

TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OF
EASTERN AFRICA

TITLE: SPIRITUALITY
AS A COMMON GROUND FOR
DIALOGUE IN MISSION

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Long Essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies.

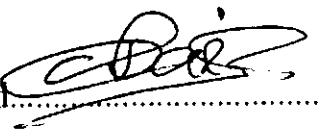
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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in an environment where most people are not Christian. There are people who belong to various Hindu spiritual traditions in its diversity and people who practice Islamic spirituality. As a student in primary school I had not given much thought to this question of differences. But as I grew up in my Christian faith this whole question of different religious traditions began to bother me. I hope that it will continue to bother me so that I may find some, if not convincing, at least satisfactory answers. It is up to each individual to find some answers or to give some kind of meaning to one's existence in one's own unique way.

Today there is a lot of attention given to the spiritual dimension of religion. At the dawn of the third millennium religious belief is intensifying worldwide. Most of humankind believes their lives have meaning and purpose. This conviction is the essential message of all religions.

When people are overcome by change, the need for spiritual belief intensifies. The thinking of the 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, which culminated in the propagation of the "God is dead" philosophy, is being repudiated by the powerful counter-trend of religious revival. Even the blind faith that was placed in science and technology is being challenged by many. They have come to the realization that science and technology do not reveal what life means. This is learned through literature, arts and **spirituality**.

In the light of present tragic experiences, people everywhere have begun to ask "how reasonable is reason", if the employment of its maximum potential for the creation of new technology does not guarantee that it can prevent the irrational use of such technology. Today's post modern nihilism, proclaims the trivialization of existence. People who have experienced the catastrophes based on human self-sufficiency are afraid of such an attitude.

As a result of several influences "spirituality" has come to be seen as a more integrated and integrative dimension of the life of faith. Today there is a greater awareness of the need for the interface of many religious traditions and cultures. There is no doubt that each is aware of one's own *separate identity* but at the same time there is a realization of the global interconnection of all. Both of these elements have led people to see spirituality as a way of life.

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has experienced a renewed interest in spirituality that covers a wide range of elements: the primacy of religious experience; biblical spirituality

renewed liturgy; recovery of its tradition's spiritual classics; interest in Eastern forms of the spiritual life; the relationship between spirituality and psychology; liberation and feminist spiritualities; mysticism and so on.

The term "spirituality" has become so popular that many things are said about it. It has undergone an astounding expansion in the last few decades. Before Vatican II it was almost exclusively Roman Catholic term. Today it has been adopted by Protestantism, Judaism, non-Christian religions, and even by secular movements like Feminism and Marxism. Though difficult to define, it is experienced as analogous in all of these movements.

The term no longer refers exclusively, or even primarily, to prayer and spiritual exercises, much less to an elite state or superior practice of Christianity. From its original reference to the "interior life" of the person, usually a cleric or religious, who was 'striving for perfection' that was beyond the scope of the 'ordinary' believer, the term has broadened to connote the whole of the life of faith and even the life of the person as a whole, including its bodily, psychological, social and political dimensions.¹

One of the important characteristics of spirituality (which is noted in this essay) is that it cannot be neatly simplified. One can understand it and foster one's own spirituality and the spirituality of others. Spirituality, despite the general confusion about its meaning, is a subject which can no longer be politely ignored by the Church which would prefer a less 'emotional' approach to faith. Today, we are increasingly aware of the thirst for spirituality and its importance in the dialogue with non-Christian religions.

Hence, in this paper, I am concerned to show how relevant this whole idea of 'spirituality' is today. I would like to make a humble effort to show how spirituality can work as a *common ground* for dialogue (which is so much spoken and written about) in the practice of our missionary mandate. In the paper I have resorted to many sources to present the available evidence on what I wish to develop. The paper will be conditioned by the culture(Indian) in which I have lived and by my limited knowledge and experience.

¹ Cf. Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy" in Bradley C. Hanson, (Ed.), *Modern Christian Spirituality*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p.18

CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUALITY IN GENERAL

The rapid evolution of our society has brought about many changes in the consciousness of people. These changes in turn, have called forth profound alterations in the spirituality of our time.

The term spirituality had emerged into wide usage by the mid- 1970's, with some broadly accepted horizons of meaning. But, one trait that has become generally accepted in the study of spirituality is its "experiential dimension." Hence, "To understand the phenomena of spirituality one has to know the spiritual quest by personal experience."²

Spirituality does not study the principles to be applied but the concrete individuals works and events. Hence one is fully involved in the interpretation one gives of oneself. That makes the discipline of spirituality a self-involving enterprise.

