

TANGAZA COLLEGE

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**REDEEMED BY THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST?
An Attempt at Making Sense of the Redemptive Work of
Christ for Humanity, in the Face of the Human Predicament**

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**A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology**

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DEDICATION

To the painful memories of my childhood which made me the man that I am with the convictions that guide my life. To those men and women, who moved by the love of God, stretch out their hand to rise up the fallen and re-enkindle in them a sense of HOPE and PURPOSE in Life.

To the ever living and loving God, the redeemer of those who are bowed down, the God who always takes the side of the least, the last and the lost, That God who in the face of the negative dimensions of the human predicament, demonstrates himself to be the redeemer, the next of Kin and the defender of the weak and oppressed.

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Student's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis), is my original work, the fruit of my personal reading, scientific research and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Baccalaureate Degree in Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. Biblical Books

Jn	John
Lk	Luke
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Gen	Genesis
Phil	Philippians
Lev	Leviticus
1 Kg	1 Kings
2 Kg	2 Kings
Jer	Jeremiah
Num	Numbers
Ez	Ezekiel
1 Sam	1 Samwel
2 Sam	2 Samwel
Judg	Judges
Ex	Exodus
Mal	Malachi
Deut	Deuteronomy
Job	Job
Hos	Hosea
Rom	Romans
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
Tt	Titus
1 Pt	1 Peter
2 Pt	2 Peter
Heb	Hebrews
Col	Colossians
Eph	Ephesians
Rev.	Revelation
Act	Acts of the Apostles
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy
Ps	Psalm
Prov	Proverbs
Gal	Galatians
Is	Isaiah

2. Others

Cf.	Confer
TNCE	The New Catholic Encyclopaedia
Vs.	Verse
Ed.	Editor
L.G	Lumen Gentium
G.S	Gaudium et Spes

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for Our Study

At the start of one's theological studies, one will be introduced to theology as a science of "faith seeking understanding". Human experiences at times bring us face to face with the not so pleasant task of having to question our creeds with the aim of trying to make sense of them, especially those times when what we profess as our faith is contradicted by our human experiences.

At the heart of this work is the earnest attempt to grapple with the negative dimensions of the human predicament, even as the Christian faith continues to teach and hold as an article of faith the fact that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, by his life, ministry, passion, death, burial, resurrection, heavenly intercession and sending of the Spirit, offered a sacrifice which had an eternal effect on the condition of humanity and the rest of creation. The Church teaches that by this single sacrifice, humanity is redeemed as an integral whole from sin and all the enslaving forces, and conditions hindering the human person from experiencing wholeness and enjoying a good relationship with his or her inner self, the rest of humanity, the environment and God.

However, our experience seems to be sharply contradicting the Christian claim described above. There seems to be more evidence pointing to humanity in need of

redemption, than that, whose work of redemption is accomplished. The divergent theological reflections that have produced equally divergent soteriologies have not helped the cause of trying to state exactly how and from what humanity has been redeemed by the sacrifice of the eternal Son of God, given the negative dimensions of the human predicament that are still so much part of the post resurrection human experience. This lack of clarity has led to misconceptions, misrepresentations, impoverishment and a distorted as well as potentially dangerous notion among many Christians, of the actual meaning of the Christ Event. Subsequently, Christian praxis, prayer and the way of relating to the figure of God has been critically affected.

Motivated by the well presented elective course on “How Jesus Saves Us” given by Rev. Dr. Eamonn Mulcahy, coupled with the very helpful lectures delivered in Christian Anthropology by Rev. Nicholas Fogliacco, we felt that we could delve into this topic and see if we can make sense of the total redemption of humanity supposedly brought by Christ, in the midst of the negative dimensions of the human predicament.

1.2 Method and Content of Our Study

In our presentation, we are basically going to rely on the results of our library research to point out what contemporary theologians are saying about the challenge that the human predicament is posing to the claim that humanity has been redeemed by Christ and how some seek to reconcile the apparent contradiction. Here and there however, we have also consulted some internet sources to aid our research.

This work is divided into four chapters each of which has its own introduction and conclusion, so that the reader keeps track of the development and direction of the

argument. In some cases, even the sub-sections within the individual chapters have their own introductions and conclusions, but all aimed at serving the same purpose.

In Chapter one, we are to present an overview of the human predicament in its various dimensions and how these enslave the human person. We shall conclude by introducing the Christian response to the human predicament, that is, Christ's sacrifice. Chapter two therefore will deal at some length with the notion of sacrifice from the anthropological and the Biblical perspectives. Against René Girard who detests any sacrificial language in Christian discourse, we shall argue that we cannot but understand the Christ Event as a case of sacrifice. We are however going to have to address those genuine concerns regarding the indignation that the notion sacrifice enlists in the minds of many people of our day. With this, we hope therefore to give the proper way of understanding Christ's death as a sacrifice, from the fact of self-giving love.

In the third chapter we shall be trying to describe how redemptive the sacrifice of Christ is and how that sacrifice effects redemption for humanity. We shall treat of the distorted presentations of how Jesus saves us and the implications these have had on Christian creeds and prayer. Then, having put into perspective the contemporary understanding of how Jesus saves us, we shall launch into the fourth chapter in which we hope to reconcile and make sense of the continued existence of the negative dimensions of the human predicament; even as we affirm that the Christ Event wrought the total redemption of humanity. We shall see how the human person has an equally active role in the work of bringing to full realization the redemption of both, the human race as well as the rest of creation. It will be of interests also that we point to the way forward and finally write a general conclusion to the entire work as such.

1.3 The Scope and Limitations of this Study

This study recognizes that we cannot talk of Christ's achievement for humanity using a single motif but for purely academic reasons we are assuming that the redemption motif can in some way help to capture, to a large extent, what the other motifs do represent in themselves. A great number of theologians have written extensively about our topic and therefore it is good for us to indicate immediately that those authors cited in this work are merely a sample of all that there is to refer to. In some cases, because of our own bias with some authors, we intended to give prominence to their views, largely because we identify more with them on a purely scholarly level. Also, we must mention that in the area of sacrifice, René Girard may not receive the due treatment that he deserves, but we will try our best to synthesize and present his core arguments as concisely but also as fully as possible. This topic being such an existential one, we also realize that we may leave more questions than answers.

It is our hope however, that, by the end of this essay, we shall have managed to demonstrate that though the human predicament is still with us, not all of it is to be blamed on God, the human person has its share in it and some of it is simply a fact of our being finite beings. Hopefully, we shall with some success argue that there is a lot of sense in the claim that Jesus has redeemed and set humanity free from all that enslaves us. We also seek to make clear the other fact that, humanity has a big role in bringing about her redemption, as does God the redeemer. Understood this way, each person will apply themselves more deeply to making this world a better place to live in.

II. CHAPTER 1

2.0 The Human Predicament Today

2.1 Introduction

By the human predicament we are referring to the situation that the human person finds him or herself entangled in. We imply the mess, the dilemma, the tight spots in which the men and women of today move and live and make decisions and relate. It entails the great questions that mark the day for the human person, those perplexing issues that so preoccupy their mind and being.¹ We wish to note as well that evil is part of the human predicament. Quinn describes evil as:

...a problem that touches the very essence of what it means to be human and it is a problem that has to refuse any division between theory and practice, heart and understanding, intellect and emotion. It is also a problem covering a vast spectrum of phenomena; various perceptions of evil and of the suffering it causes, ways of talking about evil and suffering, the different valuations ascribed to certain forms of evil, all the way to contexts of action and what is actually done in the face of need, suffering and injustice.²

The human predicament thus entails all that denies the human person to live in wholeness. St Irenaeus so emphatically said it that, “the glory of God is man (Sic) fully

¹ Cf. P. S FIDDES, *Past Event*, 3.

² R. A. QUINN, “How to be Human in Spite of the Evil in the World Today”, 127.

alive”.³ It was a reflection of what Jesus perceived his ministry to consist of, namely; “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). This summation of Jesus’ ministry is well reflected in even clearer terms in the gospel of Luke 4:18-21 pointing to the fact that to have life, for Jesus, meant no less than the total liberation of humanity from all that enslaves it. It meant the holistic liberation of the human person.

It is clear however that the 21st century human person is far from being whole, is far from having life to the full and in the words of Von Balthasar; “is full of tensions and contradictions; is torn apart!”⁴ With Quinn we note that the human predicament can be viewed through different lenses, according to Leibniz’s classification. She presents Leibniz’s classification of evil to be metaphysical evil which derives from the finite nature of the world, physical evil, which is the direct consequence of metaphysical evil, and then moral evil. Moral evil is presented as the product of humanity’s own fault. All these combine to render humanity fragile.⁵ We can discern this by analyzing the human condition today.

2.2 An Analysis of the Human Condition

Fiddes argues that the human predicament has at least three constant elements that are true to it, no matter the epoch. These may take on different shapes and colour according to the different times and cultures. He names these to be: alienation or estrangement; failure to fulfil our potential as human beings, rebellion and sin, which sin is understood to be that failure in personal relationships between human beings and

³ Cf. http://www.vineyardcolumbus.org/resources/congregational_letters/archives/2006/200601.pdf 24/08/2009, 1.

⁴ E. KUNZ, “The Divided self”, 135.

⁵ Cf. R. A. QUINN, “How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today.”, 128.

their creator, due to a rebellion on our side.⁶ In our day, we can trace these three constants in all the facets of human life, with the aid of the reflections of the different theologians on the reality of the human predicament. Basically agreeing with Fiddes, their reflections are quite telling as our analysis here below reveals.

2.2.1 The Human Spiritual and Religious Condition

St. Augustine made a famously quoted statement in his “confessions” to the effect that God did make us for Himself and that our hearts are restless till they rest in Him.⁷ This is a reality that plays out so truly in contemporary society, possibly more than ever before in history. Ours is largely characterized as a secularized society, one in which God can hardly find expression or even survive.⁸ People like Latourelle do argue that the 21st century human person is not religious and is indifferent to faith.⁹ Others contend that we are dominated by cynicism, blasphemy, vain swearing, despair, rivalry and that we are on the way to hell.¹⁰ We wish to argue however that this position is a going to the extreme. A close examination of the situation of our times reveals directly the opposite. More than ever, we suggest, the human person is experiencing an emptiness and estrangement both from self and the deity of their faith.¹¹ More than ever

⁶ Cf. P. S. FIDDES, *Past Event*, 6.

⁷ Cf. http://www.piercedhearts.org/theology_heart/teaching_saints/hearts_restless_st_augustine.htm, 26/8/2009, 1.

⁸ Cf. R. ROLHEISER, *Holy Longing*, 8-15.

⁹ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 3-4.

¹⁰ Cf. E. KUNZ, “The Divided self”, 136.

¹¹ On the question of deity, we would rather not commit ourselves as to identify that deity with the God of conventional religious faith. We respect the fact that there are those persons who doubt sincerely that such a god exists yet they believe in some power that animates the world. Others identify their deity with “mother earth, and such like. So to accommodate all these diverse beliefs, we prefer going with the more inclusive word; deity.

before, the human person seeks to have this emptiness filled and this is manifested in a number of ways.

Because people lack fulfilment in their spiritual lives, many keep hopping from one religious faith to another, from one sect to another, seeking for something that can satisfy their religious longing. It is our belief that at the core of the denial by the self confessed atheists of the existence of God is the sincere search for a deity that can ultimately and satisfactorily answer to their greatest questions, as Fiddes so rightly put it above.¹² It may very well be that, because of the contradictions that life brings to them amid the claims of the existence of God, the self confessed Atheists find the God preached to them too hard to accept or believe in.

Taking the example of Kenya, a country believed to be about 80% Christian, there are an estimated 4000 churches which are officially registered, most of which are normally filled to capacity!¹³ Some of the Pentecostal churches make ridiculous demands on their faithful who indeed desperately give in to such demands because they are craving to be at right with their God or deity for that matter. In Uganda for instance, in 1996, there happened the infamous Kanungu inferno in which over one thousand persons were burnt to death after being deceived to sell all they had, hand the money to their spiritual leader and then gather to wait for the parousia.¹⁴

After the collapse of the twin towers during the September 11th 2001 attacks on the United States, many people are said to have run to seek support, not from councillors but from pastors and priests.¹⁵ The wave of devil worship and superstition

¹² Cf. P. S. FIDDES, *Past Event*, 6.

¹³ Cf. <http://www.kenyaspace.com/churchesinkenya.htm> 18/08/2009, 1.

¹⁴ Cf. <http://www.ugplse.com/articles/daily/people.asp?ID=586> 18/08/2009, 1-10.

¹⁵ Cf. <http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/loveupdate/spiritualcare.cfm>, 18/08/2009, 1-4.

are all testimonies that indeed the human person of our day is highly spiritual but estranged from that which he or she calls the deity, and thus in their commitment to God, denial of God and indifference to God, they are actually seeking to be filled.

2.2.2 Estrangement, Isolation and Loneliness

The contemporary human person is a person of discoveries and enjoyment. The media developments that brought in televisions, internet, radios and such like, have apart from entertaining him or her, seriously compromised his or her ability to keep in touch with the self. In our day, with these items around him or her, the need for relating is relegated to the back and one feels that he or she can do alone, the neighbour is none existent or at worst even considered a bother. Big walls are erected to “keep others off”, in public transport means, the headphones have replaced the need to interact and books play good substitutes as a pass time event rather than engage the neighbour on the next seat. As such, a sense of individualism, isolation and estrangement reigns heavily upon the modern person. Paul Fiddes calls this alienation and describes it as a human experience to know oneself to be divided from other people and at odds with one’s own inner being. He says that this soon makes one feel estranged from reality itself, not at all at home in this world. It is a situation of a loss of contact with the ultimate basis of life, a separation from God.¹⁶

Life for many has become so unbearable and this has resulted in increased cases of suicide, anger and violence that are unexplained. If not for this, how else can we try to fathom the wave of post election violence that engulfed and almost destroyed Kenya

¹⁶ Cf. P. S. FIDDES, *Past Event*, 8.

in 2007! How on earth can we understand a situation of a neighbour descending on a person with whom they had lived in the same neighbourhood for years, but in a moment chooses to mutilate and burn him and the entire family alive? How can we understand the fact that in a city like Nairobi, I only need to point to someone and say that he or she is a thief and in a minute the mob will have killed that person! From where does such anger and unprovoked violence come if not from the unfulfilled and largely void inner self that turns into a time bomb?

Again, the human person has progressively been turned into a kind of electronic programmed being incapable of thinking or talking. Some structures that have been created instead do the talking and thinking for modern man and woman, let alone managing and controlling him or her, without his or her conscious knowledge. Before science and technology, the human person of our day no longer stands tall but in servitude bows to it.¹⁷ The examples here are numerous, the most common one is the inability in schools or even in daily life for a person to work out the simplest of sums of mathematics. A calculator is always needed.

Again, Latourelle points to the fact that because of science and technology, globalization has set in, cultures can easily interact and influence each other, but the cost that humanity is paying is high. The gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” has widened, weapons of mass destruction have been created in almost all parts of the world because of shared technology, and the danger for humanity to totally destroy itself is real. Through our activities, the planet and our environment is more threatened than ever before, the desert, global warming, ecological crises and shortened life spans

¹⁷ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 6.

have all come in as a result of our inventive skill, much to the discomfort of modern man and woman. Amidst all this, human beings are saddened, worried, disquieted and left wondering whether they can escape from the danger they themselves have created.¹⁸

To this end Pascal decries the disproportion of the human person, seeing humanity as having no place of its own in this universe and unable to find a balance within him or herself.¹⁹ He compares the situation the contemporary person finds him or herself in, to a sailor who is shipwrecked on a desert island, floating in the medium of a vast extent, unable to fathom him or herself. At the same time the weakest of all that there is in the universe, humanity also finds itself the most advantaged over all the rest of beings! Pascal therefore summarizes this thought saying of man to be:

A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing, a middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from an understanding of the extreme; the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy. Equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed.²⁰

So lost and unable to detect the dignity accorded to him or her, the human person today finds him or herself doing some despicable acts. The loss of the sense of dignity has moved the contemporary person to sell their bodies in prostitution, subject others to slavery and cruelty, and use their bodies for financial or fun purposes like participating in internet pornography shootings, sex orgies, among others. Some have debased themselves so low as to engage in bestiality.

¹⁸ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 5.

¹⁹ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 59.

²⁰ R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 59-60.

2.2.3 Humanity and Social, Political, Economic and Ecological Issues

The human person is besieged in a world of contradictions. Humanity is surrounded by both, what constitutes and is able to lead to its greatness and wholeness, but also with what is basically a time bomb, that which, not only can lead to self destruction in this physical life, but to final damnation in the next world as well.

Socially, the person of today has been marvellous in building big cities and techno polis, leading to, in the words of Latourelle, “a life of anonymous proximity with very loose interpersonal relationships, if any at all.”²¹ Quinn notes that the difference between metaphysical and moral evil is almost non-existent today, the two are now so interdependent. She argues in a way that we largely agree with that, the natural disasters we face are often caused by human activity, reflecting our social injustices. Unfortunately these often hit and destroy the poor and the vulnerable.²² We cannot think of better examples than the weapons of mass destruction that have threatened to destroy the earth, and here we are thinking of the bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan during the World war II.

It is a world in which each person has to justify their existence and plead the case as to why they should live at all. They are valued not for their person, but who they are in terms of material success, what they can contribute or produce and what does society stand to gain from them. It is precisely this that we witnessed in the 1939-1945 Jewish holocaust, it is this that we see in our work places where one is useful to the extent that they are still capable of producing, so much so that if one fell sick, their job is lost to those who are able. The old are asked to retire and at times this brings with it a

²¹ R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 6.

²² R. A. QUINN, “How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today,” 129.

sense of fragility and imperfection. Quinn says that facing the reality of old age and death which has to follow, at times prove too bitter a pill to swallow and industries have been developed to try and seek “to banish the pain of aging or to remove imperfections from life.”²³

Class struggles have taken centre stage in our day with the demand that one either shares in the other’s ideology, or they risk perishing. These are struggles that put humanity in a fight against itself, with the weak being suppressed and the mighty taking the day and having their way. The fundamental values of acceptance, dialogue, respect, love, affirmation and celebration of unity in diversity are issues of the past exhibiting no more than weakness.²⁴ Moreover, as a phenomenon, we are witnessing a world that is increasingly divided into segments such as developed, developing and, sadly, third or underdeveloped world. Questions of poverty, riches, justice, as well as the ambivalent role of the Church in this context, Quinn argues, all do testify “and in ever new ways characterize, a process in which evil is powerfully effective today.”²⁵

Latourelle notes that as things are produced, the destruction of the human person often accompanies it with similar rhythm. Production and the process therein involved has become like a monster that enforces itself upon people and acts aggressively. He continues to say that the human person is merely an instrument of production, a means of efficiency. The inherent value and dignity of the human person is suspended “and that necessary openness to the personal absolute being is surrendered for a degrading characterization of merely a producer.”²⁶

²³ R. A. QUINN, “How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today,” 128.

²⁴ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems* 6-8.

²⁵ R. A. QUINN, “How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today,” 130.

²⁶ R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems* 7.

In more vivid terms Quinn goes even a step further to illustrate how the modern person has been taken prisoner of the industrial developments. She notes that in the past one and half centuries, over 600 million persons were living as colonized persons and this translated into almost half of the world then! These colonies were the so called discovered lands and thus 'discovered' they were deemed to be good for raw materials supply. She continues to lament that they were brutally spoilt by conquest wars, and even slave trade. People in these 'new lands' and 'empty' territories were deemed uncivilized and thus "lost their status as subjective rather than objective individuals, and the ultimate 'other' came into existence. The other became the necessary element of the self, which was 'one's own' and therefore superior."²⁷

It is this that we see in the western countries with the senior citizens being dumped into the homes for the aged so that they may not prove any more a burden to the generation that can still produce. The football clubs can only keep in their ranks, those players who are able to bring the club to its desired goals and if not, they have to go. Such is our world today and such has led to the suppression of the weak and the least in our societies. Since they have nothing, their voice counts for nothing and their existence is at the mercy of the "haves".

