of the “essential bond between Truth, Goodness and Freedom”. Moreover, “Indeed, something more serious has happened: man is no longer convinced that only in the truth can he find salvation. . . . This relativism becomes, in the field of theology, a lack of trust in the wisdom of God, who guides man with the moral law. Concrete situations are unfavourably contrasted with the precepts of the moral law, nor is it any longer maintained that, when all is said and done, the law of God is always the one true good of man” (VS 84). Moreover, it is pointed out that “*the risk of an alliance between democracy and ethical relativism, which would remove any sure moral reference*

point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible (VS 101).¹⁹

5. Role of the Theologian and the Contemporary Challenges

The renewed self-understanding of the Church has made it clear beyond ambiguity that the role of the Church is to help human beings to realize their vocation as authentic Persons. In other words, realize authentic human nature. It is only in this respect one can find meaning for the Church's anxiety over the contemporary world. "Though mankind is stricken with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity" (GS 3). In other words, here development is weighed in terms of meaning! It is in order to note what Joseph Ratzinger wrote during the council period in his *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* that "there was a

¹⁹ Another reason for the growth of relativism is media. Today "often the media popularize ethical relativism and utilitarianism that underlie today's culture of death. They participate in the contemporary conspiracy against life" (Pontifical Council for Social Communication, "Ethics in Social Communication" June, 2, 2000). Religious Relativism: Davis Hume's (1711-1776) *Natural History of Religion* (1757) initiated the study of religion as a manifestation of human behavior in which religious activity was relative to individual and cultural conditions (details Jankunas 6). For Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) identified religious relativism as the 'crucial feature of human condition' during his time. Edward Westermarck (1862-1939) an early advocate of moral relativism stated in his major work *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas* (1906) that "morality was rooted not in universal Principles but in culturally conditioned emotions." For him, no ethical principles are objectively valid (Jankunas 6). For Auguste Comte (1798-1857) one of the ways positivist sociology differed from theology and metaphysics was that it has a 'tendency to render relative the ideas which were at first absolute.' This transition from absolute to relative was for Comte a decisive step in the creation of social sciences. Michael Brown, "Cultural Relativism" 365.cited in Jankunas fn 35.

considerable progress in the discussion of how faith should come to terms with the world and renewed hope arose that the Catholic religion might be freed from its shell of cold abstraction” (102, cited in Jankunas 90).²⁰

On the one hand, there is technical advancement and developments and the knowledge era has transformed human life hitherto never experienced, and, on the other, it has not helped one to understand the truth and goodness better and thereby finding meaning in life. Moreover, knowledge era has supplied a renewed consciousness with regard to inter-dependence and relationships. However, contemporary man has failed to grow in brotherly dialogue and to enter into a deeper level of inter-personal relationships. Hence the role of the Church and theologians and philosophers are all the more relevant and important. In *DONUM VERITATIS, ON THE ECCLESIAL VOCATION OF THE THEOLOGIAN*, Church teaches that “In the Christian faith, knowledge and life, truth and existence are intrinsically connected. Assuredly, the truth given in God’s revelation exceeds the capacity of human knowledge, but it is not opposed to human reason. ... The service of doctrine, implying as it does the believer’s search for an understanding of the faith, i.e., theology, is therefore something indispensable for the Church. Theology has importance for the Church in every age so that it can respond to the plan of God “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). In times of great spiritual and cultural change, theology is all the more important.” One can understand this magisterial teaching in consonance with the instruction of St Peter that “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (I Peter 3, 15). Any theology and philosophy

²⁰ Gediminas T. Jankunas, *The Dictatorship of Relativism: Pope Benedict XVI’s Response*, 2010. Hereafter abbreviated as Jankunas.

has to account for the integral experience of human being paying adequate attention to the spiritual dignity of human person (Gs 23).