1.1 MEANING OF THE TERM 'SPIRITUAL'

The term 'spiritual' connotes a variety of meanings. I would like to rule out the negative meaning as anything opposed to the material and this worldly at the outset. 'Spiritual' in very general terms can be identified with that which makes life significant, in so far as the need for significance is vital to the human person.³

Every human being, though not professedly religious, much less a Christian, has a spirituality. All people believe their lives have meaning and purpose. Even the most cynical at some time in their lives, come to the conviction that their lives have significance exceeding biological survival and the pursuit of pleasure. This conviction is an essential message of all religions."A passionate search for the meaning of life necessarily signifies a

1. J.W.Conn, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), p.30

2. Thomas Punnapadam, *Justice as Spirituality*, (Bangalore: Kristu Jyothi Publications, 1991), p.231

certain religiosity."⁴

The striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence or the 'will to meaning' pertains to the "spiritual" core of a person's personality. Here "spiritual" does not have a primarily religious connotation but refers to the specifically human dimension.⁵ "We do not live by bread alone, sex alone, success alone...We require meaning. We need purpose and priorities; we must have some grasp of the big picture."⁶ Whether one becomes a non-believer, agnostic or atheist, one is concerned with how to put one's life together and with what will make life worth living.

A person's concern consists in fulfilling a meaning and in actualizing values. But the fullness of human existence cannot be found in self-actualization alone but rather in self-transcendence. Actualization is the side-effect of self transcendence.⁷

Given this understanding of spirituality, it is clear that spirituality is not limited to Christians. "To give a spiritual and profound meaning to one's life, taking life as it is and not distorting it, expanding one's personality into all human space i.e., responding to one's vocation to the full. This is the desire of a person as person when one reaches a certain level of consciousness and dignity."⁸

A person's progress is so marked, despite the evidence to the contrary, that thoughtful and right thinking people recognize that person as truly becoming more noble and this progress is attributed to a personal and undeniable nobility of soul.

1.2 AN ATTEMPT AT UNDERSTANDING 'SPIRITUALITY'

There is an opinion that claiming to have read all that is written about spirituality

3. *ibid.*

4. Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), p.102

5. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), p.4

6. See V.E. Frankl, *op.cit.*, pp.105-6

7. Albert-Marie Besnard, "Tendencies of Contemporary Spirituality" in *Concilium* (Vol.9, 1965), p.30

makes one a liar and claiming to know how to define spirituality makes one a fool. I agree with this precisely because spirituality is without boundaries. Hence a satisfactory comprehensive definition of spirituality is elusive. A marked pluralism leads one to speak of spiritualities rather than a single spirituality. "All aspects of existence, even sin, have the potential to be part of one's search for spiritual meaning."⁹

For some, spirituality deals primarily with prayer and explicit religious experience, but for others it encompasses one's entire life in all its diversity - relationships, work, love, suffering, creativity, and so on. Spirituality in general terms implies an ensemble of attitudes, outlook, mentalities, values, that motivate, move, inspire and shape the person at the most profound and authentic level. It is a basic system of values which is essential for human life. It is a person's authentic self at the deepest level. Spirituality is an activity of human life as such. In principle it is equally available to every human being who is seeking to live an authentically human life. Ewert Cousins' suggestion is that, "spirituality is a pathway toward the ultimate or divine."¹⁰ Some others like Diogenes Allen and David Trickett understand spirituality as "a pilgrimage or path."¹¹

Schneiders defines the phenomenon of spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives".¹² One can go on with as many definitions as there are authors.

The above mentioned definitions when taken together have a few noteworthy features

- They describe an attempt towards an approach whereby people transcend themselves
- The goal towards which people transcend is left open
- Spirituality is understood primarily as a person's experience
- Persons in their approach seek unity of life rather than an escape from reality.

8. Elizabeth Dreyer, "Christian Spirituality" in Richard McBrien, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (New York: Harper and Collins, 1995), p.1217

9. Rosemary Goring, *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, (New York: W & R Chambers LTD, 1992), p.499

11. *ibid.*

12. Bradley C.Hanson, "Introduction" in Bradley C.Hanson, (Ed.) *Modern Christian Spirituality*, (Atlanta : Scholars Press, 1990), p.2

1.2.1 PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING OF SPIRITUALITY: As we already noted there is no widespread agreement on the meaning of spirituality. The best we can do is to consider several proposals. One proposal concentrates on the human being as spirit in the sense of self-transcending. Joann Wolski Conn articulates this understanding of spirituality, "from the perspective of the actualization of the human capacity to be spiritual to be self-transcending."¹³ What is meant here is that spirituality encompasses all of life.

Another proposal for the meaning of spirituality focusses its attention on the inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions 'the spirit'. This spiritual core is the deepest centre of the person. It is here that the person is open to transcendent dimensions; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. In other words, the meaning of spirituality in this second proposal is really the same as "religion".