In this time and day, the freedoms of people have been so colonized by money and advertising. Each person wants to put themselves at the centre of the world, while others are rendered simply possible sources of money to be targeted and profited from. Trade is without any consideration, no love, no care and no relationship more than the trader-buyer relationship.²⁸ It is so impersonal to the extent that even the worst of

²⁷ R. A. QUINN, "How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today," 127.

²⁸ R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 7.

enemies can mutually do business. The human body, especially that of women is not appreciated for its worth and inherent dignity; it is seen as an instrument of promoting business. All the “good” products should at least bear the picture of a naked or half naked woman and that product will indeed sell!

We note with regret the way some human persons have been mistreated and sent to the background with their voices suffocated by the very society in which they too are supposed to have their freedom and expression. We think of the physically and mentally challenged, but also thanks to the feminist movements which has drawn our attention to the long time ignored plight of women. This, Quinn suggests, is arising from the concept of the “other”, which has been developed. She points out that the woman has come to be viewed as opposed to man. For her, for long in the medieval theology and philosophy especially, the woman was demonized and presented as the cause of all evil. While she notes the current efforts to re-affirm the woman and ensure her liberation, she sees that the journey is far from complete. In her words, “there has been too little resistance to date to the forces of evil to which women are subjected because of their gender, as in the glaring instance of the now world wide trade in women and girls for the purpose of enforced prostitution.”²⁹

Quinn further notes that even nature is now viewed by humans as being alien, belonging to the sphere of ‘otherness’ and thus becomes an object of exploitation and appropriation dissociated from us. Resultantly, we humans have also become dissociated from nature, we have dominated it and in this event made it an object to satisfy our ever greater demands. With this, she reasons, evil has appeared in a new

²⁹ R. A. QUINN, “How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today,” 129.

guise, the earth is now groaning and we are now suffering.³⁰ Global warming, melting of the arctic sea, desertification of the greater part of the world, and such evils, have all added to human plight.

2.2.4 The Human Person full of Contradictions

The contemporary person is generally characterized by contradictions. Indeed, Pascal contends that we are trapped in what he describes as “an abyss of wretchedness”, in search of truth, justice and happiness; efforts that yield to nothing really. He believes that humanity has lost that original nature and is now in a condition of erring, incapable of attaining truth. The human person then resorts to imagination and assumes a greatness that is far beyond him or her, to masking the self. This imagination, Pascal argues, is a witness to the human condition of instability, inconsistency and nostalgia carried within each of us, that emptiness produced by the absence of God.³¹

Humanity is a paradox to itself and a riddle hard to figure out. At the same time a monstrous, chaotic judge of all things, yet at the same time a feeble earthworm. Repository of truth yet sinks in doubt and error. He is capable of the noblest of things, (like mother Teresa and her charitable works); yet can do the most shameful acts unimaginable by any wild measure, (like what happened in the Rwanda genocide, Kenyan post election violence, or even the Jewish massacres in Nazi Germany)!³²

³⁰ Cf. R. A. QUINN, “How to Be Human In Spite of the Evil in the World Today,” 129.

³¹ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 62.

³² Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 69. (Emphasis in brackets is ours)!

2.2.5 Other Tyrants that are compromising the Wholeness of the Modern Person

In his presentation of Fiddes' Soteriology, Eamonn Mulcahy identifies with Fiddes, at least three categories of hostile forces that characterize the human condition today. These he names to be: the trio of sin, law and death; then Satan and finally, principalities and powers.³³

a) Sin, Law and Death

Sin is perceived as a rejection of the intention of God for humanity, a distortion of the original freedom granted us by God at the very beginning.³⁴ Reflecting on the human condition of sinfulness, Methodius of Olympus sees the human person as placed in the midst of two possibilities; between incorruptibility, whose reward is immortality; and corruption whose reward is final damnation and mortality.³⁵ Mulcahy argues that sin dehumanizes and enslaves our freedom, in the process rendering humanity servants of contingent realities like money, success, possessions, other persons, or even self image.³⁶ The examples to back up Mulcahy's point are enormous. Here in East Africa, the reality of human sacrifice for the sake of attaining success, promotion, riches, are on the increase by the day. In Tanzania, the albino people live in constant danger of being sacrificed. People have sold others into slavery, for the sake of money; one is even willing to eliminate his or her family so long as there is a gain postulated.

Slavery to sin always goes hand in hand with the Law. Though good in itself, laws easily are left to degenerate into legalism and as Mulcahy puts it, "unfortunately, in the modern world, as with some Jewish religious authorities of Paul's time, we have

³³ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 162.

³⁴ E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation* 162.

³⁵ Cf. B. RAMSEY, *Church Fathers' Understanding of the Human Condition*, 308.

³⁶ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 162.

often absolutised law, with the result that it can become a tyrant which oppresses men and women."³⁷ We can talk of the laws which legalized slavery, abortion, euthanasia, prostitution, death penalty, apartheid, and such other decrees as clear cut examples of how law does render modern man and woman incapable of being whole.

Death is one of those enemies St. Paul talks about as having to be conquered by Christ (Cf. 1Cor 15:26), one which, according to scripture, was not part of God's plan (Gen 2:17). Because death is a threat to humanity, keeps the human person anxious and thus not whole, not in harmony and not at peace, it remains an enslaving reality.

Sachs sees death as an inevitable reality that resists to be treated simply as a fact of life. For him, it threatens the human person right from birth till it actually strikes, giving life a radical uncertainty and a sense of urgency and rendering it an untimely mystery.³⁸ For this reason, a sense of resignation characterizes humanity's outlook to life, all because of death. A Yiddish proverb is one among the many that clearly bring out this resignation since it expresses in grim terms about life saying; "a man should live but only to satisfy his curiosity."³⁹ It means that life is, but meaningless, vanity, as the words of scripture put it in Ecclesiastes 1:2. A person with such a belief can easily commit suicide.

Indeed, death is one reality confronting the human person and has yet to be accepted for what it is. No matter how long one lives, the paradox sets in once one starts pondering about death. Unable to accept it, we are constantly living in denial and dread of death. The human person can hardly look at death in the face. Sachs further argues that it is possibly the undeniable reality that one is poised to die, that comes with AIDS,

³⁷ E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 163.

³⁸ J. R. SACHS, *Christian Vision of Humanity*, 75.

³⁹ <http://www.worldofquotes.com/topic/curiosity/1/25/08/2009,1>.

which makes it such a terrifying disease. Death is not simply a biological fact; it is an existential one and thus a religious question as well.⁴⁰ Contemporary man and woman therefore, as Pascal rightly points out, fearing to turn and confront his or her wretched condition lest he or she started to think about the meaning of life and the impending death, chooses the escapist way out. The modern person can hardly stay still, meditate, keep quiet or be in darkness. These all only serve to bring more boredom, fear, gloom, depression, chagrin, resentment and despair.⁴¹ This seems to be the grand rule in our public service vehicles around Nairobi. The louder the noise the safer and more pleasant it is for the people. A great many people cannot sleep without their radio sets on, or light kept on. The sense of isolation and loneliness immediately sets in once one is alone and deprived of any source of noise.

b) Satan

Noting the delicacy involved in talking about Satan as a figure, especially in this 21st century, with Fiddes, Mulcahy presents the two biblical dimensions to Satan's character as:

a «sifting voice» with us, presenting alternatives and so forcing us to discover things about ourselves and our motives...Satan brings to consciousness possibilities that may be good enough in themselves, but which we must recognize are not the will of God here and now. This kind of testing can perform, though perhaps unwittingly, a divine office, but it slides easily into a tempting which slanders and destroys.⁴²

The postulation of the figure of Satan, Mulcahy argues, is our admission that the evil that exists in the world is surely much more than just the summation of the wickedness of the men and women of our day. It "is one way of expressing our experience of being trapped in «a totally negative field of force, or stumbling into a

⁴⁰ J. R. SACHS, *Christian Vision of Humanity*, 76.

⁴¹ R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 67.

⁴² E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 165.

quicksand which sucks us down into the depths».⁴³ We therefore choose to go along with what Fiddes quotes from Wink, as our working definition for Satan. Wink defined Satan as “the world’s cooperate personality, the symbolic repository of the entire complex of evil...the collective shadow, the sum total of all the individual darkness, evil, unredeemed anger and fear of the whole race.”⁴⁴

This definition is helpful for our purposes because the reality of sin in the world so overwhelming, that unless we posit a dominating force in the “imaginary” figure of Satan, some of the human actions that are evil cannot simply be explained. Pondering over the Rwanda massacres, the events of the post election violence in Kenya in 2007, the Nazi Germany efforts to exterminate the Jews, the raping of minors as young as two years, and a host of other such irrational acts, we are compelled to believe that the modern person does such kinds of acts under the influence and compelling force which is so overwhelming. Created in the likeness and image of God, created and appreciated by the creator as being very good, it is impossible for the human person to do such acts of his or her own accord. It is for this reason that we are filled with a sense of wonder whether actually certain acts were committed by people who are in their right frame of mind. Indeed, to the figure of Satan we may add the accompanying forces that may overwhelm modern man and woman to do the despicable: the forces of drugs in the identities of cocaine, marijuana, bung, and such like.

c) The Demonic, Principalities and Powers of This World

We agree with Ramsey that apart from suffering from within, the effects of the fall, that is, frailty, both physical and psychological, death, sin and alienation, modern

⁴³ E. MULCAHY, *The Cause of Our Salvation*, 165.

⁴⁴ E. MULCAHY, *The Cause of Our Salvation*, 165.

man and woman also suffers from without, affected, as it were, tortured and oppressed by demons and the opposing powers which, are at war with the human race. Seizing on our sinful selves, they aggravate this condition and in turn deceive, blur and confuse humanity's vision and ability to live an integrated and whole life. They terrify and threaten souls.⁴⁵

Eamonn Mulcahy in presenting to us the Soteriology of Colin Gunton gives a very good presentation on demons, powers and principalities as used in the New Testament. For Gunton, these principalities and powers not only refer to the distant cosmic forces but to concrete earthly realities including political, social, economic, cultural and religious structures of power.⁴⁶ Fiddes fully endorses this understanding since he too considers these principalities to mean both the cosmic spiritual powers and the corrupt rulers of the earth when instead of legitimately exercising their God given authority, turn to perversion and distortion. In our world today, he sees these principalities and powers represented in all the systems and institutions that lay claim to ultimate authority and demand ultimate devotion. Even the best of systems, he contends, can become demonic, regardless of whether they are economic, political, cultural or ecclesiastical. Bureaucracies can add a spirit of legalism to their particular demonic tendencies, he concludes.⁴⁷

Gunton argues that recent history overwhelmingly presents evidence pointing to the fact that there is a concentration of moral evil within the human society on a scale never witnessed before. For him this is a pointer to the fact that some alien force is generating its own momentum and sweeping up human beings into its power. This

⁴⁵ B. RAMSEY, "Church Fathers' Understanding of the Human Condition", 312.

⁴⁶ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 47.

⁴⁷ Cf. P. S. FIDDES, *Past and Present Event*, 124.

therefore justifies the use of the language of the demonic to relay the reality of extreme cases of moral enslavement, alienation or depravity. This language also helps to capture better what Gunton describes as the evident incapacity of the many men and women confronted with a whole host of pressures ranging from psychological, social, economic, to cosmic which have engulfed them. These he theologically refers to as idolatry, by that meaning that some of these pressures have been rendered absolute, despite their limited and finite reality. Resultantly, so elevated, these realities in turn enslave the human person that he or she starts to worship them and in the process, the ‘worshipper’ becomes tragically demonised as it were. The idolatries that he senses to have clutched firmly the modern man and woman include sex, alcohol, drugs, gambling, power or ambition, violence and revenge. To these we can include individualism, greed, selfishness, pride and unwarranted competition and love for instant money. He mentions that regrettable regimes like the one of Hitler all resulted from one or a combination of such idols, like power and ambition. Most recently, new forms of addiction expressing the demonic control over humanity include internet pornography and paedophilia, he concludes.⁴⁸

The situation that humanity is grappling with is not simply a case of moral slavery but indeed metaphysical slavery. Human sins have gone to the extent of even negatively affecting the whole of reality (including the environment) in its cosmic as well as its moral dimensions, because of the deep interconnectedness there is between humans and the universe.⁴⁹ With this in mind therefore, Gunton is keen to state clearly that “the Patristic image of battling with the demonic, retrieved by Aulén, is one way of

⁴⁸ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 48–49.

⁴⁹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 48.

alerting us to a dimension of our fallen human condition and, therefore, is still valid in soteriological discourse today.”⁵⁰

2.3 Conclusion

We now make recourse to Latourelle who so beautifully and almost comprehensively summarizes the human predicament today saying:

...hopelessly technicized, mathematicized, and handed over to the anonymous power of the electronic brain,...desacrarized, and rendered opaque and is now controlled by material demands no less despotic than those of political powers, in a world that boasts of its progress yet debases itself through war, terrorism, tortures, (Sic) and radical conflict; in a world that is apparently provided with everything yet is incapable of genuine sharing, authentic forgiveness and true love – in such a world, life seems to have lost its meaning... The eclipse of God, the loss of God, the death of God, the lack of God; this is something that thins the air men (Sic) need if they are to breath. In the depths of their hearts men (Sic) look with a sense of despair, for something that will give a *meaning* to everything: to life, work, suffering, loneliness, death.⁵¹

Such is the human condition, the human predicament presenting to us not only the modern person estranged from the authentic self, but indeed one who is almost crushed and overcome by frailties, sin, inadequacy, perils, calamities, and over and above all, *harmatia*, (that reign of Sin St. Paul talks about in Romans 7:14ff). Can we choose to go all the way to believe that the sacrifice Christ accomplished 2000 years ago on the cross is having relevancy to the modern man and woman bogged down by all the predicaments so pointed out and discussed above! Do we believe with Latourelle that “Christ is truly the ‘opportunity’ for modern man (Sic)...the only valid answer, the only light, the only key to the human cipher?”⁵² Again, in the midst of such an acute human predicament, can the modern pastoral worker go with the kind of soteriology that Latourelle seems to be fronting suggesting that though faced with enormous

⁵⁰ E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 49.

⁵¹ R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 8.

⁵² R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 9.

problems, they are superficial and its not these that Christ came to solve although to them all he gives an answer!⁵³ Is this not possibly going against the Lukan declaration summing up what Jesus' earthly ministry was consisted of, namely, bring the Good News to the afflicted, proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed and above all, proclaim the Lord's year of favour (Cf. Lk 4:18-19)!

We agree with Fiddes that in the wake of Liberation theology, we cannot possibly imagine any authentic salvation preached which is devoid of a commitment to the transformation of the sinful social (and we would add, political, economic, cultural, ecological and psychological) structures which often oppress the poorest of any given society.⁵⁴ Soteriology would lose its sting if in the face of corruption, cyclones, wars which have claimed the weakest of the people, as was the reality in Iraq, Israel's invasion of Gaza in 2008, the Rwandan genocide, industrial enslavement of the labour capital, nepotism, terrorism, poverty, diseases, deaths, devils and demons, discrimination, isolation, and such other evils affecting modern man and woman, we dared preach a soteriology that is exclusively spiritual. The big question for us to ponder on is whether the modern man and woman is experiencing the same God of love as preached by Jesus Christ; the saving and immanent God of Jesus Christ. We need to wonder whether the kingdom, the reign of God that Jesus made his central message is real for such persons. We cannot afford to tell the modern person that God loves them and that their salvation is already won if we are not able to exactly demonstrate this in their real lives.

⁵³ Cf. R. LATOURELLE, *Man and His Problems*, 218.

⁵⁴ Cf. P.S. FIDDES, *Past Event*, 197.

Mulcahy rather dramatically concludes this chapter for us saying that we cannot possibly attempt to sweep under the carpet or camouflage the facts and attempt to repress them. Instead, he says, we have got to face them head on, name them. Like the cross of Christ which was not predestined, the human predicament, is historical and has been staged or necessitated by actors from among our contemporaries.⁵⁵ But more than just the contemporaries who perpetuate the sinful structures as well as the devil and demons, at least for now, we are not intending to put the God of Jesus Christ, so revealed as a God of mercy, love and compassion, an immanent and involved God, off the hook! He, the Almighty, must take his portion of the blame until such a time, hopefully, in the subsequent pages of this essay, when we are able to establish that all the blame rests squarely on his supreme creation, the human person who has a large part to play in the work of redeeming him or herself, the rest of humanity and indeed, the rest of creation. What lies beyond the human person's power to change, however, we hope to establish that it has to be humbly accepted with the submission to the fact that as long as we are finite and created for a happiness that cannot be fully attained in this world, then we must not expect a troubles process leading to the attainment of that future being hoped for!

It is this therefore that launches us into the investigation of whether God is totally innocent of the plight of the contemporary human predicament and that indeed the total salvation of humanity was achieved in the person of Jesus Christ, as Christians claim.

⁵⁵ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 209.

III. CHAPTER 2

3.0 A Christian Response: The Christ Event, A Case of Sacrifice?

3.1 Introduction

In the midst of the human predicament, many persons have sought to find a way of making sense of the whole scenario and the Christian faith has been no exception. Many have even gone as far as starting religious sects bearing names such as, “Christ is the answer.”⁵⁶ Since they do not tell us what the question is, we assume that they imply that Christ is the answer to the human predicament, the ultimate question for humanity especially if the figure of God is postulated into the picture.

The Christ event down the ages has been preached by the majority, if not all of the Christian religious groups as being a sacrifice.⁵⁷ St Paul could never have been clearer in portraying the Christ event as being a case of sacrifice than he was in the

⁵⁶ Cf. <http://www.forministry.com/kenairobi/pentecncnpn18/08/2009>, 1.

⁵⁷ By Christ the Event we are referring to the total Christ, meaning, the incarnation, ministry, passion, death, burial, resurrection, heavenly intercession and the sending of the Spirit, coupled with the transformation of the whole of creation at the eschatological fulfillment (Cf. G. O' COLLINS' *Jesus Our Redeemer*, vi). It is to be understood as the *Eschaton*, that is, God the Father giving himself in an act of Love, through the Son in the Holy Spirit, to humanity.

famous hymn found in Philippians 2:6-11. Paul views the climax of the Christ event here on earth as being the act of submitting to death, “death on a cross.”

Until recently, theologians have likewise largely understood the Christ Event in similar terms of sacrifice, through which human sins were purged away and the right relationship with God restored. It is important to note though that “sacrifice” is just but one of the motifs that are used to try and explain, albeit in no complete terms, what Christ accomplished for humanity. Other equally in-exhaustive motifs used include, atonement, justification, redemption, expiation of sin, reconciliation, among many others each of which could constitute a thesis of its own, was it to be treated!⁵⁸

It is no more the same! Undeniably, as David Sanders would put it, the notion of sacrifice nowadays brings indignation in the minds of many because of the bad press and experiences people have had to endure in the name of the same. He cites the aspect of the Islamic fundamentalists who blow themselves up and many others in the process, in the name of doing it for God. Many thus wonder which kind of God would demand that one destroys oneself and so many others for God’s glory. Indeed, even the fact that the Christian God has for long been presented as a God who demands the vicarious death of his Son in order to restore humanity’s fallen relationship with Him, leaves many repulsing and dismissing as unworthy of worship, such a wrathful God.⁵⁹

In reaction, some contemporary theologians have sought to throw completely out of the Christian discourse any language that is sacrificial, and these include such heavy weights as René Girard and Mark Heim. Others instead have taken to the defence of the notion citing what a loss it can be to lose it, the most notable among them being

⁵⁸ Cf. J. MCDADE, “The Sacrifice of Christ”, 92.

⁵⁹ Cf. D. SANDERS, “Life Enhancing Sacrifice”, 86.

Markus Barth. Avoiding the extremes however, others like Luke Johnson and the Jesuit John McDade have sought to instead rehabilitate and put into perspective the understanding of the notion of sacrifice in relation to Christ's work of redemption.

Owing to the fact that the Christian response to the human predicament is centered on the Christ event, it is our intention in this chapter therefore, to try and juggle through the various theological view points, and come up with our own conclusion of whether Christ's death was or was not a case of sacrifice. It is this, that we believe can serve as a stepping stone in trying to see exactly how the Christian response attempts to argue out the case for posting Christ as the answer to the human predicament.