The Church Opens up human being to the meaning of his existence; only God can truly satisfy the deepest longings of human heart- nothing that the world offers will meet this goal; Human being cannot be totally indifferent to the working of the Spirit- Man bears the seeds of eternity in him (Augustine); God alone can give meaning, value, purpose and satisfaction to human existence; and the role of the Church and theologian is to anchor the dignity of human life and nature against all tides of opinions- eg. The view that devaluates human body or that which idolizes it-; Gospel of Jesus Christ is suggested as the best guardian of personal dignity, and liberty of human being better than all the human laws- it has a sacred reverence for human dignity and conscience, church values and respects human rights and esteems movements that foster human rights; and finally she repudiates the false understanding that human rights are fully assured only when one is exempted from or devoid of Divine Laws, but the truth is just the contrary (Gs 41).

The knowledge era has supplied us with tremendous information and knowledge, but how to determine and identify true knowledge? How do we distinguish the good corn and the weeds? How to account for the objective truth? St John says that we are co-workers with truth (3Jn 8). This was the motto of Pope Benedict XVI when he was a Bishop. To a question why he has selected it, he responded in the following way: I have excluded the question of truth for many years because it seemed to be too great. The claim 'we have the truth' is something which no one had the courage to say, so even in theology we had largely eliminated the concept of truth. But later it became convincingly clear that if we eliminate truth, what do we do anything for? So truth must be involved. He added

further that indeed one cannot say 'I have the truth' but the truth has us, it touches us. And we try to let ourselves be guided by this touch. As St John states, one can work with the truth, because the truth is person. One can let truth in, try to provide the truth with value. That seemed to me finally to be the very definition of the profession of a theologian; that is he, when he has been touched by this truth, when truth has caught sight of him, is now ready to let it take him into service, to work on it and for it (*The Last Testament* 241).

Two things are essential for the theologian: first the methodological rigor which is part and parcel of the business of scholarship and second, the need of inner participation in the organic structure of the Church. The theologian needs that faith which is prayer, contemplation and life. Only in this symphony theology comes into being. And that is why St Evagrius said: "*If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian*".

Conclusion

People feel that relativism would damage church and the world if it is left unengaged. Relativism is observed to be a "much more diffuse, amorphous, unsystematic opponent. ... [it] tends to produce ennui and purposelessness rather than organized opposition". Therefore, the first thing to do is to convince people that "there is a dictatorship to be resisted" (Allen 166). There is a crisis of values today which is the greatest threat the third millennium education faces. It is the result of a new socio-political and cultural context created also by media and amalgamation of knowledge without limits, which exalts negative ideologies such as subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. Here the trilogy of Individualism, Relativism and Atheism get a new form.

During the Council years, as a *peritus* at the Council Joseph Ratzinger wrote the *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*. With

regard to the true mission of the Council he wrote: "It is perhaps fair to say that the first real task of the Council was to overcome the indolent, euphoric feeling that all was well with the Church and to bring into open the problems smoldering within" (83). "The renewal of the Church ... cannot mean progress in the sense of technological and economical developments. The renewal should have twofold intention: its point of reference is contemporary man in his reality and in his world, taken as it is. But the measure of the renewal is Christ, as Scripture witnesses him".²¹ Today, one may say that even the theologians forget such fundamental truths. For example, I may quote two people: Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: The exclusion of ontology from theology does not emancipate philosophical thinking but paralyzes it. The extinction of ontology in the sphere of philosophy, far from purifying theology, actually deprives of its solid basis. Contrary to the common hostility toward ontology, which is apparently becoming the sole link between contemporary philosophers and theologians, we held that both disciples need this dimension of thought and that it is here that they find themselves indissolubly linked" (Nature and Mission of Theology 22). Giving a verbal expression to the contemporary situation in theology and liturgy George Cardinal Pell of Sydney wrote: "some contemporary liturgies are forms of apostasy, similar to the Hebrew's worship of the golden calf! ... The Holy sacrifice of Mass is an act of worship not a fellowship meal, and reducing the Eucharist to the exaltation of the local community is a radical inversion of the proper priorities. Genuine liturgical renewal has been opposed by forces that are bureaucratic, philistine, and secularist" (*Ratzinger's Faith*, xiii).