Philosophers speak of our human spirituality as our capacity for self-transcendence, a capacity demonstrated in our ability to know the truth, to relate to others lovingly, and to commit ourselves freely to persons and ideals. All agree that the spiritual core is the deepest centre of our being. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension. It is here that one is able to be open to the divine reality. It is one's self-transcending nature that allows one to point toward the supernatural.

1.2.2 SPIRITUALITY AS ONE'S GROWTH IN FAITH: Sandra Schneiders says that "Virtually everyone talking about spirituality today is talking about self-transcendence which gives integrity and meaning to the whole of life and to life in its wholeness by situating and orientating the person within the horizon of ultimacy in some ongoing and transforming way."¹⁴ This understanding further specifies the nature of self-transcendence by adding the feature of ultimacy, yet without the suggestion that the ultimate is the supernatural. Not just conventional religious people have faith, but anyone whose life has a master commitment. This faith or commitment influences all aspects of a person's life and also serves to unify a person's life by setting up priorities of one's existence. It might be clearer to say that spirituality in this sense is faith, and spirituality as a discipline would be studies on faith.

12. Bradley C.Hanson, "Spirituality as Spiritual Theology" in Bradley C.Hanson, (Ed.) op.cit., p.46

13. *Ibid.*, p.47

What Fowler says about faith can very well be said about spirituality. Speaking about faith he says,

"It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of a transcendent dimension."¹⁵

Spirituality is a holistic discipline in that its enquiry into human spiritual experience is not limited to explorations of the explicitly religious, i.e., the so called interior life. The psychological, bodily, historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual and other dimensions of the human subject of spiritual experience are integral to that experience.

1.3 SPIRITUALITY AS EXPERIENCE

1.3.1 SPIRITUALITY AND LIVED RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE:

Nature, including human experience, provides strong intimations toward ultimate mystery. The mystery is present in every finite process, at the same time it also transcends all that is finite. "Spirituality is not something that occurs in some realm that is isolated from the insights that we have into the events of our everyday life, from the judgments that we make as to the truth or falsity of the most mundane propositions, from the anxieties we feel and the decisions that we make regarding our orientation and actions as 'beings-in-the-world'."¹⁶ It is not a dimension of reality that is totally extrinsic from the events of understanding.

At the same time "Spirituality deals with spiritual experience as such, not merely with ideas about or principles governing such experience. Just as one cannot understand anxiety unless one has experienced it...it is difficult to imagine that one could understand spiritual experience without some personal participation in it."¹⁷ Spirituality is a fundamental dimension of the human being which is actualized in the lived experience.

¹⁵ James W.Fowler, *op.cit.*, p.11

¹⁶ Robert M.Doran, "Jungian Psychology and Christian Spirituality" in Robert L.Moore,(Ed.) *Carl Jung and Christian Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p.69

¹⁷ Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy" in Bradley C.Hanson, *op.cit.*, p.34

Religious experience belongs to the realm of interior experience. We have had insights, passed judgments, made decisions, had dreams. All of these happenings are items that we experience. We experience them interiorly. None of us have ever seen an insight or a feeling. At the same time none of us would claim that he/she never experienced a feeling or an insight, never judged that some proposition was true or false. All of these experiences occur not in the realm of outer sense, but in the domain of human interiority. "Sensations come in; language goes out; but between sensations and language there is..., the mysterious "little black box" of our interiority."¹⁸ Today Spirituality appears as *convergence* of all the disciplines known to man, that is, the disciplines whose subject is not what humans have said or done, but what they *have been*. But we have to be aware of one of the temptations of our time to seek a vague religious 'experience,' either in emotionalism or esotericism or syncretism.

When I speak of religious experience, I have in mind an experience which is authentic, serious and results in satisfying the whole human being. Authentic religious experiences are "principally those in which individuals claim to transcend the world in which they live."¹⁹

Today, after magnificent yet unsatisfying progress in technology, the same aspiration is felt. There is so much emphasis on esthetics, poetry, or the role of the 'heart' in human experience; there is a return to symbolism, poetry, esthetics and total experience.