3.2 The Notion of Sacrifice

Most theologians would agree that the notion of sacrifice is highly elusive. Hicks actually suggests that the word is used by all people but understood by none.⁶⁰ Eamonn Mulcahy would fully endorse that view, as he approvingly quotes Gerhard Forde who says of sacrifice that: 'no one seems to know exactly what it is, where it comes from, or what it is supposed to mean'. Mulcahy goes ahead to quote Ian Bradley's description of sacrifice as 'one of the most inescapable, impenetrable and off-putting themes in Christian thought.'⁶¹ What this practically implies therefore is that even the definition itself will be equally elusive. No wonder that even Mark Heim's work, *Saved from Sacrifice* makes no attempt at defining the notion.⁶²

⁶⁰ Cf. N. HICKS, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 3.

⁶¹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 357.

⁶² In the course of this essay, we shall make references to this work from time to time.

3.2.1 *An Attempt at a Definition*

Mulcahy points out that the problem with sacrifice is the lack of a precise definition, acceptable to all. He however chooses to give the general dictionary definition of the same as, “(a) *a surrender of something of value as a means of gaining something more desirable or of preventing some evil; (b) the ritual killing of a person or animal with the intention of propitiating or pleasing a deity; (c) a symbolic offering of something to a deity in homage.*”⁶³ Henri Hubert, a renowned scholar in the area of sacrifice defines sacrifice as “a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned.”⁶⁴ Sacrifice thus, appears to be generally understood to carry a religious connotation to it.

3.2.2 *Anthropological Notion of Sacrifice*

Hubert believes that at the bottom line of all sacrifices lies the need to establish a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds, through the mediation of a victim that is destroyed in the course of the ceremony.⁶⁵ He seems to look at the sacrificial victim as replacement (substitute) of the person who brings it forth to be sacrificed. Without the victim, he suggests, the person offering the victim would be the one to be personally destroyed by the deity. The picture of the deity that Hubert presents therefore is one whereby the deity will demand to be satisfied no matter what, prompting him to say of the victim that, “it dies there and indeed it is there to die. The

⁶³ E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 359.

⁶⁴ H. HUBERT, *Sacrifice*, 13.

⁶⁵ Cf. H. HUBERT, *Sacrifice*, 97.

sacrificer remains protected, the gods take the victim instead of him. The *victim* redeems him.”⁶⁶

Deliberately or out of sheer negligence, Mark Heim, who largely agrees with Girard as regards sacrifice, takes on a rather narrow approach to sacrifice, narrowing it down merely to serving the purposes of achieving reconciliation between society and the deities. All through his book, *Saved From Sacrifice*, he presents and quite approvingly, Girard’s thought. For instance, he says that human society and religion are built basically on sacrificial scapegoating. Those societies, he continues, seek to resolve their internal conflicts by uniting against a chosen victim in what he calls “an act of sacred violence”, to off stage a potential generalized factional or retributive violence.⁶⁷

We feel however that what Heim presents is such a narrow understanding of the notion of sacrifice. Ringgren instead seems to have a wider approach in his understanding of sacrifice.⁶⁸ He acknowledges the practice of sacrifice as being wide spread over all cultures that worship a divine being, but notes a variety of functions that these sacrifices serve. For him these range from a thankful hunter for the game caught, to a farmer for a good harvest. From a Babylonian sufferer giving a lamb as a ransom to escape from the supposed cause of his suffering, to a Mexican Aztec who kills a young man to offer for the sun god, seeking vital forces to bless his land, not forgetting a Moabite king that sacrifices the son so as to win a war; pointing to a variety of functions that sacrifices have always served.⁶⁹ In his presentation of the basic meanings of sacrifices, Stephen Finlan agrees with Ringgren when he says that sacrifice is

⁶⁶ H. HUBERT, *Sacrifice* 98, 100.

⁶⁷ Cf. M. HEIM, *Saved From Sacrifice*, 15.

⁶⁸ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 7.

⁶⁹ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 7.

fundamentally pragmatic in motivation, relating to issues of survival and well-being.⁷⁰ This is far wider than the atonement role Heim so seems to confine sacrifices to.⁷¹

Finlan says that sacrifices originated in ancient metaphysical beliefs, which beliefs even if they come to be lost as time goes by, leave the ritual so strongly established and enjoying a sacred recognition, so strong that it cannot be overthrown in anyway. What can happen to the ritual is simply a re-evaluation that may bring in changes to it in the sense of giving new power to the symbols of the ritual. But Finlan is keen to point out that no changes can be made in the ritual or in its prevailing understanding unless born out of sufficient theological reflection which may lead to strongly felt conclusions.⁷² In terms of function Finlan says that sacrifice is a practical tool for improving the spiritual environment which originates from the ancient assumptions about feeding and appeasing of the deities. As time went by, the ritual persisted to become an inscription of purity concepts and further gained in respect, to become a manifestation of revered tradition, even as it continues to undergo reforms, critiques and corrections.⁷³

3.2.3 René Girard's Critique of the Notion of Sacrifice

Contemporary Soteriology can hardly treat the notion of sacrifice adequately without giving what René Girard says of sacrifice. He remains the point of departure

⁷⁰ Cf. S. FINLAN, *Problems with Atonement*, 19.

⁷¹ In fact, this is not the only problem we have with Heim. Quite curiously, either just for the sake of advancing his argument, or again out of academic negligence, all through his book; *Saved from Sacrifice*, he erroneously chooses to identify the sacrificial animal with the scapegoat. Hicks rightly points out that in Leviticus 16:21-22, on the day of atonement, there were always two goats used; the one to atone, seen as holy and then the scapegoat which was never killed or subjected to any violence, but rather set to go to *Azazel* in the wilderness to carry away sins (Cf. HICKS NUCENT, *The Fullness of Sacrifice*, 11-12).

⁷² Cf. S. FINLAN, *Problems with Atonement*, 19.

⁷³ Cf. S. FINLAN, *Problems with Atonement*, 19

today either for affirming or denying the sacrificial nature of Christ's death. We intend not to be exceptional, since a compressed reading and presentation of Girard's thought will be vital to laying ground for our conclusion concerning the sacrificial understanding of Christ's death.

Girard uses aetiology to describe the origin of sacrifices. He believes that sacrifice takes either of two opposing aspects; a sacred obligation to be performed lest peril befalls one or society; or, a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity. To this extent, he discerns a necessary connection between sacrifice and violence.⁷⁴ For Girard, when violence is triggered in the society, the stage for battle is effectively set and vengeance is sought since no peace can be achieved as long as the object that elicited the violent feelings still remains out of reach. This threatens the established social ties because violence will stay seeking until at least, some surrogate victim is found to replace the one that excited the violence.⁷⁵ Approvingly, Heim presents Girard's belief that this surrogate victim is usually one that is normally vulnerable, defenceless, with no one to plead their cause. The choice is always arbitrary, and has nothing to do with the guilt of the accused but with the need of the community which finds it easier to unite against one common enemy, on whom all the calamities befalling the community are accused.⁷⁶

It is rather interesting how Girard presents the reality of human sacrifice in those communities where it was practiced. He notes that often the people that used to be sacrificed included only those whom society did not really identify with closely such as slaves, prisoners of war, small children, unmarried adolescents, and the handicapped.

⁷⁴ Cf. R. GIRARD, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.

⁷⁵ Cf. R. GIRARD, *Violence and the Sacred*, 2.

⁷⁶ Cf. M. HEIM, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 51.

All these had no real value in society and thus compared to animals, they too had some connections or resemblance to the person they are substituting for. For the communities that used to sacrifice the king, who in all honesty is the centre of the community, still Girard argues that the king's position alone would isolate him from the society and render him casteless. The death of such persons, like is the case with animals, would not inevitably enlist vengeance because that vital link with the community is rather lacking.⁷⁷ Heim explains the arbitrary choice saying;

This arbitrariness is sometimes given implicit expression in the sacrificial rituals by the use of games of chance or casting lots to fix on the final victim from among several options. This is associated with the belief that chance reflects the divine will. The god identifies the chosen one in this impersonal manner, one that further insulates sacred murder from the nexus of interpersonal revenge. No specific accuser can be held responsible for the choice, and the collective nature of the violence is enhanced.⁷⁸

Quoting from Maistre, Girard says that in sacrifice, the animal victims that displayed human characteristics were singled out cited for their usefulness, gentle nature and innocence. This was so because they exhibited habits and instincts closely in harmony with those of humans, and thus could easily deceive the violent impulses seeking to be appeased. To this end he thus concludes that the hypothesis of substitution is the basis for the practice of sacrifice.⁷⁹ He nevertheless seeks to differ from Maistre by refusing to identify the relationship between the potential victim and the one being substituted in terms of guilt and innocence (moral distinction), since he sees no expiatory role being played by the victim at all. Rather, he feels that it was more a question of society wanting to deflect upon the relatively indifferent victim, the violence

⁷⁷ Cf. R. GIRARD, *Violence and the Sacred*, 12-13.

⁷⁸ M. HEIM, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 51.

⁷⁹ Cf. R. GIRARD, *Violence and the Sacred*, 2-3.

that would otherwise be vented out on its own members, and the very people it most desired to protect.⁸⁰

With all the above analysis, Girard categorically believes that though sacrifice has always been described as mediation between the one sacrificing and the deity, a blood thirsty deity at that, the concept holds no real relevance in our day. His belief is that the notion of sacrifice belongs to the realm of the imagination since, if granted that a god really intervenes, then the sacrificial significance would be compromised owing to the fact that divine intervention of itself would necessarily do away with the dreaded pervasive aura together with the firmly structured economy of violence.⁸¹

Girard therefore views Israel's religious history as a progressive release from this structure of sacrifice of the scapegoat,⁸² replacing it with the emphasis on social justice as the mark of righteousness before God, hence a more purified religious observance. He sees the mission of Jesus as the final stage of this purification, arguing that, by his death, Jesus exposed the scapegoat mechanism as an unjustified murder of the innocent. To the sacrificial community, Girard argues, Jesus appeared as a destructive and subversive force threatening it and thus this community chose to turn violence against him.⁸³

Girard personifies violence as the Satan, the Accuser, whose power is the ability to falsely accuse in so convincing a manner that the whole community takes for truth

⁸⁰ Cf. R. GIRARD, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4.

⁸¹ Cf. R. GIRARD, *Violence and the Sacred*, 6-7.

⁸² Again we have to restate rather with disappointment that both Girard and Heim choose to misrepresent the notion of sacrifice and scapegoating as presented in the Old Testament. Like earlier noted, there was never any form of violence exercised on the scapegoat, involving shedding of blood (Cf. Lev 16:21-22).

⁸³ Cf. J. WILLIAMS ed., *Girard Reader*, 182.

the false accusations.⁸⁴ To this extent, he perceives the passion of Christ as a violent process, a demonic expulsion.⁸⁵ He therefore concludes that if understood this way, Christianity is rendered in fact, anti - sacrificial, with its historic mission being the exposure of the scapegoat mechanism for its violence, and thus put an end to all sacrifices.⁸⁶ For Girard therefore, the use of sacrificial language in Christian tradition is indeed mistaken. He says, “There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice...The passages that are invoked to justify a sacrificial conception of the passion both can and should be interpreted with no reference to sacrifice in any of the accepted meanings of the term.”⁸⁷

3.2.4 Biblical Notion of Sacrifice

Here we are basically talking about the Israelite sacrificial practices. These originated especially from among the Canaanites in Ugarit. According to *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Israelite sacrifices immediately bring one into contact with the head of the cult, Yahweh, since all sacrifice was either done to worship, praise, thank, petition or ask for forgiveness from him.⁸⁸

a) Background of Sacrificial Practices in the Bible

We note with Ringgren that one sure thing is that the geographical area of the Ancient Near East in which the Bible tradition is rooted can hardly lead us to any ascertaining of a common origin for the various sacrificial practices. Nevertheless, at

⁸⁴ Cf. J. WILLIAMS ed., *Girard Reader*, 201.

⁸⁵ Cf. J. WILLIAMS ed., *Girard Reader*, 195.

⁸⁶ Cf. J. WILLIAMS ed., *Girard Reader*, 174.

⁸⁷ J. WILLIAMS ed. *Girard Reader*, 178.

⁸⁸ Cf. J. S. HOMLISH, “Sacrifice in Israel”, in *TNCE*, 510.

least knowing the existent types of sacrifices therein, can give us the ability to discern the extent to which the Biblical practices have been influenced or differed from them.⁸⁹

Seeking to trace what could constitute any common feature of these varied kinds of sacrifices, scholars resorted to a descriptive approach based on observable facts and came up with categorizations of these sacrifices.⁹⁰ In Egypt for instance, sacrifices were essentially to offer the gods food, a necessity for their life, but also the animal sacrifices were symbolically explained as a slaying of the evil god *Seith* who as the myth went, had killed the good god *Osiris*. This way, such sacrifice meant a destruction of evil in the world.⁹¹ The Sumerians for their part prepared banquets for their gods since their myths told them that the human person was created basically to feed the gods who were starving by then. The Babylonians and the Assyrians had this aspect of winning blessings from the gods once something sweet was offered them. Moreover, they also had an appreciation of the fact that indeed the divine lord was the real owner of the country. Other sacrifices were for appeasing the anger of the gods.⁹²

As for the Phoenicians and the Canaanites, Israel's neighbours, much exists in common with the Old Testament terminologies for sacrifices. These include *zebakh* (blood sacrifices), *kalil* (holocaust or whole burnt offering), *Shelem* (peace offerings), among others.⁹³ Of great interest, they also do not talk about human sacrifices, a

⁸⁹ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 10.

⁹⁰ It is interesting that most of Israel's practices are well echoing these classifications, as we shall see in our subsequent exposition of the topic.

⁹¹ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 10.

⁹² Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 10-11.

⁹³ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 11.

practice the Old Testament referred to as a pagan practice that threatened to infiltrate Israel (Lev 18:12; 20, 2kg 21:6; 23:10; Jer 7:30ff; 32:35).⁹⁴

Hubert reports of deity sacrifice in some cultures and religions. He observes that deity sacrifice, unlike victim sacrifice by individuals or societies, was devoid of the selfish connotation to sacrifice.⁹⁵ The god who sacrifices himself, he says, does so irrevocably and all intermediaries are eliminated. He plays both the sacrificer and the victim. But Hubert then rebuffs this saying that this is only possible as a myth for ideal beings. He says, “this is how the concept of god sacrificing himself for the world could be realized, the highest expression and as it were, the ideal limit of abnegation, in which no apportionment occurs.”⁹⁶

Non committal about the existence of gods, Hubert says that for sacrifices to truly be justified, there must be, of necessity, the things existing outside the sacrificer, which cause him (her) to go out of him or herself and to which he or she owes what she or he sacrifices. These, he continues, must be close to the offerer to be able to enter into a relationship with them, draw strength and the assurance he or she needs by the rites performed.⁹⁷

3.2.4.2 Sacrifices in the Old Testament

3.2.4.2.1 Terminology Evolution

According to the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, the oldest generic term in the Old Testament for Sacrifice was *minhâ*, meaning a gift or a tribute payable to people

⁹⁴ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 12.

⁹⁵ Cf. H. HUBERT, *Sacrifice*, 77-94.

⁹⁶ H. HUBERT, *Sacrifice*, 101.

⁹⁷ Cf. H. HUBERT, *Sacrifice*, 102-103.

(Gen 32:14; 33:10), or to God (Gen 4:3, Judg 13:19, Isam 2: 17, etc); and it mostly seems confined to the early period representing both bloody and unbloody offerings. But in pentateuchal priestly and later prophetic writings, *minhā* specifically came to mean cereal offerings (Lev 2:1-13). Other generic terms used included *Qorbān* which meant the thing brought near (Lev 1:2-9, Ez 20:28), and then *Zebah* with the meaning of a sacred slaughtering (Gen 31:54; Ex 10:25; 12:27).⁹⁸

3.2.4.2.2 Types of Sacrifices in the Old Testament

We basically find these well spelt out in Leviticus 1-7; 14:10-32; 22:17-30; 27 and in Numbers 18-19. We can get all the technical details going with each kind of sacrifice, but unfortunately not their origin. We therefore rely on the good work of Ringgren and Finlan to describe the various types.

a) Gift Sacrifices

This was the most prominent of all sacrifices in Israel, and two of the general terms used in Hebrew for sacrifice; *minkhāh* (showing either thanks, homage, friendship or allegiance, like in Genesis 32:13), and then *qurbān* (with its root meaning being “to bring near, to offer or to give), fundamentally means gift”.⁹⁹ Ringgren suggests that from the rules connected to the gift offering, it is discernable that such a sacrifice aimed at reminding God that one is present and thus that God should spare him or her a thought and bless him or her. He says that the word used is *azkārāh*, which means memorial and is related to remembrance.¹⁰⁰ This gift had to be the best of what one had to offer, Malachi 1:14; to imply recognition of the great king. Numbers 15:18-21 carries

⁹⁸ Cf. J. S. HOMLISH, “Sacrifice in Israel”, in *TNCE*, 510.

⁹⁹ H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 16.

the connotation of gratitude. Whatever was offered had to be the first of what is being offered, be it fruits or animals to indicate the acknowledgement that to God belongs the ownership of them all (Ex 13:2; 22:29;23:19; 34:26). In Deuteronomy 26, the gift sacrifice also served as recognition of the faithfulness of God to his people.¹⁰¹

b) *Communion Sacrifice*

It is basically found described in Leviticus 3 and Leviticus 7:11-38 (for the different forms which it takes and Leviticus 22:21-24 for the choice of the victim). The victim in this case can only be an animal, and not any kind of bird whatsoever. It is also called peace offering, derived from the term *zeḥaḥ shelāmim* whose translation is open to discussion, though the fact that *shelem* comes from the same root as *shalōm*, at least guarantees the basic meaning of the root *shlm*, which refers to wholeness and harmony. It is therefore most likely that these peace offerings were aimed at establishing a harmonious relationship and fellowship with God. Part of the sacrifice was always burnt to the Lord and another eaten by the worshippers, possibly indicating as well, the harmonious relationship existing between the people and God and then between peoples.¹⁰² Roland de Vaux however says that communion sacrifices can be of three different types, depending on the motive behind the offering. It can be a sacrifice of praise, *tôdāh*, offered on occasion of a solemnity, or it could be a free will sacrifice, *nedābāh*, offered out of devotion apart from any prescription or promise, and the third type is the one that derives out of a vow made which binds the offerer to perform. It is called the votive sacrifice or, *neḏer*.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 18-20.

¹⁰² Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 23-27.

¹⁰³ Cf. R. VAUX, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 31.

c) *Expiatory Sacrifices*

Roland de Vaux says that apart from appreciating sacrifices as homage to God and as establishing or re-establishing a relationship between God and those who are faithful to him, sacrifices also do appease the anger of God against the sinner and averts punishment. For this reason therefore, de Vaux feels that every sacrifice has an expiatory force to it (Cf. 2 Sam 24: 25).¹⁰⁴ Expiatory sacrifices according to de Vaux were brought about by an awareness of the faults committed and the need to be restored to grace before God.¹⁰⁵

Expiatory sacrifices are the only type whose purpose is expressly stated, taking either of two kinds, sin offerings or guilt offering (*Khattàth* and *àsham*), as found in Leviticus 4-6. The former seems to refer basically to sins committed unwittingly through prohibition violations (Cf. Lev 4:2; 5:1-3), while the latter is for a guilt incurred when one commits a breach of faith offence or transgresses the rights of God (Cf. Lev 5:15). The meaning for this sort of sacrifice, Ringgren suggests, could be far wider however, since it also envisages the purification of priests at their consecration (Cf. Ex 29:14), Altar purifications (Cf. Ex 30:10; Lev 16:16) and for people (Cf. Num 6:10ff; Lev 12:6). He reasons that Leviticus 4 and 5 could just have simply systematized and simplified the varied practices of a variety of such offerings.¹⁰⁶

Expiatory sacrifices had two striking elements that differentiated them from all other sacrifices. These elements include the function of blood and the use of the flesh of the victim. According to Roland de Vaux, blood played the most important role in this kind of sacrifice, believed as it were, to be having an expiatory value in itself (Gen 9:4;

¹⁰⁴ Cf. R. VAUX, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 91.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. R. VAUX, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 28.