A theology that is not faithful to the mind of the Church and ecclesial traditions is no theology at all and it cannot adequately respond to

²¹ Ratzinger. *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 2; Jankunas 69-70

the ideological challenges that faith confronts today. Pope emeritus Benedict XVI would say “Theology either exists in the Church and from the Church, or it does not exist at all”; to this one may rightly add that theology exists for the Church as well. That is why Pope Benedict adds further that “in fact, a Church without theology impoverishes and blinds, while a Churchless theology melts away into caprice”. Church and the world need theology more than ever, because faith has to be interpreted to contemporary man more than ever.

I would conclude this short reflection with the following note: There are always right things which can never become wrong and there are wrong things which can never become right. One of the greatest dangers that we face today and that which promotes relativism is the attitude of being comfortable with the present state. In this approach there is no need for anything supernatural, which eventually promotes contemporary agnosticism and atheism that lead many to ignore their greatness. In this context the observation of Michelangelo is worth citing: “the greatest danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark.”

Contributors

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| 18. Sr Gladis CMC | |

Annals of ILAAM

The first Indian Leuven Alumni Association Meeting (ILAAM) was held at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetra (DVK) Bangalore, on 02 February 2002. The purpose of was to initiate a discussion to bring together the Indian alumni on a regular basis to interact with one another and to promote contextual historical-critical theological thinking. Through various regional informal meetings held in Bangalore and elsewhere, and through the alumni in different regions information was sent regarding the first meeting. The response was very encouraging and 26 alumni from different parts of India attended this meeting. Prof Mathijs Lamberigts, the dean of the faculty of theology, Leuven was the moving force behind the meeting. Prof George De Schrijver of Leuven, Belgium, yet another person who motivated and inspired the Indian alumnito form ILAAM was also present at this meeting. During this meeting it was suggested to hold biennial ILAAM Symposia. Following are the details of venue, date and theme of the ILAAM Symposia.

1. Pedro Arrupe Institute, Goa January 10- 12, 2003; Challenges of Christian Faith in the Cultural Context of India.
2. niveditha, Aluva, January 23-25, 2005; Struggling to be Authentic: Pastoral and Moral Concerns of the Indian Church
3. PILLAR in Nagamalai, Madurai, September 25-27, 2006
Religion and Society
4. St. John's Seminary, Ramnthapur – Hyderabad, February 3-5, 2008
Globalisation in India
5. Shanthi Kiran, Bajjodi – Mangalore, February 7-9 2010 Pastoral Strategies and Faith Formation in the Context of the Changing Indian Scenario
6. Mariarani Centre, Ghantipuram, Trivandrum, February 5-7, 2012 The Future of Religiosity in the Hi-Tech India
7. Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram Bangalore, February 5-7, 2014, The Role of the Church in the Public Domain and in the Civil Society: Leaders and Leadership in the Church
8. DBCLC, Trichur, February 3-5, 2016; Francis Effect: A Theological Appraisal in the Current Indian Scenario
9. Nivedhida, Aluva, February 6-8, 2018; Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society
10. Animation Center, Nagercoil, February 11-13, 2020; Creative Conversation between Systematic Theology and Pastoral Practice



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Indian Leuven alumni association Meeting (ILAAM) is a biennial gathering which provides an open forum to those who studied in Leuven to continue the intellectual ambience and to evolve theological-philosophical responses of faith to the critical problems of India.

It is an appreciable fact that the Conference has resolved to focus on Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society, a topic that deserves attention in the current scenario which could successfully initiate a discourse for the betterment of lives. I am sure that ILAAM Conference on Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge Society, will keep on contributing more effectively in order to achieve the ultimate goal.

Prof (Dr) Sabu Thomas
Vice Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi University

Theological reflection should always also be committed to finding the meaning of knowledge, which is always progressing... the topic chosen for this ILAAM-conference – Theologizing in the Era of Knowledge society – is an excellent, challenging and relevant one.

Prof (Dr) Mathijs Lamberigts
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