1.3.2 RELIGIOUS AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES IN EVERY-DAY

LIFE: Nature, including human experience, provides strong intimations toward ultimate mystery. The mystery is present in every finite process and at the same time it also transcends all that is finite. Riane Eisler speaking of her experience writes, "I think of our whole life, from the time we're born, as a spiritual journey in search of the experience of oneness with the divine. There has been so much confusion about this journey. I thought the spiritual journey meant that you detach yourself from life, like the so-called wise men sitting on a mountain. Now I wonder, how wise can you be if you wrench yourself away from

¹⁸ Jean Leclercq, "Introduction" in E. Rozanne Elder, *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1976), p. xxxi

¹⁹ Carlos M.N. Eire as quoted in Bradley C. Hanson, (Ed.) *op.cit.*, p. 4

human connection?"²⁰ One of the most touching aspects of knowledge is the knowledge of the sacred in every day life- the understanding that what we think of as "sacred" actually is present in everything we do. We can build a society where all of life is imbued with that connectedness, with the extraordinary miracle of life, with the beauty and mystery and sometimes tragedy of nature and of ourselves as part of nature.²¹

There are exceptional experiences, which have a profoundly religious impact and significance. It is considered that God is present in these experiences and is working out his purposes of love and redemption in an especially wonderful, mysterious, and convincing way. Religious experience is historically, socially and culturally conditioned. Every religious experience occurs in an historical context. Hence to understand a religious experience it is important to know the cultural, historical context of the experience. Though it is conditioned and affected by cultural, historical and sociological factors, it is also spontaneous, creative and free.

"The religious experience is part of a search, a journey where one is not closed to new possible experiences and new truths."²² These experiences yield no new knowledge in the sense of information, and no specific divinely authorized doctrine, but a new understanding or a way of looking at, and responding to, the world and its source.²³ They increase, intensify one's sense of the mystery of things and of God.

"A religious experience involves some kind of "perception" of the *invisible* world, or involves a perception that some visible person or thing is a manifestation of the invisible world."²⁴ There is an extraordinary rich variety of religious experience to be found within religious traditions spread throughout the world. Mystical experience is a common element in different Eastern spiritual traditions. A number of people believe that from time to time during their lives they have had some sort of religious awareness. Though it is like a

²⁰ Riane Eisler, "The Long Journey Home" in Benjamin Shield and Carlson Richard, (Eds.) *For the Love of God*, (California: New World Library, 1990), p.14

²¹ *ibid.*, p.17

²² Dennis Ryan, *The religious Element in Life*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1978), p.27

²³ Harold Schilling, *The Consciousness in Science and Religion*, (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1973), p.240

²⁴ Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p.15

perception, they are not able to describe that perception, because they feel it is beyond sense perception.

Dennis Ryan distinguishes five characteristics present in a genuine religious experience:-

1) The first is the sacredness of the experience which reveals some aspect of the ultimate reality.

2) This experience is intense, profound and more meaningful than ordinary experiences.

3) The experience is never a full revelation of the sacred, which can never be fully comprehended.

4) The whole person is involved in the experience. It is a unifying, integral experience of all human elements.

5) This experience motivates the person to do something. It does not leave the person indifferent. One is very deliberate about what one should do.²⁵

Religious experience is an experience of mystery. It is not only attractive but fascinating and evokes awe. By it one is possessed. Paul Tillich named it "as being grasped by ultimate concern."²⁶ It corresponds to St. Ignatius Loyola's consolation that has no cause as expanded by Karl Rahner.²⁷

1.3.2.1 NON-INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCE: The truly mysterious comprises far more than what is sensually perceived. Much of it is hidden and hence yet to be understood. The Eastern mystics would call it a direct experience of reality which transcends not only intellectual thinking but also sensory perception. Knowledge which comes from such experience is called 'absolute knowledge' by Buddhists because it does not rely on the discriminations, abstractions, and classifications of the intellect which are always relative and approximate.

Lonergan says that religious experience is not the consciousness that accompanies the

²⁵ see Dennis Ryan, *op.cit.*, pp.20-24

²⁶ Refer D.M.Brown, "Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue" as quoted in Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p.106

²⁷ Karl Rahner takes "consolation without a cause" to mean "consolation with a content but without an object." Refer B.Lonergan, *op.cit.*

acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. It does not accompany acts of reflecting. It is the type of consciousness that deliberates, makes judgments of value, decides, acts responsibly and freely.

The Eastern mystics repeatedly insist on the fact that the ultimate reality can never be the object of reasoning or of demonstrable knowledge. It can never be adequately described by words because it lies beyond the realms of the senses and of the intellect from which our words and concepts are derived. This experience is an entirely non-intellectual experience of reality, an experience arising in a non-ordinary state of consciousness which may be called a 'meditative' or 'mystical state'. The existence of such a state has not only been testified by numerous mystics in the East and West but is also indicated by psychological research. W.James writing about such experience says, "Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different."²⁸

Religious experience is "not the product of our knowledge and choice. On the contrary, it dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on, and it sets up new horizons in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing."²⁹ Though not the product of our knowing and choosing, it is a conscious dynamic state of love, joy, peace, that manifests itself in acts of kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self control (Gal,5:22).