Lev 7: 26-27, Deut 12:23). This is indicated in Leviticus 17:11, where we have God telling the Israelites that he has given them blood so that they may, on the altar, perform the rite of expiation for their lives since it is blood which expiates by the life which is in it.¹⁰⁷ Ringgren here points out that this is an indication of the primacy of blood, and not the flesh, in bringing about atonement.¹⁰⁸

As for the flesh of the sacrificed victim de Vaux continues to explain that it was shared and eaten by priests as a 'very holy thing' (Lev 6:22). He uses this fact to argue against the view that the victim would be laden with the sins of the offerer and would undergo a penalty that was otherwise due to the offerer. For him, the victim offered does not in anyway become sin; it is an offering that is pleasing to God who, in consideration for this offering removes sin.¹⁰⁹

In describing expiatory sacrifices, the word *Kipper* is used for both sin and guilt sacrifices and the implication is rather profound. For Ringgren it can both imply appeasement of someone's anger, as well as atoning for! But he notes that when we refer to the Babylonian language, whose word is close to *Kipper*, the suggestion is that the word possibly means "to remove" or "to efface". He chooses to go a step further in his investigation for the proper meaning attached to the word *kipper* by the Hebrews, focusing on how they understood sin in terms of "missing the mark", something perverted and crooked. Sin was also conceived as a rebellion against God, more or less, inherent in the order of the world as established in creation. This, he continues, meant that sin is an objective concept, commission of which, results from wickedness and

¹⁰⁷ Cf. R. VAUX, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 92-93.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. R. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. R. VAUX, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 94.

humanity's desire to live without God as can be seen in Psalm 10.¹¹⁰ Since the violation of the divine laws had serious consequences, it was punishable.¹¹¹ More to this, there was the world of the profane and impure, to which sin and uncleanness belonged, contact with which rendered one impure and unfit for communion with the divine order since all were forces against goodness. Restoration to a right relationship with God rested in either appeasing God's anger or expiation (Cf. 1Sam 26; 2Sam 24; Job 1:5; 42:7ff).¹¹²

Ringgren then notes that in all these the word *kipper* is used and the emphasis is on the removal of sins, atonement. Though the Israelites were barred from eating blood since it carries life (Gen 9:4), God puts the same blood to a more valuable use, the expiation of sin. He further suggests that the usage of blood for expiation could be rooted in Deuteronomy 21, where God demands that a heifer be sacrificed by the elders to protest their innocence, at the murder of a member of the community whose murderer remains at large, so that God can remove the guilt of innocent blood from among their midst. The vicarious death of the heifer brings about atonement, but it is an atonement wrought by God and not the sacrificial act. God is asked to accept the sacrifice and remove the guilt of the people. Ringgren thus concludes that even in expiatory sacrifices, the usage of the word *kipper* carries the same meaning.¹¹³ He is keen to note that though the idea of satisfaction could be traced in this type of sacrifice, stress should be put on the fact that God alone effects the atonement. Moreover, *kipper* basically meant sin removal and in the same regard, atonement was never a punishment but a

¹¹⁰ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 31-32.

¹¹¹ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 33.

¹¹² Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 35.

¹¹³ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 36-37.

redemptive act wrought by God Himself, albeit through his priest (Cf. Lev 1:4; 4:20; 5:16), but before the Lord Himself (Cf. Lev 19:22).¹¹⁴

It is worthwhile that we note with Ringgren against Heim and Girard that on the Day of Atonement for the whole country, two animals were involved. Of interest for us now is what Ringgren so beautifully presents that, of the two animals involved, the one on whose head the sins of the community were transferred (the scapegoat), blood was never involved at all.¹¹⁵

3.2.4.3 Conclusion

We have basically investigated the background and the reality of sacrifice as found in the Hebrew Scriptures and practices. We have also seen the understanding and significance attached to these sacrifices by the Hebrews. This is crucial because if we are to have a discourse on whether Christ's death was a sacrifice or not, the discussion has to be rooted in the Jewish culture in which the whole Christ Event was played out. We have however chosen to suspend the New Testament treatment of the reality of sacrifice until the following section in which we intend to argue for the sacrificial nature of Christ's death. It will be more fitting there since all the New Testament discourse on the issue of sacrifice necessarily involves the person of Christ.

What we have done in this section treating the Biblical notion of sacrifice, is to widen the concept of sacrifice and liberate it from the narrow confines and misconceptions that Mark Heim and René Girard had restricted it to. We have found out that in the Jewish milieu, in which the Christ event unfolded, there were more sacrifice types than the single type that our hailed authorities in the area of sacrifice had

¹¹⁴ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 38.

¹¹⁵ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 39.

presented, namely, the bloody sacrifice appeasing an angry and vindictive deity! Even of greater importance for our discussion is the fact that of all the above sacrifices described, none was meritorious of itself as a human instituted performance, but all were God given institutions to provide for humanity's right relationship with God and for their redemption from evil forces threatening their normal existence. In this regard we have to appreciate sacrifice as a divine institution for humanity, and not merely a human creation aimed at manipulating the deity as Girard and Heim do argue.¹¹⁶

In the Old Testament, we are not ruling out the contribution of humanity, since in cases like the one of sin offering, confession of sins had to be made and restitution wherever possible demanded (Lev 5:5; 16:21), yet again, some sins could not even be atoned for (Num 15:30; Pr 21:27). This implies that, in itself, the sacrificial act was not enough, God had to accept the sacrifice (Lev 19:7; 22:23-25; Jer 14:12; Hos 8:13). The priest had to pronounce the divine word to complete the sacrifice. In other words, sacrifices were not magical or mechanical, but needed the active contribution both from humans and God.¹¹⁷

Keeping the above in mind, we now turn to the investigation of whether Christ's death was a case of sacrifice or not.

¹¹⁶ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Cf. H. RINGGREN, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 41-42.

3.3 *Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?*

3.3.1 *The Contribution of Markus Barth*

Neil Ormerod rightly notes that central to the Christian understanding of the death of Christ is the symbol of sacrifice.¹¹⁸ But Markus Barth goes beyond that. He sees sacrifice merely as one of the many possibilities that have been used to describe what he calls the controversial death of Jesus. He calls it controversial because to some in history, Jesus' death was a case of execution of a political pretender, a tragedy of a hero's death, the martyrdom of an inspiring and devout saint, a judicial murder carried out by some wicked Jewish authorities or even the natural end of a morbid insane man!¹¹⁹ Rightly so, Barth notes that even if it were to be granted that the death of Christ was a case of sacrifice, it would still remain debatable which kind of sacrifice it was, since, both the Early and the Hellenistic Churches, differed in their preaching, teaching, praying and celebration of the affirmation of the sacrifice of Christ, just as the Christian communities down the ages, have differed in their presentation of the doctrine of Atonement.¹²⁰

As such, Barth limits the scope of his investigation to the meaning of some select passages of the New Testament (John, Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, Hebrews, 1 Peter and Revelation) which use sacrificial terms to describe Christ's death. His aim is also to try and establish, if any, "a minimum of common preaching on 'Jesus' death as sacrifice' contained in all the authors and passages named above...and know what the nature and meaning of that common sacrificial minimum may be."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 102.

¹¹⁹ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 1.

¹²⁰ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 2.

¹²¹ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 3.

Barth feels that the sacrificial utterances there are in the New Testament, apart from that of 1 Corinthians 10:20, are all deriving from the Old Testament, drawn, as it were, from the New Testament authors' understanding through the Scriptures, as well as their experience of the Liturgies of the time and the manifold types of sacrifices celebrated in Israel. As such, the Old Testament is vital to our understanding of the death of Christ.¹²²

3.3.2 *Barth's Analysis of the Old Testament*

An analysis of Genesis 15 (the covenant offering of Abram); 22 (the sacrifice of Isaac); Exodus 12:1-13:16 (the Passover) and Leviticus 16 (the Day of Atonement), reveals some important aspects about sacrifice in the Old Testament including the fact that these sacrifices were willed and instituted by God himself. Moreover, they were to be offered in an orderly and fitting manner that glorified God. Barth goes on to say that in and by these sacrifices, God always revealed himself and yet at the same time they also acted as signs both for God and for the people. They acted as:

A seal of the covenant which God had made and to which He would prove Himself faithful. They were a test and a vindication of the righteousness of both God and man...instituted to seal and maintain communion. They did it because God was always the giver of grace. The blood is a gift of God upon the altar to make atonement...Lev 17...shows and teaches distinctly that blood is not at the disposition of man, but is used by God for a purpose He alone can achieve. *The sacrifice is a gift of God to man, rather than a gift of man to God.* By this gift God reveals, and tests, installs and unites. The beneficiary of sacrifice is always man. The texts scarcely reveal the writers' obsession by the idea of sin. But they make it plain that through sacrifice God gives to man what man has not deserved and what he cannot give to or secure for himself, namely blessings and peace.¹²³

Barth also notes rather interestingly that only blameless and faithful persons could offer up these sacrifices to God, if they were to be accepted. It is for this reason

¹²² Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 10.

¹²³ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 26.

that the priests were always used to offer the sacrifice, if the desired life, peace and erasure of sin were to be achieved. Sacrifices were not tools or tricks to be managed just by any man.¹²⁴

3.3.3 *An analysis of the New Testament*

Romans 3:21-26 is a vital text in our investigation and we focus on the verdict that Paul makes, to the effect that all are sinners before God, who nevertheless are made righteous in God's own way. Verses 25-26 give us the reason, purpose and description of the mode by which, redemption was achieved in Jesus Christ. It also describes distinctly Christ's death as a sacrifice. Paul says in Romans 3:25 that:

God has put forward the messiah Jesus as true expiation (*hilasterion*) in his blood, in order to manifest his righteousness through the forgiveness of the sins (that were) committed earlier under the forbearance of God; (and) in order to manifest his righteousness in the present time so that he may be righteous and justify him who is from faith of Jesus.

Basing on Paul's use of the word *hilasterion* (*seat of Mercy*), Barth reasons and argues that indeed, Paul conceives of Jesus' death as an expiatory and atoning sacrifice. This is in addition to the other two motifs Paul uses to describe Christ's death. That is, "the prophetic motif of the faithful servant to whom God reveals Himself, for whom He commits Himself in covenant and through whom he rules His people...the other parallel ...is Paul's allusion to the Exodus-motif of redemption by sheer grace."¹²⁵

Barth notes four traits of the New Testament usage of the word redemption compared to the almost exclusively none cultic but rather political usage it often carried in the Old Testament. He notes that the New Testament teaches that; 1) Redemption and sacrificial atonement are now inseparable (1Cor 1:30); 2) Redemption is made only

¹²⁴ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 27.

¹²⁵ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 28-29.

through payment of a ransom (Mk 10:45; 1Pt 1:18; Tt 2:14), though it is always given gratuitously to humanity (Rom 3:24), God pays a high price for it, the giving up of his Son. 3) Redemption is always redemption from slavery of sin, it is identical to forgiveness (Col 1:14; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:15). 4) Redemption is no more only a future hope but has become a reality present to us (Rom 3:21, 24).¹²⁶

3.3.4 Characteristics of Christ's Sacrifice in Paul

Barth points out from Romans 3:24-26; the characteristics of Christ's sacrifice that Paul describes which stand true or closely connected with other biblical passages.

- a) Jesus' sacrifice is the work of God: 'God put him forward as expiation' and Barth discerns a number of meanings to this. That God intended it (Rom 1:13), God set it up and brought it forth, God declared, proclaimed, made it known; which means that He alone "is the Agent and the Subject who brings and proclaims the sacrifice of Christ...a gift of God's love (Rom 5:8; 8:32; Jn 1:16; 3:16) for sinners".¹²⁷
- b) It is an act of revelation (Rom 3:25ff), that Jesus Christ is the faithful priest who makes true expiation, that past sins are remitted and that man is made righteous by the righteous God himself.¹²⁸
- c) It is a juridical act and righteousness is revealed by it (Rom 3:21); even that righteousness peculiar to God which is both his being righteous and his making righteous (vs. 26). This means that an orderly and proper release, remittance and forgiveness of sins are granted to all...without distinction (vs. 22)." But, the

¹²⁶ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 30.

¹²⁷ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 31.

¹²⁸ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 31-32.

juridical aspect is never separated from the cultic motif as Paul so clearly demonstrates (Rom 3:25; Col 1:7).¹²⁹

- d) The sacrifice changes the situation of man. By God's judgment, sinners are made righteous (Rom 3:24) and called to live in faith, vs. 22, ushering in a new order, even implying the end of the former mutual exclusion between the Israelites and the gentiles. The walls are broken down (Eph 2:13-18), thereby gathering God's people from near and far into one.¹³⁰

From the Gospel of John, Barth observes that an analysis of John 1:29, 36, the words "behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world", reveals that these verses too carry with them a sacrificial chord as regards the death of Jesus.¹³¹ Indeed J. D. G. Dunn in his article carried by Sykes, "Paul's Understanding of Jesus' Death as Sacrifice" is in full agreement with Barth when he examines 1 Corinthians 5:7. Though he recognizes that the Paschal lamb was not a sin offering, he feels that the phrase "Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed" immediately connects with the Passover which in itself is already associated with atonement, like in Ezekiel 45:18-22. It therefore falls in perfectly well to say that blood at the last supper was poured out [*ekchunnomenon*] for many, as is reported in Mark 14:24, where the language is surely sacrificial, with atonement significance tied to it. He actually argues that even the very thought that Jesus was made into sin, he who knew no sin, (2Cor 5:21), leaves no doubt that Paul had in mind the cult's insistence on clean and unblemished animals for sacrifices.¹³² Barth, therefore, insists that the Lamb of God is a gift of God and

¹²⁹ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 32.

¹³⁰ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 34-35.

¹³¹ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 40.

¹³² Cf. S. W. SYKES, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption*, 42.

acceptable to God but not otherwise. For him, as John 3:16 suggests, it is given out of God's love to take away sins from the world. Seeing Jesus' death in other terms than a sacrifice provided by God himself and flowing out of love would be to cheapen and deny the greatness of God's love.¹³³

The other aspect is that recognizing Jesus as Lamb and the subsequent witness is all dependent on revelation. It is indeed a revelation done by the Spirit that is given to and by Jesus Christ (Jn 1:33). Only with this manifestation (the one on whom the Spirit comes and stays), can Jesus Christ be called the Lamb of God. It is still the judgment and manifestation of God that makes and declares Jesus Christ's ministry a sacrifice. That is, "sacrifice is decided and settled first between the Father and Son, but this decision is publicized by actions of the Spirit which in turn produce 'witness' (Jn 1:33ff) and call for faith (Jn 1:7; 20-31 etc)."¹³⁴ Moreover, it is through his death that Jesus and in turn, God is glorified (Jn 17:1; 13:31; 14:13), just as the letter to the Hebrews also testifies that Jesus' death is revelatory (Heb 2: 9). John basically describes the sacrifice of Christ as a gift of God in favour of the world, and as a revelation of God and his only Son by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁵

In the Gospel of Mark we take 14:24 as the proto text for our investigation purposes to represent the synoptic Gospels. The words used are: "This is my covenant blood which is poured out for many", and out of these Barth draws our attention to two striking points:

a) That Christ's sacrifice is constitutive in the making of a new covenant; bringing out the juridical aspect to it, the way the right relationship between God and humanity

¹³³ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 40.

¹³⁴ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 40.

¹³⁵ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 41.

and between humans themselves is revealed. Comparing this with Abraham's and the Sinaitic covenants, he observes that this embraces even the Gentiles and comes with:

an intensity that means *eschatological* forgiveness of sins,...the effective and revelatory means for the gathering, the redemption and the order of God's people...It is the meaning of Christ's death to reveal that God is for many...that even gentiles who need 'forgiveness', are God's partners in this covenant; that God himself pays the price and bears the risk of such a covenant.¹³⁶

b) It lays emphasis on blood, thereby indicating the gift of life. Mark 14:24 brings out the uniqueness of the effect and meaning of the blood of Jesus, especially considering the linguistically embarrassing reference to 'My blood of the covenant'. It is a blood different from that of bulls and Abel's, for, it speaks louder than Abel's (Heb 12:24), offered with loud cries and tears (Heb 5:7), it is precious (1Pt 1:19) and purges away sins (Rev 1:5). It is one that, against all taboos, is to be drunk (Jn 6:53-56). Mark 14:23 is keen to demonstrate that only Christ's sacrifice is instrumental and the sign for the time of redemption from fear of death for a community of forgiven sinners. It is effective not as a magical substance, but a form and sign of most intensive prayer (Heb 12:24), whose effect never ceases (Heb 5:7-8, 25).¹³⁷

Barth appreciates Christ's death as the true *sacramentum et exemplum*, because it is effective by God's grace; and it is the exemplar because it shows an unmatched obedience and trust in God's grace.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 43-44.

¹³⁷ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 44.

¹³⁸ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 45.

3.3.5 Barth's Conclusion

With all the scriptural analysis above, Barth then seeks to finally drive home his argument that it is imperative that Christ's death be appreciated and preached as a sacrifice, citing what would be at stake if at all Christ's death is not preached as a case of sacrifice. He reasons that:

i) This sacrifice thought away, denied or forgotten inevitably opens the road for the establishment of a timeless relationship between creator and creation, based on, for instance, the ground of an impersonal analogy of being or participation in being. The person of God and the person of man will then disappear behind levels or processes of becoming.¹³⁹ However, this sacrifice affirmed, it plays out clearly that the relationship between God and humanity can only be real when it is a covenantal relationship if the Holy is one with people of unclean lips and hardened hearts; that the covenant is an order designed on God's terms and requiring righteousness and not arbitrariness from both partners. This sacrifice shows that humanity is considered and employed in God's service as humanity and not as an inferior being. It is impossible that God's covenant with humanity should be witnessed to and held in faith without reference to him who brought the one great sacrifice.¹⁴⁰

ii) The sacrifice of Christ shows that the gift of redemption is a Trinitarian accomplishment and not just the work of Jesus or merely a human fictitious creation. Now, for a sacrifice to be acceptable and revealed as accepted, there must be the right Spirit given to the chosen servant (Heb 9:14; Jn 1:32). Barth says that the claim that:

Man's (Sic) redemption is the gift and work of the Father, of the Spirit and of the 'anointed' servant of the Lord is asserted when Christ's death is called a

¹³⁹ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 51.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 51.

sacrifice...however, the concept of sacrifice eschewed, we are left with a Christomonism...This in turn means that man (Sic) is left alone with his 'knowledge' of a way for the soul's salvation or with his deified idea of an ideal man (Sic). The Bible calls Christ's death a sacrifice, because it wants to attest that the humanity of Jesus and his death were willed by God, inspired by the 'eternal' Spirit; manifested as the eternal will, accepted in glory before human faith discovered in them,...redeeming power...The New Testament's sacrificial descriptions of Christ's death guard and proclaim the mystery of the Trinity, to which man's (Sic) redemption is due.¹⁴¹

iii) With Adam having sinned and distorted the image given him, Christ's sacrifice stands as a testament to what true humanity should and really is, as summed up in the famous "Ecce homo", (Jn 19:5). It is a witness to the fact that 'it is accomplished' (Jn 19:30), is not a rather tragic accident that so happens to occur in the environment where God's chosen one was incarnated, but the wise will and righteous order of God himself.¹⁴²

Any perception of death as a redemption of the soul from the body, in platonic terms is thereby eliminated. Christ's death accepted as a sacrifice reveals that humanity must and can stand before God only in accepting the limits which God set by creating time, in accepting the vocation to glorify God even in the most horrible death. It testifies to the fact that life in time is, but a glorious opportunity given by God to love him and one another to the end (Jn 13:1; 19:30). Barth continues to say that praising Christ's death as a sacrifice leads to the proclamation of humanity's freedom in obedience and responsibility, in gratitude and joy, to live after the order given by God. It is a realization that true humanity does not last only till death comes. Rather, it includes the acceptance of death from God's hands, in view of the resurrection and new life hereafter.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 51-52.

¹⁴² Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 52.

¹⁴³ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 52-53.

iv) Christ's death as a sacrifice shows what a sacrament is and points to the One True Sacrament. His death and resurrection shows what it effects and effects what it shows. That is, "God has willed this sacrifice so much and so eternally that the lamb is called 'slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev 13:8). God has sent, installed, and equipped his Son to be the servant who offers it."¹⁴⁴ The resurrection is then the testimony to God's acceptance of this sacrifice and this led to the out pouring of the Spirit into the world and the Church (Act 2:33; Eph 4:7), meaning that the sacrifice had a penetrating effect on mankind, leading to a change from death to life, darkness to hope, but all being due to the same death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁵

v) Barth says that were Christ's death not to be preached in Hebrew sacrificial stories, laws, institutions, festivals and terms, Christians might have felt condemned or free for all kinds of enterprises, led to focus on an immediate relationship with the New Testament Jesus Christ, to the exclusion of the Old Testament Yahweh. It could be a real risk for Christians to practice exclusivism and thus become anti-Semitic, despisers of the Old Testament, rugged individualists, and spiritualizers of the New Testament. It would be difficult for them to appreciate that it is not the law but faith that overcomes the world, that God creates and maintains of his own right and according to his own terms, an effective and uniting penetrating covenant, not only with sinful Israel, but with the 'many' who are also called to participate in its privileges.¹⁴⁶

To this effect, Barth concludes that, God's mysterious way of redeeming humanity from sin and fear of death cannot be preached or celebrated apart from Christ's sacrifice. He warns against any effort to demythologize or try to modernize the

¹⁴⁴ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 53.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 53.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 54.

Gospel's message since it can only maim and impoverish both, the form and the content of the Good news. He affirms that the New Testament proclaims that the life and peace, righteousness and freedom, joy and fellowship of every person and indeed of the whole world depend on the sacrifice of Christ. He says that, "the celebration of that sacrifice – in prayer and work, in hope and suffering, in private and in public – is origin (Sic), criterion and mission of the church that bears Christ's name."¹⁴⁷

3.4 A Contemporary Approach: Sacrifice as Self-giving Love

Markus Barth did a good job defending the sacrificial nature of the death of Christ and did well to demonstrate what would be at stake were we to deny that Christ's death was indeed a sacrifice. However, he fails to argue his case convincingly to a person who may be indignant at the notion of sacrifice, to make it more acceptable and less offensive.

Certainly there are other theologians who believe with him that it would be wrong to drop the language of sacrifice. Indeed, Luke Johnson describes as an "alienation from their own language", the attempt by some Christians to avoid the sacrificial language. He finds this a matter of great concern. Going back to the etymology of the notion of sacrifice in Latin, *sacrum facere*, which meant making holy, Johnson says that it has always been used to imply the Hebrew and Greek Old Testament expressions referring to the dedication of gifts to God. His advocacy therefore is to find the right historical context in which the notion was being used rather

¹⁴⁷ M. BARTH, "Was Christ's Death a Sacrifice?", 55.

than merely dismissing what he describes as a language of the scripture that is irreplaceable and the font of all other Christian language.¹⁴⁸

Almost as a direct attack on Heim and Girard, Robert Daly faults the attempts to use the understanding of sacrifice as practiced in the world religions and try to verify this in Christ's sacrifice.¹⁴⁹ He finds support in Luke Johnson who says that the way to recovering a sincere interaction with the scriptural challenges "is therefore not through formal anthropological analyses of sacrifice, but through reflection on ordinary human experiences and on our personal experience."¹⁵⁰ Daly reasons that it is like invoking what is non Christian to explain what a Christian sacrifice is, yet the latter can be understood on its own terms as the Christ Event. For him, Christian sacrifice is the way of entering into the Paschal Mystery, adding that key to this understanding is the belief in the Trinity and the Eucharist.¹⁵¹

Trinitarian view of sacrifice

Daly discerns three interconnected 'moments' in Christian sacrifice.

a) The *self offering of the Father in the gift of the Son* is the first of these. He notes that it is not that the Father gives up what he loves the most, and neither is it something that he does to the Son. Rather, the Father's initiative is his self offering in the gift of the Son. Daly stresses that what happens between the Father and the Son is totally free, loving and mutual self-giving.¹⁵² Luke Johnson in fact uses images to indicate what God is doing in giving his Son. He uses the human experience of marriage to illustrate what God does for humanity in the gift of his very self through the Son. It symbolises a

¹⁴⁸ Cf. L. T. JOHNSON, "Sacrifice is the Body Language of Love", 88.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 14.

¹⁵⁰ L. T. JOHNSON, "Sacrifice is the Body Language of Love", 88.

¹⁵¹ Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 14.

¹⁵² Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 15.

relationship of love, whose daily characteristic is the constant mutual gift-giving, seeking for what constitutes the flourishing of the other, at the expense of one's own desires. It is an enlargement of the heart, which implies a self giving devoid of limitations, but rather symbolising an open ended covenant that wells out of self-disregard and sheer spontaneous generosity.¹⁵³

b) The second moment that Daly identifies is the *self offering response of the Son in his humanity and in the power of the Holy Spirit*. In line with the scholastic understanding, he emphasizes the humanity of Jesus as the instrumental cause and pivot of our salvation.¹⁵⁴

Daly dismisses as non-Christian the reference to Christ's sacrifice exclusively in terms of the passion and death. Seen from the Trinitarian perspective, there will be no material, agent and recipients as would be in the sense of the world religions' sacrifices. Instead of Jesus' tortured body being viewed as the material for the sacrifice, it is in fact the perfectly free, responsive, self-giving, self-communicating, en-spirited love of the Son to the Father and also to us that makes for the material of the Christian sacrifice and becomes the central meaning of it.¹⁵⁵ He dismisses the Roman authorities and the Jewish leaders as being the agents for this sacrifice, suggesting that it is the persons of the Trinity that are indeed the agents and then the liturgical assembly as the concrete historical realisation "in this particular time...of the body of Christ, now in the power of the Spirit ratifying its covenantal, marital relationship with God."¹⁵⁶ In this regard then, seen from the Trinitarian perspective, the recipients of the sacrifice will be non-existing

¹⁵³ Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, "Sacrifice is the Body Language of Love", 89-89.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 15.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 15-16.

¹⁵⁶ R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 16.

according to Daly. Nothing is given to anyone. He is in agreement with Kilmartin and René Girard, that indeed, with this scheme, sacrifices in the ordinary sense of the term were done away with, by what God was doing in Christ.¹⁵⁷

c) Daly sees Christian sacrifice completed by the third moment; namely, *the self-offering of the faithful*, but adds immediately that it is not about what Christians do. Rather, the emphasis is on the effects that accrue as a result of the Spirit's power, that same Spirit that acted in Jesus, acts in us and we get taken up into what he describes as the "totally free, totally loving, totally self-communicating, mutual love of the Father, Son and Spirit...For we do not experience falling in love as something that we do, but as something that happens to us, that lifts us out of ourselves and transports us...to a place of supreme fulfilment, a foretaste of heaven."¹⁵⁸

What we observe in the foregoing paragraphs is not a diversion from what Markus Barth says while defending Jesus' death as a true case of sacrifice, but rather a placement of the emphasis on the essence of this sacrifice, an aspect Barth had missed out. The emphasis is on the reality of self donation. Like Luke Johnson points out, indeed Jesus' death especially in the letter to the Hebrews is described in terms of the sacrifice offered on the Day of Atonement, meant to effect reconciliation between God and humans. That is why, Johnson notes, Jesus had to be both human and divine so that in his very person he would be able to effect such mediation in an act of priesthood that was the offering of his very self. Johnson rightly stresses though that:

The main emphasis of the New Testament, however, is on Jesus' self donation for the sake of others. 'The son of man', Jesus declares in Mark 10:45, 'came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' He gives his life...so that others might be liberated. His gift is to enhance the life of others. John's Gospel speaks of

¹⁵⁷ Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 16.

¹⁵⁸ R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 16.

Jesus the Good Shepherd who 'lays down his life for the sheep' (10:15) so that 'they might have life and have it abundantly' (10:10)...Jesus told his followers while breaking bread, 'This is my body, which is given for you.' The ritual gesture points backward to Jesus' entire ministry 'for the sake of many.'...Because Jesus is at once the 'yes' of God to humans in fidelity and also humanity's 'yes' to God in faith, we are lifted into a higher life than we could ever imagine, a sharing in the life – and the eternal dance of gifts given and received – of the triune God.¹⁵⁹

3.5 Conclusion

From our treatment of the Old Testament practices and celebration of sacrifices, we have noted quite a number of striking ideas that make us more inclined to agree with those who understand Jesus' death as having been a case of sacrifice. With Markus Barth we have seen why we not only need to understand Christ's death as a sacrifice, but also continue preaching it as such. It is amazing how much of the aspects described about the Old Testament sacrifices, the sacrifice of Christ embrace. It seems to encompass all types in one. Nevertheless, we also remain attentive to the fact that this notion of sacrifice can elicit indignation and resentment in the minds of many, and thus, it is vital that the term is rehabilitated, but not so as compromise what the Bible says.

As earlier noted, John 10:10 has Christ teaching that he had come that all may have life and have it to the full, meaning the total liberation of the human person and the realisation of the reign of God (Cf. Lk 4:16-20). For Jesus to achieve this, he had to empty himself and accept to embrace the limitations of what it means to be human. The ultimate self emptying act was that of accepting to die a shameful death, instead of betraying the ideals of the Kingdom (Cf. Phil 2:6-11). Though as a human person Jesus had to undergo the reality of death, his was a pre-mature death occasioned by the fact that he felt the need to rather stick to the truth and the values of the Kingdom, the values

¹⁵⁹ L. T. JOHNSON, "Sacrifice is the Body Language of Love", 91.

of inclusion, liberation of humanity from all the tyrants including the political, social, spiritual and psychological harassments, than spare his life and in the process betray the ultimate cause of establishing the reign of God. To this far therefore, we realise that possibly we cannot easily do away with the notion of sacrifice as such.

We choose therefore to conclude in agreement with Daly that, we can use the notion of sacrifice without offence. In order to do this, he suggests that we begin with the people's actual experiences. We note with him that anyone who has some experience of self-giving love from a significant other can get some clue of what the self-giving love of God entails. Daly says that these are experiences that make us human and give us an inkling of ultimate human fulfilment. It becomes the most beautiful thing to happen, to be hoped for. Seen this way, all suffering will be considered as nothing compared to the love that remains. The difficulties and the painful things that generally accompany self-giving love will easily be put into perspective. This way, it becomes clear that it is self-giving love and not the suffering that accompanies it, that is the essence of the sacrifice of Christ.¹⁶⁰ This blends well with Jesus' declaration that "a man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). No wonder therefore that Paul appeals to his audience to offer themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. For him, this is the true spiritual worship (Cf. Rom 12:1). We, therefore, conclude this chapter affirming that Christ's death was indeed a case of sacrifice. Thus affirmed, we now seek to establish in the following chapter how this Christ Event becomes redemptive for the whole of humanity and indeed the whole creation.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. R. J. DALY, "Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery", 17.

IV. Chapter 3

4.0 The Sacrificial Death of Jesus: Is it Redemptive?

4.1 Introduction

When we were analysing the human condition, we noted that humanity finds itself caught up in some mess including sin, estrangement from self and from God, fear, isolation, lack of fulfilment and true happiness, and always faced with the unpleasant reality of death. There are a host of many other such realities, pointing to a humanity that is far from being integrated and whole. Christian faith believes and has always portrayed God, through the Christ Event, as the ultimate answer to this human condition.¹⁶¹ We also noted that this Christ Event is understood to be sacrificial in its totality, in the sense of it being an act of self-giving love through and through.

With O'Collins we believe that it is vital for us to try at this point to understand how an event that happened as many as 2000 years ago can have its effects trickle down efficaciously to us today, so much so that individuals, human communities and indeed the whole of creation can appropriate to themselves its saving effects here and now, as

¹⁶¹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 163.

well as in the future.¹⁶² The International Theological Commission notes that it is not enough to claim that the whole human person is redeemed by Christ, it is important that this be capable of being shown to be true in the intellectual order.¹⁶³

In order to do this, we first need to understand the proper meaning of the notion of “redemption” and define the boundaries within which we are going to be using it in this essay.

4.2 Etymology, Meaning and Usage of the Term “Redemption”

Though it is so spontaneously used by the majority of Christians, Eamonn Mulcahy seems to indicate that the notion of Redemption is another of those very elusive and hard to define soteriological notions, so much so that many theologians avoid making attempts at clarifying about it.¹⁶⁴

He further says that the English word *redemption* translates the Greek words, *lutrōsis* or *apolutrōsis*, which from their root refer to the liberation brought about by paying a price, and are connected to the nouns *lutron* (Mk. 10:45), and *antilutron* (1 Tim 2:6), meaning a ransom paid for the freedom of a slave.¹⁶⁵

4.3 Usage of the Term in the Bible

According to Mulcahy, though the New Testament usage of the notion and the associated words derives from the Greek commercial language, it is important for us to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures in order to get the real significance attached to them. He

¹⁶² Cf. G. O’COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, v.

¹⁶³ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, “Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer”, 164.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 422.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 422-423.

points to the fact that as an image, redemption stems from the Jewish family law that had the word *gā'al* which carried at least two meanings, that is, reclaiming and then more fundamentally, protection. He says that the task of protecting and defending one's integrity fell above all to the next-of-kin (*gō'ēl* or *redeemer*), whose obligation it was to restore the person, land or property back to the family, at his own cost (Lev 25:8-55; Jer 32:6-15).¹⁶⁶

Mulcahy explains that the noun *gō'ēl* was later appropriated to God as the protector of the weak (Pro 23:10; Jer 50:34) and the defender of the oppressed (Job 19:25). He continues to say that by the time of Deutero-Isaiah, the term *gō'ēl* had become the peculiar reality that distinguished Yahweh from all the other gods (Ps 82).¹⁶⁷ Moreover, Mulcahy also cites the other law among the Jews that allowed anyone at the right price, to buy back the freedom of a slave and set them free (*pādāh*). This came to be the preferred word in the Deuteronomic tradition to describe God's rescuing of Israel from Egypt (Deut 7:8), and from exile (Jer 31:11).¹⁶⁸

Mulcahy is thus keen to stress that the New Testament usage does not derive from the Greek slave market language, but rather from the Jewish experience of liberation from the Egyptian captivity by Yahweh and the subsequent covenant that followed, marking out the Exodus as the foundation event that sealed the relationship between Yahweh and his people Israel. He also notes in the same line that as used in reference to the Exodus experiences, the emphasis is on the personal relationship

¹⁶⁶ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 423.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 423.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 424.

between Yahweh and his people (Is 43:3-5), and not at all on the price paid in ransom to anyone.¹⁶⁹

Of course, Mulcahy acknowledges the fact that in the New Testament Christ's salvific work is described especially by Paul using buying and purchasing verbs like *agorazein* and *exagorazein* (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 4:5), which if linked with the nouns *lutron* (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28) and *antilutron* (1Tim 2:6), can give the impression that some kind of transaction is taking place.¹⁷⁰ He however defends Paul's usage which he perceives to be directly derived from the experience of the Jewish people as covenant partners of Yahweh rescued from slavery for God's self, in the exodus event. Mulcahy therefore, agreeing with Lyonnet and Sabourin concludes that Paul's purpose in using the purchasing metaphor is, but a vivid way of expressing to his audience, the salvific effect of the cross; that is, new links have now been realised that attach us to Christ as his personal possession.¹⁷¹

For Mulcahy therefore, the metaphor of redemption is a pointer to the conviction that we have been introduced into a new and personal relationship with God by the total Christ-event, and thus rendered God's special property by a new covenant guaranteeing all the conditions for our acquisition. The New Testament presents Jesus as our kinsman (Cf. Rom 8:15) who by implication becomes our *gō'ēl*, whose office it is to protect and vindicate the rights of his kinsmen by election. In this way, Mulcahy adds, Jesus' love and not his death, becomes our ransom because the death was just a supreme act of expressing that absolute and gratuitous disinterested love of God. In this way Jesus transforms our freedom for right relationships with God and between us, implying that

¹⁶⁹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 424-425.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 425.

¹⁷¹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 426.

to live as persons in communion and right relationships is the primary meaning of salvation and the personalist meaning of the word redemption.¹⁷²

It is important that we define exactly how we are to use the notion of redemption in this essay; here Gerald O'Collins will be quite helpful. He notes that the language of redemption often overlaps with that of salvation, liberation and deliverance, terms used by the Septuagint to connote a range of ideas, from rescue out of physical dangers, to spiritual threats like sin and judgement (Cf. Jn 3:17, Lk 1:71, Is 49:6).¹⁷³

O'Collins further suggests that the language of liberate or set free, (*eleutheroô*) and that of liberation and freedom (*eleutheria*), equally do overlap with that of redeem in Paul's usage as he contrasts the two laws of the Spirit and that of sin (Rom 8:2,21).¹⁷⁴

Thus, speaking of salvation and redemption, O'Collins notes that even the very name of Jesus means 'God saves' in Hebrew. He says that the early Christians easily used the two words almost as equivalents. But focussing on the internal meaning of the word salvation as derived from the Latin *salus*, with its associated adjectives, *salubris* and *salvus*, O'Collins tries to recover the proper meaning of it as denoting good health, well-being, welfare, wholeness, being healed, being 'hale and hearty' or sound and safe.¹⁷⁵ He thus notes that, "provided we reclaim the internal range of meanings for 'salvation', we can recognise what it entails here and after: a 'whole' life that is authentically healthy brings our true welfare in this life and in the life to come."¹⁷⁶

Understood this way, O'Collins says that salvation will have a richer meaning than redemption which often suggests an external deliverance from some danger or

¹⁷² Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 427-429.

¹⁷³ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 6.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 10.

difficulty. Since the two may often serve as equivalents in biblical, liturgical and theological texts as O'Collins has noted above,¹⁷⁷ we intend in this essay to use the term redemption in the context of salvation understood as *salus*.

4.4 The Need for Redemption

O'Collins points out that in the midst of the human predicament, two groups of people emerge. First, he identifies those who feel that all is well, harbouring a sense of self-sufficiency, and the ability to direct the destiny of their lives as they trust in the open-endedness of human achievement, thereby needing no redemption,. But he also feels that there are those who at the other extreme have resigned themselves to the human predicament, hopelessly regretting all the wrong that there is which apparently nobody can correct. Their very existence is deemed as pointless and absurd, so enslaved by hostile powers that have corrupted, alienated and broken all their vital relationships.¹⁷⁸

The International Theological Commission, however, strongly differs with O'Collins and warns against such categorisation as misleading.¹⁷⁹ Instead, the Commission contends, the reality that is existent is one of cultural and intellectual pluralism with differing analyses of the human condition and a variety of ways trying to cope with it. The Commission says:

Alongside a kind of flight into pleasurable diversion or the absorbing, passing attractions of hedonism, one finds a retreat to various ideologies and new mythologies. Alongside a more or less resigned, lucid and courageous stoicism, one finds both disillusionment claiming to be tough minded and realistic and resolute protest against

¹⁷⁷ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 10.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 61-62.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 168.

the reduction of human beings and their environment to marketable resources that can be exploited, and against the corresponding relativism, underestimation and ultimately trivialization of the dark side of human existence.¹⁸⁰

O'Collins, as if focussing exclusively on the mess in which humanity finds itself, notes that such is the human condition, sinful, suffering, mortal and incapable of self-redemption out of everything that hinders that authentic and integral human living and attainment of true happiness. We truly need someone beyond ourselves to heal all our alienations and lead us to a new life.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, while the Theological Commission agrees with O'Collins that humanity needs a saviour, they view this need in what we perceive to be richer terms, that is, the divine plan of God which from all eternity had created the human person not in vain but for a purpose. The Commission suggests that actually, God created humanity with the aim of making a covenant with us in view of having us participate in the life of God. This means therefore that the human person will always be oriented toward the supernatural.¹⁸² The Commission further states that among the other endowments that humanity was graced with, the gift of freedom is included. Having extended the invitation, God allows the human person to respond to it freely so that the desire that would lead humanity to seek and find its destiny, God, should come from the human person himself or herself.¹⁸³

Unfortunately, humanity misuses the freedom granted it and by extension tends to frustrate the plan of God. But since in God there is no alteration, so that he stays faithful to himself, God takes a rather radical and determinate step toward the

¹⁸⁰ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 169.

¹⁸¹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 62.

¹⁸² Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 203.