The Eastern mystics say that the direct mystical experience of reality is a momentous event which shakes the very foundations of one's world view. D.T.Suzuki has called it "the most startling event that could ever happen in the realm of human consciousness...upsetting every form of standardised experience."³⁰ And this experience has a number of fundamental characteristics which are independent of the mystic's geographical, historical, or cultural background. As Eastern thought has begun to interest a significant number of people and meditation is no longer viewed with ridicule or suspicion, mysticism is being taken seriously

²⁸ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York: The American Library, Inc., 1958), p.298

²⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *op.cit.*

³⁰ D.T.Suzuki, "The Essence of Buddhism" as quoted by Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, 3rd ed.(Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1991), p.7

even within the scientific community.

Ken Keyes narrating one of his experiences says,

"I began to feel an energy that I can only call divine. It took me far beyond my usual way of perceiving reality. It enabled me for a short time to transcend my habitual ego-centred concerns and ways of thinking. While my usual mental activities receded into the background I began to experience a feeling of "nonseparatedness", of having no boundaries. I felt that I was merging with my environment. I began to experience everything that came into my sight as if from within, as if it were a part of myself...This feeling of "merging" seemed to grow in intensity and to be quite real, although it was unusual and foreign to me."³¹

This kind of transcendent experience opens a level of perception beyond the ordinary. Its insights leave a permanent imprint on one's being. It gives one the experience of a spiritual energy that is more satisfying than one's ordinary ego-based perceptions. This experience brings about a feeling that one is not entirely separate from everything else in the world around him/her. This becomes one of the most treasured insights one can have.

After such experience people seem to find a 'new reality' from which to operate. They begin to understand that, one of the guidelines of this game of life is to keep their feet on the ground in the world of physical objects while keeping their heart in that transcendent dimension where all are one. "The factor of religious experience is even more crucial when we consider the events and the human lives from which the great religions have stemmed."³² With Ninian Smart, one can say that every religion is an outcome of the religious experience of a particular individual in history.

1.4 RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

1.4.1 'RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE': THE BASIS OF RELIGION:

Some form of religious experience is the basis of any faith, and all the great religious traditions begin with one.³³ Religious experiences are at the heart of all religious traditions

³¹ Ken Keyes "Finding God through Love" in Benjamin Shield and Carlson Richard, (Eds.) *op.cit.*, p.22

³² Ninian Smart, *op.cit.*, p.10

³³ see Dennis Ryan, *op.cit.*, p.28

and they are the basis of personal faith. People believe because of what they personally have experienced or they believe in the religious experiences of another because they recognize in them what is good, what is beautiful, what is ultimately true.

The most obvious aspects of religion people are aware of are the public phenomena like churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, festivals, gatherings, doctrinal and credal statements, heated arguments between people of different religious persuasion, etc. But a religiously committed person has another dimension which may be more important than the public phenomena. Many are aware of this sacred realm of personal experience for which the public aspects provide only a *context* and an *interpretation*. The historical religions, which get tangled up with politics and every other dimension of life, are the public expression of an inner experience of the sacred.

The definition given in the Chambers Dictionary of Religions and Beliefs can be of help here. It defines Spirituality as "the experiential side of religion, as opposed to outward beliefs, practices and institutions, which deals with the inner spiritual depths of a person. Spirituality has been present in all religious traditions, including Kabbalah Judaism, Sufi Islam, the Yoga traditions within Hinduism, the meditational disciplines within Buddhism, and some strands of Christianity."³⁴

If the rituals and activities of religion, no matter how vivid, are not an expression of, or response to the human experience of the sacred, then they cannot be termed religious. In the gospel of Matthew (23:27) the people who concentrate on the outer show, to the point of excluding the inner dimension are labelled as 'white washed tombs...' For a religious believer what matters is the personal experience and the inner intention. Without these there will not be a real understanding of religion.

Hence one can say that spirituality, at once deeper and more personal than religion, is the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of cumulative tradition. At the same time, one can also say that spirituality and religion are reciprocal. Each is dynamic; each grows or is renewed through its interaction with the other.

³⁴ Rosemary Goring, *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, (New York: W & R Chambers Ltd, 1992), p.499

1.4.2 *DIFFERENT RELIGIONS: DIFFERENT SPIRITUALITY!*

Some scholars have suggested that spirituality does not differ greatly between religions. Others such as Scholem, have argued that each religion has a very different spirituality. Zaelner has claimed that there are four types of spirituality within and between religions :

- loving union with a personal God;
- a sense of oneness with the absolute and the world;
- a sense of merging with the world,
- a sense of being separate from the world and becoming one with one's real self.³⁵

1.4.3 *SPIRITUALITY IN OPPOSITION TO RELIGION:* Today the relationship between spirituality and religion has become problematic. For some, it is difficult to fit spirituality into the contemporary academic study of religion. They feel that it is engendered by a religious tradition, in some cases and to some degree by its doctrines. If we consider spirituality as wisdom based on faith (religious or non religious), then wisdom no longer functions as wisdom when it is treated as a neutral object. The existential element makes spirituality a distrusted partner in departments of religious studies that stress the more distant relation.