¹⁸³ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 203.

restoration of his promise to humanity that had been consistently compromised, intervening this time in Jesus Christ, a reality that reveals God's steadfast faithfulness.¹⁸⁴ The Commission thus concludes pointing out that if we understand the total Christ event this way, as well as revealing the love of God, it also reveals the human condition itself. Humanity is exposed as helpless and in need of a saviour (Jer 31:12ff). Jesus therefore appears to restore the human condition in a radical way and marks a new beginning, a recreation, thereby re-echoing Ezekiel 36:26 who prophesied that God will put a new heart and a new spirit within his people, to imply that the change happens in the human race, not God.¹⁸⁵

This being the case therefore, we feel it is important that we try to sketch out, the redemption story as such, in the couple of pages that hereby follow.

4.5 The Redemption Story

The fact that the Church Fathers were convinced that the human condition was so pathetic that only a divine saviour could help it leads O'Collins to raise questions on how we may then have to understand exactly how the man Jesus who possessed all the essentially human characteristics save for sin, can be truly divine. The other question of equal importance regards the necessity of stressing Jesus' personal identity in the story of redemption.¹⁸⁶ To answer these questions O'Collins endorses the conviction that it was the divine Son of God who assumed the human condition and lived out a genuine human history. This is opposed to the argument that may be it was the divine substance

¹⁸⁴ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 204.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 205.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 81.

that was the one that was incarnated. By this, he intends to stress that the Father-Son relationship that Jesus revealed was the very same relationship that indeed exists in the life of the tripersonal God. It was this same relationship that, in the Spirit, was dramatically played out in human history, which accounts for the unique value and efficacy of what Christ accomplished for the salvation of humanity and the entire world.¹⁸⁷

Further still, O'Collins agrees with the Fathers of the Church that it was the total Christ and not merely his passion and death that wrought our salvation.¹⁸⁸ His argument is that, during his early years in Nazareth, Jesus was attentive to his world and what was happening between people and their loving God. So, when Jesus started preaching, he was keen to infect others with a perspective that could orient them to conversion and open them to the grace of the divine Kingdom, which also served as the core of his proclamation. It was a Kingdom, O'Collins notes, which on the lips of Jesus himself, was tantamount to talking of God as Lord of the world, and whose decisive intervention would liberate sinful humanity from the grip of evil, for a new, final and lasting age of salvation,¹⁸⁹ which in his preaching and lived life also meant the necessity of including those pushed to the margins and whose voices were suffocated, like women.¹⁹⁰

4.6 The Redemptive Value of Jesus' Sacrifice

The redemption story thus presented does not make much sense unless in concrete terms we can try to show exactly how the sacrifice of Christ indeed redeems us

¹⁸⁷ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 82.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 82-84.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 94-95.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 99.

from the negative dimensions of the human condition. This attempt has evolved through different stages as various theologians in different epochs have tried to explain. This evolution of thought is important to be summarised here because as we shall see, certain thought patterns especially out of the middle ages have had a deep impact on Christian praxis and prayer.

4.6.1 Distorted Presentations

According to Neil Ormerod, the early fathers of the Church were largely inspired by other New Testament writings than the Gospels while reflecting on the nature of Christ's death.¹⁹¹ He singles out St. Irenaeus who centres his reflection on the Pauline idea of recapitulation (Eph 1:10), to understand Jesus' saving work as a summation of the apparently irreconcilable corruptibility and incorruptibility, mortality and immortality, passibility and impassibility. He stresses the fact that it took so much on God's part to save humanity, noting that God had to render himself visible, finite and capable of suffering, so that he might draw all things to himself at the proper time.¹⁹²

Noting that strength of Irenaeus' argument lies in his ability to give a powerful sense of the wholeness that salvation brings, that is, bringing everything together in Christ, Ormerod is quick to point out that this is however done at the expense of portraying the mechanism of salvation as a kind of automatic outcome of the incarnation itself, which compromises the role of conversion and repentance in redemption.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 93.

¹⁹² Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 93.

¹⁹³ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 94.

As for Tertullian, his focus is on Christ's death seen as a ransom that had to be paid as the price to the angels of this world for our sins, and this resulted in getting us merited for heaven.¹⁹⁴ This view set in motion a soteriology that became so famous; the devil's rights theory. He suggests that by Adam's sins, we became slaves to sin and to win us back for him; God had to treat the devil fairly by paying the price for our release.¹⁹⁵

But Gregory of Nazianzus was not amused by Tertullian, wondering how a price could be paid to a thief, the devil, or even if it were to be paid to God, since already he had rejected blood sacrifices including Abraham's offering of Isaac. He thus forthrightly rejected the theory.¹⁹⁶ Not so for Gregory of Nyssa however. For him, the ransom theme is okay, but sees in it a God playing trickery with the devil and beats the devil at its own game. Having rights only over sinful humanity, Gregory reasoned, the devil by claiming Christ who was actually divine and sinless, bit off more than he could chew by taking what was not his and therefore ended up forfeiting even his claims on humanity.¹⁹⁷ But this then portrays God as being a liar and a cheat, who wins the contest by deceit and grants the devil rights before God, which is actually absurd!

Origen, another Church Father, chose to pick on the symbol of the cross, took for granted the sacrificial character of Christ's death because, the fact of sin actually demands of itself propiation, which necessarily implies a victim.¹⁹⁸ But conscious not to present a vengeful God, he tries with difficulty, to make use of the notions of sacrifice

¹⁹⁴ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 94.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 94.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 95.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 95.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 96.

and ransom, with the aim that Christ's sacrifice should be viewed as an expiatory reality averting the devil's power. Of this Frances Young notes:

Origen's way of explaining the sacrificial death of Christ and the expiatory power of his blood is in terms of the offering of a ransom to the devil and the analogy with human sacrifices of aversion, examples of which can be found in pagan literature. He is at a loss as to how such sacrifices of aversion work, but basically feels that the sacrificial death of Christ is only explicable in such terms, while recognising a great difference, for Christ died to save the whole world...Christ gave his soul...as a ransom for many...To whom did he give it? It could not have been to God; rather it was to the wicked who had dominion over us until the [soul] of Jesus was given to him as a ransom for us. But deceived, he thought he could master it...and did not realise that he could not bear the torture of holding it. So the life (ψυχή) offered in sacrifice and the blood shed as expiation became in the hands of Origen, the ransom price given by God to the devil.¹⁹⁹

Ormerod makes a general verdict on the presentation of the Fathers saying that each one makes an approach that has an existential appeal to it, inviting us to explore an aspect of salvation. A thorough study of any of them however, he notes, reveals serious difficulties, the failure to systematize it being one of the major pitfalls in each.²⁰⁰

4.6.2 The Beginning of System in the Middle Ages

Ormerod sees St. Anselm as the first one to have some kind of systematised work of soteriology which he presents in the famous book, *Cur Deus Homo?*, in which he rejects any possibility of the devil being paid a ransom, arguing that both the devil and humanity belong to God and thus God owes nothing to his creatures. For him, by our transgressions, we rid God of his due honour and this amounts to sin. This violation of the honour of God unless satisfied, leaves every person at fault and with a debt to God.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ F. M. YOUNG, *Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers*, 183.

²⁰⁰ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 97.

²⁰¹ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 98.

For Anselm, the fact that humanity is finite and yet has dishonoured the infinite, of necessity, is the need for an infinite satisfaction to be made for such an infinite dishonour. Because it is humanity that has dishonoured God, it must be humanity itself that must supply for its own transgressions. But being finite, it is impossible for humanity to supply an infinite satisfaction as would be demanded by the magnitude of the offence. So, it is for this reason that Anselm proposes the only possibility available, that is, only the God-man can effectively satisfy the debt, thereby explaining why the need for the incarnation.²⁰²

Though this theory was so powerful at the time that it almost found its way into the Vatican I teaching, it has been mercilessly criticized by modern and contemporary theologians.²⁰³ Michael Winter, for instance, refers to Jesus' dealings with the sinners and his teaching to disregard Anselm's theory.²⁰⁴ He argues that Jesus' message was one of forgiveness, and therefore, the idea of compensation as a condition for being received back in God's love, holds no validity.²⁰⁵ Thomas Rausch on his part faults Anselm as regards his appreciation of the Christ event saying that he focuses only on Jesus' death, instead of the total Christ event as the cause for our salvation.²⁰⁶ He says that it is an approach which is flawed, as it tries to do a soteriology from above, from God's point of view and he accuses Anselm saying: "By literalizing one of the New Testament metaphors for salvation, Anselm has created a problematic ontological

²⁰² Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 98-99.

²⁰³ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Creation, Grace and Redemption*, 99.

²⁰⁴ Cf. M. WINTER, *Atonement*, 66.

²⁰⁵ Cf. M. WINTER, *Atonement*, 66.

²⁰⁶ Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 187.

theology which ‘introduces’ the metaphysically impossible idea of a transformation of God.”²⁰⁷

4.6.3 Implications of a Distorted Soteriology to Christian Praxis and Prayer

Because for several hundred years the soteriological model proposed by St. Anselm was the one that guided the Church, the effect it had on prayer life and the faith instruction of the faithful was enormous. But we also know that as Mulcahy rightly points out, the law of prayer influences our creeds (*lex Orandi, lex Credendi*), [and it must be said that in turn this also translates into the way we live our daily lives and relate with the God figure].²⁰⁸

Mulcahy does well to point out some of the liturgical language the Church uses. He refers to the third Eucharistic prayer which gives the impression that Jesus’ death is the one which finally brought about peace between humanity and God (*calling to mind the death your Son endured for our salvation...Look with favour on the Victim whose death has reconciled us to yourself...Lord, May this sacrifice which has made our peace with you*).²⁰⁹ This way, God is presented as a wrathful God who will not rest unless satisfied and his debt cleared in proportionate measures. The image painted of him is an ugly one; it is one of a God who is heartless, so much so that he demands the molestation of his own and only Son so that his anger is appeased.²¹⁰ Mulcahy also explores some of the catechisms of the past, (which are no less common in many parishes here in East Africa), that taught that the divine Son came to earth for the sake

²⁰⁷ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 187.

²⁰⁸ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 8.

²⁰⁹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 8-9.

²¹⁰ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 9.

of saving us and he did this by dying for us on the cross, and that through his sufferings and death, he satisfied the justice of God, delivered us from hell and the power of the evil one.²¹¹

It is also true that while praying the Stations of the Cross, we say that it was because of the cross that salvation for the world was won by Christ!²¹² Not only that. The common language until very recently when reforms were made to the sacrament of Reconciliation, when it was still known as the Sacrament of Penance, the penitent having finished to ‘accuse’ or ‘report’ him or herself would wait to receive from the priest, what was popularly known as a “punishment”. In effect God was the punishing God who seeks to get even with his offenders whenever a transgression was made against him. These days, it is the experience that most of the staunch Catholic faithful, especially the elderly, who go for the Sacrament of Reconciliation when the priest does not ask them to “do a punishment”, they feel it is not a complete confession. The expectation is that the greater the offence against God, the heavier the punishment, may be three rosary recitations for murder, and three ‘Hail Mary’s’ for abusing someone!

The effect of all of this has been that most Catholic faithful have the image of a God who is a judge, one to be feared, almost dreaded. Subsequently, most faithful live, lives of piety and uprightness, observe the commandments and do charitable works while avoiding sin, but the impetus of all this being the fear of incurring the wrath of God. Such beliefs are further confirmed in the minds and hearts of the faithful by some pastors and preachers who lay stress on the fact that sinners are going to burn in the

²¹¹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 11.

²¹² According to the formula of venerating the cross as we pray the stations of the cross, the leader says, *We praise you O Christ and we bless you*, and then the response of the people goes: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

eternal fires of hell. The result has also been the basically Catholic sense that the more I work to be virtuous and do good works, the easier it will be for me to go to heaven. While works are important in securing our eternal dwelling with God, to many Catholics the aspect of the grace of God is almost forgotten, and salvation becomes more of a personal effort, a reality that one merits because of their good deeds and therefore God is obliged to offer it to them. We therefore need to try and understand in the light of contemporary soteriology, exactly how Jesus redeems humanity, so that from here we can conclude our thesis with a discussion of how best we can make sense of the redemption that Christ wrought for humanity, in the midst of the human predicament.

4.7 How then Does Jesus Redeem Us?

When we talk of Christ's redemption of humanity, we are actually referring to a total and integral liberation of the human person from all that enslaves him or her, denying him or her the ability to live a fully human, integrated and whole life, as well as barring him or her from the full realisation of his or her potential and desires. Because of this reality therefore, we cannot describe in one sentence exactly what Christ did to redeem humanity. But looking at the reality of redemption from the various aspects that we shall single out, we are going to make an attempt at introducing the various ways in which humanity is actually saved and set free. Under no circumstances can we therefore claim to be exhaustive in describing the immensity of the activity that Christ did for humanity through the work of redemption.

4.7.1 *Redemption as Deliverance from Evil*

Gerald O'Collins says that Jesus saw his ministry as being at the service of the Kingdom of God which was meant to confront the satanic powers (Mk 3:27). He says that Jesus knew that his ministry involved liberation of people from sin, evil and from bondage of the law, aiming at ushering in the fullness of life.²¹³ According to O'Collins, the early Church interpreted the Christ Event as implying the swallowing up of death in Christ's victory and uprooting of its sting, namely sin, and its power, that is, the law (I Cor 15:54-57). This stands true, O'Collins reasons, considering that what apparently stood as a sign of failure, the viciously cruel crucifixion of Jesus on the cross, by his resurrection is turned into a powerful means of redemption. Subsequently, the curse of death is broken and transformed into a passage from the dominion of sin into an eternal and utterly satisfying life, and all the forces of the world and all its powers are overcome. Humanity is set free from fear and set on the path to wholeness.²¹⁴

The fact that the event of Jesus' passion and crucifixion coincided with the Passover celebrations (Mk 14:1-2,12) made it easy for the early Christians to understand how Jesus' dying and resurrection connected to the original Exodus and its commemoration of the Passover. This way, they managed to interpret Jesus as the paschal lamb sacrificed for the remission of sins from the world (Jn 1:29, 36). Subsequently, Paul talks of how the human community and the rest of creation that had been in bondage and groaning for redemption (Rom 8:18-23) and liberation from the law (Gal 4:1-7; 5:1) have been redeemed or bought (Gal 3:13, 4:4) and delivered from all the past bondages. It is notable, however, O'Collins stresses, that the New Testament

²¹³ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 116.

²¹⁴ Cf. N. ORMEROD, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 118.

—does not at all mention that the price involved (Mk: 10:45; 1Pt 1:18-19) is paid to anyone. What is stressed instead is how costly on the part of Jesus this redemption was, so much so that his life was lost. The devil's rights theory is heavily denied therefore.²¹⁵

O'Collins notes that in practical terms, the victory over the powers of evil and sin has inspired many peoples over the centuries to oppose the forces that enslave humanity. He cites the example of the development of such theologies like Liberation theology which have galvanised widespread action and energised people to work for the liberation of those engulfed under the power of sin, social enslavement and other forms of bondage and oppression like political, economic, social and religious systems that demean the human person.²¹⁶ Rausch adds his voice by saying that Christ's cross is a sign for humanity of that victory over all that used to bedevil the human person since he resolutely refuses to yield to sin, but is intent at achieving the ultimate good for humanity, that is, ushering in of a new order. He does not let hostility be met with hostility, and sin with sin. This is in itself a radical statement of choice, where by it becomes an antidote to an otherwise endless cycle of revenge and violence. It becomes a pointer to what true forgiveness and costly reconciliation actually entails.²¹⁷ In fact, as quoted by Mulcahy, Karl Rahner sees Jesus' death transformed from being the manifestation of sin to becoming in him an expression of grace; it became life and a visible advent of the Kingdom of God.²¹⁸

Quoting McGill, Rausch further argues that by Christ opposing all the powers and forces of evil that rendered humanity enslaved, divided and incomplete, he reveals

²¹⁵ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 120-121.

²¹⁶ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 127.

²¹⁷ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 192.

²¹⁸ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 459.

God's essential life whose power brings nothing less than life. This way, the cross turns into a representation of the ultimate defeat of the demonic since "Jesus' self-offering on the cross and his whole life in Palestine is the action of the Son, and therefore an action in which a human mode of being is gathered into the inner life of God."²¹⁹ Rausch interprets this to mean that humanity which is also living under the weight of the cross "enters into a life with God that makes death not an end point but a transition to a new life. With Chesterton, Rausch notes that this way, Christianity introduces the idea of a deeply involved God, one who suffers alongside the image of God. He is therefore a God who is so immediate and present to his creation."²²⁰

4.7.2 Redemption as Cleansing through Christ's Sacrifice

Here, the idea of expiation has to be invoked, and directly connected to the Jewish understanding of how God removed the sins of the community, the meaning of blood and how it relates to life in Leviticus 17:11-14. Sacred in itself and given by God, blood meant deliverance and life, having within it the power to cleanse human sins. For that reason it was used at the *Yôm Kippûr*,²²¹ as part of the ritual to express God's willingness to purify his people from the contamination caused by their sins and restore their relationship with him, which these sins had severed.²²² Mulcahy does a fine job of retrieving for us the proper usage of the term expiation in the New Testament, based on

²¹⁹ Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 193.

²²⁰ Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus*, 194.

²²¹ It was the day of Expiation when the high priest led the community of the Israelites into a ritual purification. Blood of the sacrificial animal was smeared on the *kappōret* (mercy seat), which was believed to have been contaminated by the people's sins and thus "driven" Yahweh away, so that this blood could cleanse the mercy seat and thus have Yahweh come back to his people and unite with them. The sins of all were blotted out. (See. E. MULCAHY's treatment of "Expiation in a relational key", in his book, *Cause of our Salvation*, 431).

²²² Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 172-176.

the Old Testament Day of Atonement. He rejects as false any interpretation of the Greek word *hilastērion*, which Paul uses in Romans 3:25, be it in Paul or in any other Old or New Testament text, to mean appeasement, propitiation or placation. He relates the term to the Greek verb *hilaskesthai*, which, according to him is the word that the Septuagint uses to refer to the Hebrew verb *kippēr*, believed to be the controlling idea behind the feast of the *Yôm Kippûr*, whose meaning can be, to wipe away, rub on, smear over, to cloak and remove, thereby expressing the removal of Israel's sins by God.²²³ He thus argues that in biblical thought, expiate simply means purifying, or rendering an object, place or person pleasing to God. It refers to disposing human persons to receive the gift of God. In no way does it connect to God's anger with the passion and death of Jesus.²²⁴

The term *expiation* thus rescued from misconception, O'Collins tries to explain how the blood of Christ can remove the sins left by others' sins and resultantly restore their relationship with God and their damaged moral order. He also seeks to explain how Christ relates with those who are the beneficiaries of his expiation. He argues against the understanding of Christ's expiatory effects in terms of substitution or representation because this would necessarily create a gap between us and Christ. His argument is that between the representative and the represented, there is no necessary identification and the sense of personal participation is lost since there is no necessity of either the representative or the represented being drawn into the story of the other.²²⁵

O'Collins, therefore, sees Christ's redemption for us and the suffering associated with it as revolving about the fact that Jesus wanted to be with us and share our condition. It was his devotion to us that led to his violent death and it was and continues

²²³ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 430-431.

²²⁴ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 433.

²²⁵ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 176-178.

to be love that invites human persons to leave behind their violence and malice and allow them to be incorporated into the crucified and risen Jesus. That way, they come to participate personally into the drama of redemption and share in that uniquely new communion with God. O'Collins further stresses the fact that without such a personal participation, Christ cannot effect any cleansing of lives and restoration of a stained moral order. He concludes that, those who are drawn into the Christ story of redemptive suffering do experience the effects of being washed clean and now find their situation somehow set free from defilement.²²⁶

4.7.3 Redemption as Transforming Love

For Gerald O'Collins, approaching redemption through love is critical because it shows how salvation is not primarily a process or even a formula, but a tri-personal action playing out in a boundless love. In love, he says, *personal causality* is highlighted even more than when we interpret redemption as deliverance from evil and as sacrificial, expiating the results of our sins.²²⁷ But we need to know what love in this context means. Eamonn Mulcahy agreeing with John Macquarrie understands love as *letting-be*. He approvingly presents Macquarrie's definition saying:

...Love is letting be, not of course in the sense of standing off from someone or something, but in the positive and active sense of enabling-to-be. When we talk of «letting-be», we are to understand both parts of this hyphenated expression in the positive sense - «letting» as «empowering», and «be» as enjoying the maximal range of being that is open to the particular being concerned. Most typically, «letting-be» means helping a person into the full realisation of his (Sic) potentialities for being; and the greatest love will be costly, since it will be accomplished by the spending of one's own being.²²⁸

²²⁶ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 179-180.