Some self-help, or self-actualization books, set religion and spirituality in opposition to each other. Many of them include the implicit judgement that spirituality is what really matters. Tradition, participating in the life of faith and worship, and a sense of religious belonging are denigrated.

A person's spiritual life, then, becomes something that happens in opposition to any participation in formal religion. The trend is to see religion as something dealing with obligations and regulations, and spirituality as something more personal. It can be called a false dichotomy.³⁶

In the name of religion we have detoured from the "partnership core" of our spirituality so terribly often. Why? So much of our connection with divinity came through a hierarchy, its institutions and superstitions which interfered with our ability to have a personal

³⁵ Rosemary Goring, *op.cit.*

³⁶ Michael Downey, "The Spirituality of Relationship" in Tom Jordan, (Ed.) *Spirituality*, (Vol.1, No.1, July 1995), p.21

relationship with the divine.³⁷

1.5 THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

1.5.1 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND

SPIRITUALITY: Spirituality refers to both a lived experience and an academic discipline. Over the past 35 years this academic discipline has developed rapidly. Programmes and courses in spirituality are offered in many places. Many colleges, universities and seminaries offer courses in spirituality and a few even give graduate degrees in spirituality. There is the extraordinary burgeoning of publications, especially of research tools, in the field of spirituality.

Given this context, theology may not be intrinsic to spirituality as such, but it is intrinsic to Christian spirituality and therefore to the academic discipline which studies that experience. The expansion of the term spirituality to include non-Christian and even non-religious spiritual experience, entails an understanding of the discipline which is not necessarily theological. Although spirituality and theology in the strict sense are mutually related in that theology is a moment in the study of spirituality and vice versa, theology does not contain or control spirituality.

The majority of those who see spirituality as a strictly theological discipline take this position because they are convinced that good theology is rooted in religious experience, reflects upon that experience, and nourishes the religious experience of the theologian and the Church community. Schneiders says,

" I find most convincing and clarifying the position that regards spirituality as an autonomous discipline which functions in partnership and mutuality with theology. It is a relationship analogous to that between biblical studies and theology. Theology is a moment within the study of spirituality in so far as it is essential to the full interpretation of Christian spiritual experience. Spirituality is a moment integral to theology, both because it raises questions which theology must consider and because it supplies data for theological

³⁷ Riane Eisler, "The Long Journey Home" in Benjamin Shield and Carlson Richard, (Eds.), *op.cit.*, p.15

reflection."³⁸

Rahner has made this point concretely in relation to the theological study of mysticism. He insists that the empirical mystic supplies data for the theologian which is not available from the traditional sources and this data is not only useful but necessary for the theological study of the experience.

1.5.2 NEED OF SPIRITUALITY FOR THEOLOGY: Diogenes Allen argues that theology has lost its credibility for many, because there is a widespread confusion about how the mind gains access to spiritual truths. The confusion is to think that we can gain access to spiritual realities by using the same tools we use to consider scientific or ethical matters, whereas worship and prayer are among the ways we attend to spiritual realities. Many consider participation in worship and prayer as a private, optional concern as though one could do theology without them. Allen asserts that the theologian's participation in spiritual practices and reflection is essential to having one's eyes opened to spiritual realities.

1.6 SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURE

Spirituality is interactive. It requires community, language, ritual and nurture. It is shaped by initiatives from beyond us and by other people. Culture is "the total life-way and mentality of a people."³⁹ Cultures are but different answers to essentially the same human problems. Culture is merely the way a given society tries to be successful. Culture is always specific, local and particular for it is a specific set of symbols, vehicles of meaning and value, by which a people in a particular community experience and express meaning.⁴⁰ A community is rooted in its own culture. One dimension of such rootedness involves also **spirituality**. A particular culture in this sense reflects its own particular spirituality.

³⁸ Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy" in Bradley C.Hanson, *op.cit.*, p.29

³⁹ Louis J.Luzbetak, *The Church and the Cultures*, (California: William Carey Library, 1970), p.61

⁴⁰ Christopher Duraisingh, (Ed.) "Editorial" in *International Review for missions*, (Vol.85, No.337, April 1996), p.156

1.6.1 SPIRITUALITY, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, MYTHS AND RITUALS:

(1) **RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS:** In the modern period, with the development of modern psychology, inwardness of mind and soul has been pursued to new depths of conscious and unconscious life. Jung for example claimed to have found that religious symbols well up in humans from the deepest reaches of the unconscious. For him the human unconscious constitutes a major means of religious revelation.