²²⁷ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 182.

²²⁸ E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 388.

Understood this way, O'Collins sees love as being at play right from creation with God showering humanity with divine gifts, a reality that even intensifies with redemption when God finally chooses the divinization of humanity for it to be drawn into the inner life of God and to share an existence of eternal love (Jn 17:26). It is a divine redeeming love that manifests at least three elements that were revealed by the life of the divine Son incarnate.²²⁹

The first of these elements is that *Active initiative* through which God reveals the gratuitous, unsolicited nature of divine love. It was not called upon, but spontaneously this love moved to help those bedevilled by sin and evil. God, who was the offended, initiated the reconciliation and carried it through to the bitter end, loving us while we were yet sinners and estranged (Rom 5:8), thereby transforming us into beautiful and lovable creatures.²³⁰

The other element that O'Collins identifies is that unreserved *self-giving*. God gives the very best of his very self because of love. O'Collins adds that, "the human life of Christ was the sign and reality of the gift of the divine self. This free self-giving entailed a new presence that effected a communion of life and love...Christ brought about results that were and remain life-giving and life enhancing...salvific."²³¹

The third element that comes out is the *speech* and *presence* of Jesus which proved highly relevant in the context of redemption through love. Jesus' language was salvific whenever he was with others. By his speech, O'Collins notes, redemptive effects came about, making powerfully present the saving realities that he spoke of.²³²

²²⁹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 183.

²³⁰ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 183.

²³¹ G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our redeemer*, 184.

²³² Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 184-188.

In agreement with O'Collins, Thomas Rausch firmly states that Jesus' ministry was not 'other-world oriented', but rather fully focussed on the present, teaching, healing and reconciling the men and women of this world, setting them free from the forces of evil and alienation. He defended passionately his concerns for and inclusion of the sinners, demoniacs, lepers, women, children and all who were on the margins of society, placing them at the centre of his mission (Lk 4:16-20; Mk 2:17), meaning that in him, these people always found a friend, justification and acceptance (Mk 2:18; Lk 7:36-50). Whenever he stood to teach, people never remained the same (Mk 1:22; Mt 7:29; 8:2, Jn 4:42; Lk 19:2) because of the hope and assurance he gave them (Lk 15:11). All these stories involved a transformation from ignorance, slavery, sin, power and isolation, to newness of life, all done in the context of the grace of God mediated through and by Christ.²³³

In all this, the International Theological Commission sees Jesus tracing out a new way to an authentic and lasting freedom, calling people to conversion, a necessary condition for the inheritance of the Kingdom. The Commission further says that in his parables on the Kingdom, Jesus shattered the deep structures of our accepted world view, thereby removing our defences, rendering us vulnerable to God. In this way, God can now touch us and transform our lives to be fit for the Kingdom.²³⁴

Though it is necessary to stress the centrality of love in the redemption story, it is equally important not to overlook the passion that was involved on the part of this redeeming lover. For this reason O'Collins is keen to add that:

²³³ Cf. T. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 189-191.

²³⁴ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 174.

God cannot not love, and love always puts those who love at a risk. Generous, self-sacrificing, and unconditional love – and that is what we find exemplified supremely in Christ – risks being exploited, rejected and even murderously crushed...No parable from the Gospel evokes more poignantly the risk of love than the story of the merciful father. His love leads him to face and endure the insulting behaviour of his elder son (Lk 15:29-30), as well as the deep pain caused by the moral, spiritual death of his younger son (Lk 15:24, 32).²³⁵

As such, to label Jesus' suffering as a passion is apt since it combines intense love with the mortal suffering it brought the lover.²³⁶ The International Theological Commission therefore sees the cross in this context as the time and place where a God who is love and who loves us is made visible. Jesus crucified then reveals to us how deep God's love for us is, and in a very particular way affirms that in this gesture of love, a human being has given unconditional assent to God's ways.²³⁷

O'Collins points to the deepest paradox of Calvary, that is, through weakness and total humiliation, God's power ushered in a new life. So, here love becomes a unity in new life and brings forth to birth. He relies on Jesus' quotation (Jn 12:24) pointing to the necessity of the dying of the grain of wheat if production is to be, to point to the real redemptive value of Christ's sacrificial death. For him, it is a death that gathers a people together and enlists in them a growth of new life and blossoming. They start to see things in a better way. The centurion can now profess his faith, the three women are joined by many others and Joseph of Arimathea becomes bold (Mk 15:39-47). After the resurrection things begin to happen, Peter, Magdalene and all those whom Christ had called to form a community of committed disciples can now definitively respond to it,

²³⁵ G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 189.

²³⁶ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 189.

²³⁷ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 175.

after finding their lasting and redeemed identity bestowed upon them. In response, Christ promises to abide with them till the end of time (Mt. 28:20).²³⁸

Moreover, the uniting power of Jesus' redemptive love breaks down barriers and goes beyond the boundaries that were. O'Collins uses the example of Paul who exhorts his audiences to have Christ for a garment which dissolves distinctions between Jews and gentiles, free and slaves. Now, all become a new creation and thus united with one another through the saving love of Christ, believers are summoned to conform their existence to the new life of love received (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13). Without destroying the uniqueness of each, one becomes closer to themselves than ever before, coming to know the self in a completely new way. Their self-giving in service of the other becomes easier and a loving exercise to do.²³⁹

There is another dimension to the redeeming love of Christ, that is, *an offer of eternity to humanity and its divinisation*. Quoting Gabriel Marcel who said that to love is to tell the other that "thou shalt not die", O'Collins sees Christ's redemptive love as an eternally faithful reality in what it effects. In Paul, he finds the recognition that Christ's love so manifested supremely on the cross, lives on forever in his heavenly intercession for humanity (Rom 8:34, 35, and 38). In John 6:26-58, whoever is united to Christ lives for ever. The share of eternal life, O'Collins further notes, is tantamount to the deification of humanity in the sense of sharing in that divine loving relationship of the Trinity. God in his loving act of bestowing on humanity a share in eternal life comes

²³⁸ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 192-194.

²³⁹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 194-195.

with a gift to us, which gift is no less than his very self, flowing from a spontaneous abundance.²⁴⁰

This redemptive love of God is a love that makes known to us the life of God and in the process so fundamentally changes us. It is thus a redemptive self-disclosure as Titus 3:4-5 attests. This redemptive self disclosure comes to us through the personal operation of the Holy Spirit and the initiative of the Father, enabling us to be renewed in orientation and inner being. In fact, Nicholas Fogliacco argues that revelation and redemption imply each other since revelation incarnates itself in the salvific activity of God in favour of Israel, climaxing in the events of Jesus' life especially the death and resurrection. For him, therefore, revelation is salvation.²⁴¹

Fogliacco sees revelation as having two important aspects, and answering to at least two aspects of the human condition. In the first place, he notes the loss of God as the greatest human tragedy of our day, and in this case Christ does well to recover for humanity this lost God. He reasons that if losing and rejecting God was the fruit of our scientific development which may have ushered in a sense of self-sufficiency, or, if the rejection arises from the fact that we may have experienced a God who is tyrannical, cold and disinterested in human affairs, Jesus reverses this trend. The God of Jesus Christ is one who is for human beings and desires their full freedom and well being. He is a God of life whom if encountered effects a rebirth and total new life which opens one to hope and an even fuller future. Jesus reverses the picture of a disinterested God by demonstrating how God steps down from his celestial heights to join humanity's

²⁴⁰ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 197-199.

²⁴¹ Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, *God of All Consolation*, 41.

struggle for justice, doing this so fully and perfectly by emptying himself for us (Phil 2:6ff).²⁴²

Fogliacco says that as Jesus offers salvation both to his contemporaries as well as to ourselves, the new face of God that he conjures up is one before which we all stand as sinners, gratuitously granted grace as long as we are ready to receive it in faith. This way, he adds, humanity begins to appreciate the law and God's precepts in a new light of a redeemed people, no longer indignant or seeing God as a boss, but as a God of love aiming at human fulfilment. His laws are thus appreciated as leading to our growth in all spheres of life, and hence our integration and fulfilment.²⁴³

More than that however, Christ's revelation reveals to humanity the true face of itself, thereby helping humanity to recover that lost image of God. Humanity then starts on to the road of self-making and recovery of the values lost due to sin. The human person's emptiness is unmasked and all the tyrants demeaning him or her get exposed. Christ then imparts the values of the Kingdom epitomised in God's love which exposes self and group idolatry; the dignity of the person and the equality of all human beings all of whom are appreciated as God's children are recovered. What becomes of this recovery, Fogliacco concludes, is the realisation of a sense of universal fraternity, service of others, justice, peace, meekness and joy.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, *God of All Consolation*, 42-43.

²⁴³ Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, *God of All Consolation*, 60-61.

²⁴⁴ Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, *God of All Consolation*, 45.

4.7.4 *Bodily Resurrection and the Transformation of the World*

According to O'Collins Jesus was the first to have experienced redemption.²⁴⁵ But reading Paul, he points out that the resurrection was not presented merely as a unique action by the Father on behalf of the dead Jesus. From all aspects, this resurrection of Jesus affects human kind and the whole of creation since, "he [Christ] was handed over for our sins and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25)".²⁴⁶

O'Collins further notes that the persons to whom Jesus appeared came to understand that the risen Lord was bringing them into a new relationship in the Spirit, in an unprecedented way, life that could never be broken by death. Hope for their own resurrection was integral to their experience of and reflections on what had redemptively happened to Jesus himself. This coming to life without any more possibility of death implies a full and final salvation that will complete our being made into the image and likeness of God as was intended by God at creation (Gen 12:6-7). This new creation modelled after the risen and glorified Christ (2 Cor 5:7), will be more mysterious.²⁴⁷

Pondering on the reality of the empty tomb, O'Collins finds it to be a redemptive sign in itself, with the appearances helping to provide the necessary continuity between the earthly and the glorified Jesus. Jesus' pre-resurrection followers, he stresses, managed to recognise him as being the same person that they had lived with. The empty tomb then becomes a key to reflecting that holiness the now glorified body once had, that corpse of the incarnate Son whose whole existence was pro-others. He simply could not know corruption (Acts 2:27). Moreover, because tombs naturally

²⁴⁵ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 239-246.

²⁴⁶ G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 246.

²⁴⁷ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 247.

express finality and the irrevocable loss death brings, Jesus' empty tomb stands for the fullness of a new and everlasting life that he has now risen into. O'Collins notes yet another aspect about the empty tomb. He sees it as speaking about the nature of redemption as being much more than just an escape from suffering and death. It powerfully means the transformation of this material body with its whole history of sin and suffering. Jesus' resurrection is a great sign pointing to God's intention of bringing our universe to its ultimate destiny. The earthly body of Jesus was not abandoned but mysteriously transformed, a pointer to what lies ahead for all humanity and the rest of the universe, a recreation.²⁴⁸

4.8 Conclusion

We have basically seen in some details, how Christ's sacrifice effects redemption for the whole of creation. We have looked at it from various angles, although not exhaustive in themselves. We probably need to note with O'Collins a rather important aspect of the redemption Christ brought about. For him, the personal causality of love has to be stressed. In tune with Fogliacco, he notes that redemption is a revelation and communication of the divine love to humanity which gives life. In the redemptive process, the Tri-personal God has created conditions in which a human response can be made to God's initiative of coming to humanity to offer them new life. In this case therefore, O'Collins feels it is better to talk of redemption as an empowerment, and by empowerment he means, that creative quality of the divine love which draws all men and women to respond freely in love. Humanity is then enabled to

²⁴⁸ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 250-251.

love by being loved. We see and experience a God who responds to the desperately bad situation created by human sin, by personally entering into the situation at the incarnation, being united with sinful humanity and ultimately serving humanity with self-giving love.²⁴⁹

The emphasis centres around the establishment of the Reign of God, leading to what Mulcahy calls a relational Soteriology of communion based on God's unconditional, inclusive love made tangible in Jesus of Nazareth. It is a communion that is crowned in the resurrection and as we have seen above, shared with any man and woman who follows him in faith (Cf. Rom 1:16). Mulcahy concludes his thesis affirming Jesus to be the cause of our salvation (Cf. Heb 5:9), the transparent proof in history that we are loved and wanted and desired by the one behind life in a love that can never be broken, thereby rendering love the basic principle of our salvation.²⁵⁰ He says that redemption must always be connected to the doctrine of creation since the salvation Jesus wrought is holistic and integral. It concerns not only the soul, but the body too, meaning, the whole person, the whole of humanity and all creation. It must be a salvation not projected to the future, but one which starts here and transforms the human condition for the better.²⁵¹ We are in total agreement with what seems to be Mulcahy's appreciation of the most fundamental effect Christ's redemptive action has on humanity. Concurring with Luke Johnson he says that salvation should best be understood as the action of Christ (freeing humanity from estrangement) and

²⁴⁹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 268-269.

²⁵⁰ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 473.

²⁵¹ Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 477.

transforming our freedom for right relationships with God and with one another, (not to forget with the environment as well)!²⁵²

We now move into the closing chapter of our work, in which we shall attempt to affirm the belief that indeed God through his eternal Son has redeemed humanity and the whole of creation from the power of sin and death, and transferred us to the Kingdom of that same beloved Son in whom we have redemption, reconciliation and peace by the blood of his (the Son's) cross (Col 1:12-20).

This is a belief that we are holding, despite the fact that humanity is far from experiencing wholeness, integration and authentic happiness. Our argument here is going to be that the reality of the human predicament is not testimony to the fact that humanity and the rest of creation are not redeemed. We are going to attempt to demonstrate how to understand the redemption Christ won for humanity and make sense of it to the modern man and woman having to contend with the human condition. Hopefully, we shall as well be able to absolve God of the blame we had placed on him in the first chapter, for all the realities that are bedeviling humanity and the rest of the created world.

²⁵² Cf. E. MULCAHY, *Cause of Our Salvation*, 473. Emphasis in the brackets is ours.

V. Chapter 4

5.0 Redeemed by Christ's Sacrifice: How Can We Reconcile the Human Predicament with the Redemption Christ Won for Humanity?

5.1 Introduction

We noted earlier in our work that John 10:10 has Christ declaring that he came so that all may have life and have it to the full. The redemption Christ achieved for humanity has to be understood in terms of bringing about an integral liberation of the human person and setting humanity free from all that had prevented humanity from experiencing wholeness, authentic happiness and harmony both within the human community and between God, the human race and the rest of creation. That Christ accomplished the work of our salvation is in no doubt according to the teaching of the Church, and we have seen in the previous chapter the various concrete ways of how Christ's redemption of humanity can be experienced. Nevertheless, we can see that the negative dimensions of the human predicament is still with us and may not be about to go away. This then launches us into the investigation of how we can still make sense, in the midst of the human predicament, of the fact that the total redemption of humanity

was won by Christ. This, as we shall be indicating, has a lot of implications on the Church as regards Christian instruction and catechesis, prayer life and missionary work.

5.2 The Redemptive Value of Christian Suffering

We have to state that the victory over sin and death Christ achieved by his cross and resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering from human life nor free from suffering the whole historical dimension of human existence. It nevertheless casts a new light upon this dimension and upon every suffering endured: namely, the light of salvation (Cf. *Salvifici Doloris* 15). The divine and human nature of the Church, that visible instrument of redemption to the men and women of our day is therefore highlighted by the reality of human suffering, which suffering can creatively be rendered redemptive by the same God that redeems the Church for her to redeem her children and all peoples of the world in turn. For this reason, the Church reflects on her own sufferings and those of her members as having some special value, something good to be revered with all the depth of that faith she has in the redemption of Christ. She also bows down reverently in the same faith with which she accepts within herself the overwhelming mystery of the Body of Christ (Cf. *Salvifici Doloris* 24 Par 3, 4, 5).

It is ours to argue out the case that God is not going to be blamed for the yet unresolved mess. In this regard therefore we choose to focus on the human person, God's supreme creature and his or her role as God's co-worker in the process of ushering in redemption for humanity and the rest of the created world that anticipates its own redemption too (Cf. Rom 8:21-23)!

In a world where suffering is dreaded and seen as a reality that has to be done away with at all costs, the Church has to be more forceful in her teaching and prophetic role, to educate human society about the reality of suffering and its real meaning. Especially in the western world where technology is seen as a remedy to all human suffering, the Church has to take a leading role in bringing the men and women of our day to that humble submission to the fact that we are finite and therefore cannot do without suffering. Today's society is one which Sequeira describes as being consumer cultured, one which will not hear of struggle and suffering.²⁵³ Sequeira continues his description of today's society saying that it has a desire for instant gratification and avoidance of pain, sacrifice and struggle at all costs. Now that the youth have been won over by the power of the media and market will, Sequeira laments that they end up dying for success but not values. The one ultimate desire for most people is money, to which one can add status, power and pleasure, rendering all other things useless.²⁵⁴

In our attempt to alleviate suffering, we have created some of the predicaments that have bedevilled the human race. When we think of the fact that some industries have been started to produce goods that make humanity's living more bearable and easier, we cannot fail to realise that often this has come at a deadly cost to humanity. Environmental degradation, unemployment, global warming, air and water pollution, health hazards to the industrial workers, enslavement and exploitation of the human capital, among many other evils have cropped up, with bitter consequences for humanity. In an attempt to deny that God has created them in the best way possible, other persons have resorted to bleaching or blackening themselves so as to look better

²⁵³ Cf. L. SEQUEIRA, "The Cross Symbol of Struggle and Hope", 216.

²⁵⁴ Cf. L. SEQUEIRA, "The Cross Symbol of Struggle and Hope", 216.

and be more acceptable. This has caused diseases like cancer and all these deny the human person the dignity due to him or her, and that full happiness. The Christian persons therefore have the greater responsibility of witnessing and instructing the others that some of the human suffering has to be endured patiently and humbly, after all, suffering at times serves to be revelatory to us of our frailty and need for God. In fact, not all suffering is negative.

Down the ages, the Church has realised that in suffering some of her own members have been drawn closer to God and they have discovered that it is by way of suffering that they are called to serve the cause of the Kingdom and bring glory to God by the grace of Christ their redeemer. This suffering is not without difficulty and they too experience the hard moments of Gethsemane, asking as it were, that profound question in agony: “*why*.” This discovery then becomes a particular confirmation of their spiritual greatness and interior maturity which become evident even as they joyously endure the ailments of their bodies, touching and moving to conversion in the process, those who are healthy and others who may be losing hope in their ailments (*Salvifici Doloris* 26, 27). It is therefore vital that the Christian faithful demonstrate by their lives, that humility of accepting in faith and love the sort of sufferings that human ability cannot alleviate. By staying focussed on her teaching against Euthanasia, abortion (even in cases of rape or unwanted pregnancies), standing for the truth even if it implies suffering physical pain and harassment, insisting on the rightful acquisition of material resources while refusing to engage in corruption, the Church will be a testimony to the rest of the world that suffering at times may have to be endured for the

sake of higher values. In those circumstances where the Church has had to stand for the truth and defend it to the bitter end, great fruits have been realised.

We think back with admiration about the strong stand the Holy Father Pope John Paul II took against communism, which even exposed his life to the danger of assassination in 1981, and see in this a big statement on the part of the Church. This became a redemptive suffering by all standards because the rest of the world now enjoys the fruits of such a conviction. But in those eras when the Church has shied away from confronting these situations because of fearing to be persecuted, the consequences have been dire. We think of the reality of the Church's fear to face the shame of the sex scandals in the past, the result has been that apart from compromising her own moral authority, some of these testimonies have driven people further away from God. So, the extent to which the Christian faithful shall be consumed by the currents of our age will be the extent to which the realisation of our redemption will remain elusive and vice versa.

The Church's teaching, mystagogy and catechesis should remind the Christian faithful that, having experienced redemption on their part, they are in turn expected to play an active role in the work of bringing the created world to the full experience of redemption. This role gets enjoined on them as an obligation at baptism since they are made to share in the three fold ministry of Christ, that is, priest, prophet and king. This may at times demand of the Christian person, the price of enduring some untold suffering. With John Paul II we note in this regard that human suffering within the context of the Christ Event enters a new dimension and order. Humanity's own suffering, if endured in faith and placed in perspective, can become redemptive in turn.

It becomes linked to love which creates good drawing it out by means of suffering (Cf. *Salvifici Doloris* 18, 19, 24, 25).

But this does not in any way mean reverting to that dangerous teaching of telling people to passively endure suffering and oppression since their reward is in heaven and their better days are yet to come. Pastorally, there are those preachers who do damage to their flocks by asking them to endure all their sufferings since God will reward them. They have told women who are being battered by their husbands to persevere with Christ; those whose justice is denied to forgive, telling them that Christian life is a sacrifice just like the Christ of the cross. In the event of such a teaching, people may be resigned to their situation and neglect their God given duty of being participants in the work of bringing about positive change through pro-action for themselves, others and the environment.

Catholics in many countries have largely shied away from politics because they have been taught to learn passivism and not to get involved in “dirty politics,” thereby missing out at the opportunity of bringing the values of the Gospel to the political arena as influential leaders. They have largely thought that they can only go as far as trying to pray for a better future and if things do not change, then it is the will of God. It is partly this that brings indignation to many at any use of sacrificial language referring to Christ’s death. God is portrayed as unfair, uninvolved and willing the suffering of the innocent at the hands of the mighty. In our homilies, threatening people with a God who punishes and grounded in the law must give way to forming a people who serve God and observe his ordinances out of love because of their experience of his goodness to them. It may be that as pastors at times we do not reflect enough on the Word of God to

really understand it, since scriptures are overwhelmingly presenting God fighting for the cause of the oppressed anyway!

5.3 Humanity Created as Finite but Destined For God

The Church is keen to ensure that the fundamental question underlying the actual problems of human beings in the world, the question of truth regarding what the human condition, the meaning of human existence and what from the perspective of the present itself can human beings ultimately hope for, is never lost sight of. The International Theological Commission, therefore, says that in presenting the doctrine of redemption to the world, the one aspect which is most crucial for humanity is hope. It is so because redemption is the only reality powerful enough to meet real human need and the only reality deep enough to persuade people of what is really in them.²⁵⁵

It is to be appreciated that the redemptive message of hope is grounded in Christology and the Trinity. In these, one finds the rationale for the Christian interpretation of human history, the human person made in the image of the triune God (a unity in community), and redeemed out of love by God's only Son, Jesus Christ, "for the purpose of participating in the divine life, for which we were in the first place created...indicated by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, when human beings in their total reality share in the fullness of divine life."²⁵⁶

For the International Theological Commission, this therefore points to the fact that the assessment of the human condition cannot stand by itself, but as an aspect of a

²⁵⁵ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 170.

²⁵⁶ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 170-171.

much larger vision centred on the Christian understanding of God and his relationship to humanity and the created world. The larger vision is that of a covenant by which God wills to associate human beings with his life, fulfilling in us all that is positive in us, while at the same time cleansing from us all the imperfections that there are, the frustrations and enslavements. The call to divine communion is an eternal intention which has always been God's and already started in the Old Testament, continued through to our day when God literally intervenes in human history through his mighty deeds.²⁵⁷

According to the International Theological Commission, this intervention was so completely and definitively brought about by Christ when he totally took part in the human condition in a historical form. It therefore is the case that what Christianity speaks about the human condition is based on what God himself has actually done for human beings, revealing to humanity the knowledge of what humanity truly is, as well as revealing his very self to us as a God of communion to which we are gratuitously invited. Through the covenant, the human person is raised to the level of the divine. It is in this perspective therefore, the Commission concludes, that the vision of the human person and of the human condition put forward by Christian faith acquires its whole specificity and its whole richness.²⁵⁸

In effect this means that being finite by nature, as long as we are still in this contingent world, imperfections are bound to persist. We also wish to point out that our very nature of finitude as well as the *τήλος* (goal) of this created world understood in the

²⁵⁷ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 171

²⁵⁸ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 171-172.

context of the entire divine plan implies that redemption has to be understood as a process. O'Collins concedes in this regard that it is hard to conceive as sensible, the claim that Christ conquered sin and death when the whole world is apparently still under the reign of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). To this great perplexity he suggests that what is needed to understand the redemption of Christ for humanity in this context is the understanding of Christ's mission as an establishment of the Kingdom of God (Lk 4:16-20).²⁵⁹

This Kingdom according to O'Collins can only be understood if the right balance is struck. He suggests that we need to differentiate between the fullness of redemption, which is obviously not yet here, and the liberation already achieved. He cites how realistic the New Testament is when it speaks about deliverance as a reality that is in principle already accomplished, when Christ disarms the cosmic powers and authorities (Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8). Indeed, in John 16:33 Jesus consoles his friends not to fear since he has already conquered the world. But in no way does the New Testament deny the existence of sin in the world. Its active power is well recognized (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 1 Pt 5:8-9; 2 Thes 2:3-10). In fact, Paul says that Christ must reign till his enemies are subjected under his feet, the last enemy being death (1 Cor 15:25-26).²⁶⁰

The International Theological Commission is in tune with O'Collins when it teaches that redemption is only received fragmentally in this present world. Though we have the fruits of the Spirit that enable us to walk in the newness of life through faith and baptism (Rom 6:4; 8:1-27), we are still groaning for the redemption of our mortal bodies (Rom 8:23-25). This, the Commission adds, is true even with our sins since

²⁵⁹ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 128.

²⁶⁰ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 128-129.

while we are forgiven, the marks of sin remain still with us and these include suffering, pain, and death. They are only to be overcome finally with the resurrection when we shall definitively share in the victory of the risen Christ. All we can do in the interim is to use the grace given us to combat the presence of sin and its effects in our society through working for the promotion of justice and peace, love and unity by ensuring that there is reconciliation. This can only work if we are ever more committed to the cause of breaking down the walls of division that sin had erected in our midst.

As long as one is in Christ, they are to strive to change what they can change and what cannot be bettered now, offered in union with Christ's sacrifice in love and humility for the salvation of the world, being as it were that humble acceptance of our finitude and inability to comprehend everything. These become an opportunity for us to make that humble surrender to God that his power may very well be manifested in us more evidently (22 Cor 12:9; 2 Tim 1:12; Phil 1:13; Rom 5:1-5). Then, when Christ comes back to establish his final Kingdom and present to the Father the abiding fruits of his struggle, everything will be recreated and permeated by the divine presence so that God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).²⁶¹

5.4 Humanity's Role in the Work of Redemption

a) Response of Faith

The International Theological Commission says that Christ's incarnation unites him to every human person and in turn raises humanity to the dignity of becoming children of God. To each the gift of redemption is offered, as well as the grace to enable

²⁶¹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 214.

him or her to respond to this offer ~~in the power~~ of the Holy Spirit. The grace being talked about here is the gift of the faith which for St. Paul is an imperative (Rom 4:1-25).²⁶² The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* (No. 16) is quite clear about the universal plan of salvation since it appreciates the plan of salvation to include all who acknowledge the creator, including the Muslims as well as those who through no fault of theirs have yet to hear and know of Christ. So long as moved by grace, they, in their actions strive to do God's will as they know it best as per the dictates of their consciences, the council states that eternal salvation is theirs. This means, according to the Vatican council II, which the Church has to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all people by going out there to preach the Gospel to every creature (L.G 16; G.S 22) so as to bring them to faith. But we have to stress that the most important thing really is not how much we say to the world in words, but how much we speak by our lives of witness, working for peace and justice and integrity of all God created.

A thorough reading of Paul indicates that by faith he implies that act of total surrender of one's whole self to God and accepting to die to the old self so as to acquire a new life (Rom 4:6) which sets him or her free from sin to begin a new journey of life, so new that one can declare with St. Paul that, "it is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). It is an interior freedom that consists in freeing one's conscience and invites them by the grace of Christ to respond to the promptings of the Spirit, so that truth gets imposed on the consciences of the believers, by the force of its own truth. One becomes a 'member' of Christ and a friend of God, a partner in the covenant whose hope is oriented to the eternal communion with the same God that frees

²⁶² Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 206-207.

his or her freedom. Their lives become lives of charity because of the Spirit poured in their hearts (Rom 5:5), and this issues into good works by the transformation effected in them by the same Spirit, who from then becomes the principle of their lives and action.²⁶³

b) Active Participation in the Continuing work of Redemption

Apart from giving the response of faith, O'Collins says that redemption is not simply a matter of Christians sitting back and applauding Jesus as he achieves victory for them and for the world. Instead, they must in turn, through the power of the Holy Spirit, take part in the ongoing battle against the powers of evil and become for others, subordinate agents of redemption. O'Collins cites Paul who requires of those redeemed to constantly put on their armour and keep awake with the breastplate of faith, love and the helmet of hope for salvation (1 Thes 5:6,8). Theirs is not merely a struggle against flesh and blood, it also involves a struggle against the cosmic powers of the present darkness and against the spiritual forces of evil, meaning that the weapons of truth, integrity, faith and righteousness are to be employed daily to overcome the flaming arrows of the evil one (Eph 6:11-17).²⁶⁴

This view of O'Collins makes great sense if we consider the prayer of the 'Our Father', in which we pray that the Kingdom should come (Mt 6:10). The Kingdom cannot come unless we who have experienced the fruits of the redemption Christ won for us are committed to making it happen in our day, since to us was left the responsibility of perpetuating Christ's work of liberating the men and women of our

²⁶³ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 207-208.

²⁶⁴ Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 130-131.

day, to make Christ known to the ends of the earth (Mt 28:18-20). That is the will of the Father, who sent Christ so that all may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). Christ we know, existed for others and lived and died for a cause so passionately close to him, the Kingdom of God!

It is this teaching that we draw from the reading of the Gospel on the Good Samaritan. The story belongs to the Gospel of suffering indicating the attitude that each person should have at the realisation of the plight of those who are suffering, thereby making them experience God's reign as they are led out of their desperation (Is 66:9-12). We cannot remain unmoved at the sight of those who are suffering; action is called for, not simply sympathy as St. James so tells us in chapter 2:13-20. The Gospel parable of the good Samaritan negates any possibility of viewing the redemptive dimension of suffering in terms of passivity, at the same time strongly advocating for pro-action as seen in Luke 4:18-19 and Matthew 25:34-45 (Cf. *Salvifici Doloris* 28-30).

Indeed, Sequeira stresses the fact that the proclamation of the Kingdom was central to Jesus' ministry and this proclamation was based on the Abba experience that he had. Sequeira says that Jesus was ready to set the stage for battle with the authorities and powers that were, as long as the plight of those on the margins could be addressed. He says that Jesus chose to uphold the primacy of love, a love that was universal, ever consistently standing for the rights of the poor and the outcasts. Jesus refused to conform to the values of a discriminating society, even when this meant him having to pay the ultimate price of his own life. He demonstrated himself to be counter-cultural and therefore was perceived to be a great threat to the unjust and oppressive powers that

enslaved the weakest of the society. He died a very meaningful death, since it was a death that was pro-others, a life lived out of solidarity with the poor, and the outcasts.²⁶⁵

Sequeira therefore reasons that, Jesus not only participated in our predicament, he as well gives us the strength and sustenance to struggle on against the forces of evil that bedevil humanity today. He shows us the way, leading us away from despair to hope since, by his resurrection, God vindicates Jesus and passes judgement on the evil forces that led to his crucifixion. For Sequeira, the resurrection becomes a victory of life over death, justice over injustice, goodness over evil. However, it also presents a challenge to all redeemed that they are not to close their eyes to the injustices and evils that there are in the world, but rather, get involved in the struggle of transforming the present realities and condition of oppression just like mother Teresa of Calcutta did, like Bishop Oscar Romero did, like Nelson Mandela did.²⁶⁶

The International Theological Commission reinforces Sequeira's point saying that, the risen Jesus affirms God's gracious response to self-giving love. The resurrection proclaims that the way of Jesus is the way that overcomes sin and death and leads to boundless life. It thus becomes enjoined on the Christian community of our day therefore to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God of freedom, of love, of inclusion and of forgiveness by their lives of witness grounded in an active faith. But, it is also true that the Jesus story points them to that reality that the work of bringing forth the Kingdom will cost no less than everything. The consolation however is that, that

²⁶⁵ Cf. L. SEQUEIRA, "The Cross Symbol of Struggle and Hope", 217.

²⁶⁶ Cf. L. SEQUEIRA, "The Cross Symbol of Struggle and Hope", 217.

cost is worth it, since by it, death and sin get conquered once and for all, men and women are fully set free to live and to love according to the initial plan of God.²⁶⁷

The implications of the above reality are indeed great. As we have already mentioned in passing, the prayer of the “Our Father” in which we pray that God’s Kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven calls us into action (Cf. Mt.6:10). Christians cannot expect that the Kingdom will come of its own accord. It is a reality we have to work for. It means that we first and above all have to get that deep experience of the Kingdom, and transformed by it, our fear is banished and we thus burst forth to tell of what we have seen and heard (Lk 24:15-34), and in our witness to “these things” (Lk 24:48), fearlessly confront the powers and principalities of this world, jealously work to guard the rights of one and all, defend the dignity of all human persons and the created world, so that the dream so expressed in Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 65:19-25; and Revelation 21:1) may be realised.

We can therefore see that the efforts of the Church to engage in lobbying for women, the poor, the marginalised, for just and good laws, campaigning against abortion, weapons of mass destruction, wars, death sentence, apartheid, religious intolerance and hard working conditions for the human capital as well as the oppressive political systems are perfectly justified since they aim at leading to the realization of the Reign of God here on earth. In this regard, the drive in the Church to create the ministry of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation is a reality that has been long overdue in waiting. We can now understand better the rationale behind the Holy Father, Pope

²⁶⁷ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, “Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer”, 178.

Benedict VI's proclamation as mortal sins, the sins against nature because this all leads toward the same purpose of ensuring that the Reign of God is realised.²⁶⁸

The Church was instituted for the work of mediating redemption to this world and quite rightly the Theological Commission says that though marred by sinfulness, by the action of the Spirit, Christ abides in the Church rendering her the seed and beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth. She remains that holy temple, with her individual members formed into the living stones building her up. She continually purifies herself in Christ so that she may clearly stand as that universal sacrament of salvation, the sign and instrument through which human walls of division are brought down to make way for unity. In her, liberation, reconciliation and fraternity are to be realised especially through the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. This allows the members to achieve progressive healing of their nature wounded by sin. This in turn is passed on to the other members of society by a committed action aimed at rooting out all alienating and enslaving forces that bedevil humanity. The Church as an institution as well as the individual members making up her body are meant to be contra-models and signs of hope and holiness that help to transform a world so divided by sin and suffering.²⁶⁹

The Christian community having experienced healing, must rip off the old self and put on a new man so that in her, Christ is the one reality that is most visible (Gal 2:20, 2 Cor 4:8-11, 14). As a people that celebrate the Eucharist and receive it, the Catholic faithful should become what they receive, that is, the bread to be broken daily as they spend their lives for the service of others and realizing the divine plan on earth

²⁶⁸ Cf. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article3517050.ece> 02/11/2009, 1.

²⁶⁹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 211.

(Cf. Rom 12:1), following as it were after the example of Christ in John 13. It must be the challenge of all the faithful to embrace and to work to reverse the embarrassing challenges that have taken centre stage in our time involving Christian countries and personalities. We recall with regret the 1994 Rwanda genocide, the 1996 Kanungu massacres in Uganda, the paedophilia cases that have embarrassed the Church's claim to be an authentic teacher of faith and morals, among many other evils. As Christians, we are to be the life giving forces of our society (Jn 10:10).

The International Theological Commission concludes well this section for us reminding all faithful that their redeemed lives must have an obvious historical character and an inevitable social dimension. So redeemed, the onus is on all the faithful to break down the structures of sin and division (Gal 3:28), of oppression and isolation so that they can radiate an authentic humanity manifesting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, and compassion, following after the lead of the Master Jesus Christ. Like the Church of Thessalonica then, the redeemed man and woman of our day becomes the converter of the 'Macedonias' and 'Achaias' of our time (1 Thes 1:6-7).²⁷⁰ In this regard, the missionary venture of the various religious communities should be above all based on witness, portraying to the world a people who have first of all experienced redemption and are now keen to pass this on to their brothers and sisters in the struggle. It means that as an evangelizing Church, she herself must radiate the picture of a community that loves radically, reconciles radically and prays radically after the ecclesiology of Matthew chapter 6, and she must be attentive to the signs of the time.

²⁷⁰ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer", 179.

5.5 Conclusion

What we have seen in this chapter is the fact that the negative dimensions of the human predicament are still with us, despite the affirmation that the Christ Event is the ultimate answer to the human condition. We have tried to show that the fact that the human predicament is still with us is not a negation of the liberating effect of Christ's Sacrifice on the human race and the rest of creation. It has been our concern in this chapter to make it clear that humanity's redemption from all that enslaves it and stands in its way to full happiness has to be understood as a process, a process launched by the coming of Christ, but one that will attain its completion at the end of time. In the interim however, human persons, and especially Christians, have the responsibility of participating actively in this process that is aimed at realizing the total redemption of the human person.

But we have also seen that humanity by nature is finite and so are the rest of the creatures and therefore to imagine that satisfaction and perfection would be experienced here in its fullness would be a refusal to recognise our finitude. Therefore, in humility we should recognise the fact that some sufferings endured are simply true because of the fact of our finitude and therefore all we can do is to be humble and submit to God in the face of those realities that we cannot change, for instance the fact of death, natural disasters and the inability to be totally satisfied. These are indeed revelatory of our true nature, that is, as finite beings. We are now ready to conclude our essay.

VI. GENERAL CONCLUSION

We set out at the very start of this work with the intention of trying to see if we can still make sense of the Christian claim that the sacrifice of Christ is the answer to the human predicament, despite the apparent contrary evidence that our experiences point us to. It was crucial that we clearly present the use of sacrificial language as applied to the sacrifice of Christ in terms of self-giving love and not in terms of a price that had to be paid to placate an angry God, because the latter approach would be repelled especially in the contemporary society, where the word sacrifice is greeted with indignation and resentment. This way, we managed to see how truly sacrificial the Christ Event was, and thus it was then easier for us to investigate the redemptive value that is attached to it and how that is in turn effected and appropriated to humanity and brings about humanity's release from all that enslaves and blocks our fulfilment and integrity, to set us for right relationship within ourselves, with others and with God.

We have had to show concretely how; redemption can be experienced in real life by the man and woman groaning under the negative dimensions of the human predicament in our day. It also came out clearly that we must appreciate that as human persons we have been responsible for the existence of some of the enslavements bedevilling humanity due to our misuse of freedom, greed or neglect of what we have to

do in order to ensure that all live to experience the reign of God here and now, since we are called to be Jesus' co-redeemers, using the help we ourselves have received from the Lord Jesus (Cf. 2 Cor 1:3-4). It is in this line that we have looked at the various ways in which as human persons who have experienced redemption, we can in turn actively participate in the work of realising the dream of the arrival of the reign of God.

However, since we are only finite beings, we have also noted quite fundamentally that it is almost impossible to imagine living without any imperfections in our world because this contingent world and its experiences are not finality in themselves. We have to accept that certain aspect of the human predicament like death, lack of fulfilment and that unquenched longing for wholeness are implied by our finitude! We have also seen that some of the sufferings and trials we are to encounter in this life can have a redemptive value to them and may be revelatory of our true nature, that is, finite beings oriented to some goal beyond this contingent world.

Probably we have not been able to clear and answer all the doubts that this work set out to clear, regarding the challenge the human predicament poses to Christian faith regarding humanity's total redemption. Nevertheless, if we have created some platform for further investigation and reflection about the issue both on a personal spiritual and academic level, our purpose is achieved. We conclude therefore with the strongest affirmation that, by the Christ Event, humanity was set free from all that enslaved us, for right relationships, appreciation of our true selves and destiny, as well as our role in making the world a better place to live in even as we match to our eternal redemption. The key to making sense of the predicament still with us is the "yet" and "not yet" eschatological dimensions of the reign of God (Kingdom), Christ came to establish.

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