A symbol is a uniting of two realities: material and spiritual. The first signifies or stands for the other. A sign points to an outer, objective reality ordinarily graspable by human reason.⁴¹ A symbol links us to a relatively unknown inward reality. Etymologically, symbol means a throwing together. Hence, the symbol is an empowering message that bridges conscious and unconscious life and has a creative function. They assist persons to overcome one sidedness, and incline toward a fuller reconciliation of opposites.

Great religious leaders were able to communicate to followers in gripping ways their insights, dreams and visions through symbolic activity. The direction of the symbolic way is towards an inner religiousness, a quest for inward meaning. Symbols can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal symbols include poetry, myths, images, parables etc. There are no abstractions. They are comfortable to handle, easy to understand. They involve the listener, call for participation.

Non-verbal symbols are a medium used to express a religious experience through matter, sound, light, which include paintings, sculptures, buildings, dances, music etc. These symbols in turn can provide a vicarious religious experience. Religious art seeks to express the personal faith found in a Religious tradition.⁴²

(2) **MYTHS:** Myths are effective ways of awakening the human mind to spiritual dimensions, of drawing human beings toward spiritual transformation.⁴³ Myths attempt to express a spiritual reality, the ultimately true structures of human life. They give

⁴¹ Eugene C. Bianchi, "Jungian Psychology and Religious Experience" in Robert L. Moore, *op.cit.* p.18

⁴² refer Dennis Ryan, *op.cit.*, pp.35-45

⁴³ Mircea Eliade, "Myth and Reality" p.128 as quoted in Dennis Ryan, *op.cit.*, p.39

history a deeper and richer meaning.

(3) RITUALS: Ritual is a symbolic expression of religious faith, and of religious experience. It is an essential component of any religion. It has a symbolic value for the participants in its reaffirmation of commitment for shared communal values. It may also serve to commemorate events thought to have taken place in the historical or mythical past. Ritual can be secular or religious. It is shaped by the values of communities and is a means of passing these values on to the next generation. Therefore it cannot be understood apart from a study of underlying commitments through which groups secure their identity.

Ritual is both conditioned and free, standardised as well as spontaneous. Religions contain many rituals which enable the believer to relive important moments in the history of that religion, moments in which there is an especially powerful manifestation of the sacred. The best known ritual, within Christianity, is the Eucharistic Celebration or the Communion Service at which there is the commemoration of Christ's sharing of himself in the form of bread and wine.

Through myth and ritual, religious organizations mediated the original experiences of the founding group for successive generations. Participation in an act of worship is meant to express one's response to the ultimate reality.

On the positive side, organised religion through scripture, preaching, ritual and pastoral activity have had beneficial effects; but on the negative side, religious institutions, in order to preserve and control their following, have curtailed the inward spiritual journey for many. Standardised act of worship can become so habitual by repetition that there can be no attention to the sacred at all. In formal worship the participant has to make an attempt to experience to some extent what is being symbolised. Such conscious effort can make that experience become spontaneous, a sign of his/her own experience.

1.7 GLOBALITY OF SPIRITUALITY

Cousins has made an attempt to offer a historical interpretation of global spirituality. He suggests that the spirituality of early humans was mythic, cosmic and ritualistic and that they felt at one with nature and the tribe. But in the Axial Age of the 6th B.C. there arose the possibility of an individual spirituality that was self-reflective, speculative, analytical and

separate from nature and the tribe. He suggests that we are now living in the second Axial Age, in which a new spirituality is emerging that is recovering a spiritual consciousness of nature. Whether this is the case or not, it appears that a new spirituality which integrates the material, the humane and the translucent- nature, humans and God - is beginning to emerge in the conditions of our time.⁴⁴

Given the above elaborate description, one can easily say that spirituality is a human universal. Cross cultural exploration of the psyche has led to forms of universalism in dealing with religious experience. Theologians of strongly particularistic persuasions have found this very challenging to their beliefs.⁴⁵

The understanding of spirituality continues to develop in a global context. National and political units are breaking down at an accelerated pace, demanding a reorientation of thought about and action toward people of all beliefs. Almost overwhelming are all the new voices that are part of the base of experience from which the spiritual life must be understood. Not only are there Black, Hispanic, Asian, and female Christian voices, there are also voices of Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Native Americans, and New Agers. As the awareness, knowledge and practice of one's own tradition deepens, the dialogue with other voices in a spirit of inquiry and openness continues.⁴⁶

We have to see spirituality in a global perspective. This can point to common elements in various spiritualities, and highlight differences as well. It can give a broad panorama against which to see ourselves. It is a challenge for us Christians to identify the essentials of our own spirituality for Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and other spiritualities belonging to traditional religions. Often in defining our spirituality only to ourselves, we may omit the most important elements found in other spiritual, religious traditions.

⁴⁴ See Rosemary Goring, *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ Eugene C. Bianchi, *op.cit.*, p.20

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Dreyer, "Christian Spirituality" in Richard McBrien, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (London: Harper and Collins ,1995), p.1219

CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Today it is important to see Christian spirituality in its relation to the spiritualities of all the major religious traditions. The global perspective of seeing spirituality becomes very helpful. It can point to common elements and differences as well. It may give us a broad panoramic view against which to see ourselves. If we stick to defining our own spirituality only for ourselves we might forego or omit some most important elements which would benefit our tradition.

It is clear that spirituality is no longer the glorious ornament of a privileged lineage (clerical or monastic families) who, because of ancient or recent traditions, have practiced it until now. Today it springs up among Christians who owe their spiritual appetite to the gospel and not to schools or centers of spirituality.

When we speak of Christian spirituality, one refers to a living synthesis of human and evangelical elements. These elements are so rich and varied that one can hardly foresee the result of a synthesis. So one is in a dilemma as to whether one can speak of 'one spirituality' or should speak of 'spiritualities'.

Given this context, it is challenging and also difficult to give a definition of Christian spirituality. It is easier to study its history and draw some meaning from a genre of writing or do a phenomenological analysis of the experience involved in spirituality.

2.1 PRECONCILIAR DEVELOPMENTS

Christian spirituality, before Vatican II, was usually associated with the life of the soul, the life of Christian perfection, the interior life, the life of recollection and reflection. It was the influence of scholasticism, which began in the twelfth century that led to a sharper distinction between spirit and matter. The word 'spiritual' took on a meaning more radically opposed to corporeality, hence there came the disdain for the body.

The kind of spirituality of this time was mostly associated with the life behind the

walls of a monastery. During and after the Middle Ages, many spiritual writers advocated many spiritual practices to nurture the life of perfection that was beyond the ordinary Christian life. This view has changed or is changing dramatically. The approach of the pre-Vatican II traditional ascetical-mystical theology, or spiritual theology, no longer applies and no longer works.

The ascetical theology tried to give some abstract set of principles which were meant to apply to all times. They were supposed to answer all questions in all ages. The principles it advocated stood above history and were detached from everyday human experience. As a consequence, it was largely alienated from the world of sense experience.

Today, when we talk about Christian spirituality, we have in mind a more holistic and inclusive understanding of the human person. The journey toward holiness is seen as an integral outcome of the baptismal commitment of every Christian. There is even change in the understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world and the way in which the Spirit is active in the world. "Contemporary Christian spirituality sees our ordinary daily life as an arena of the spiritual."⁴⁷ Theology, today, sees human experience as an authentic source of revelation. This has brought about a change in the way people look at Christian life. Spirituality is no more a static concept with clearly drawn out principles valid for all times and people. Spirituality is a dynamic concept that demands new approaches to Christian conduct. Such an understanding enables the personal assimilation of salvation in Christ by every person within historical, cultural and social circumstances.

2.1.1 NEW TESTAMENT ORIGINS: Several recent studies have explored the development of the term spirituality from its origin in the New Testament. The Pauline neologism "spiritual" (pneumatikos) is the adjectival form derived from the Greek word for the Holy Spirit of God (Pneuma). The adjective "spiritual" was coined by Paul to describe any reality (charisms, blessings, hymns etc) that was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly he used it in 1 Cor 2:14-15 to distinguish the "spiritual person" (pneumatikos) from the "natural person" (psychikos anthropos). Paul was not contrasting spiritual with material living with the dead, or good with evil, but the person under the influence of the Spirit of God with the merely natural human being.

⁴⁷ Michael Downey, "Spirituality of Relationship" in Tom Jordon, (Ed.) *Spirituality*, (Vol.1, No.1, July 1995), p.23

Throughout the centuries, the term "spiritual" has had intellectual, juridical, and philosophical connotations, but it has referred consistently to that aspect of human life characterised by grace, that is, by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament there grew out of the Christ-event an understanding of the "Spirit" that was new. It appears in Mark and Matthew where there is, "the fact that God himself is really present in him as nowhere else",⁴⁸ with the extensive experience of the Spirit within the community after Easter. Luke develops a new theology of the Spirit to show the supremacy of the Lord as the bestower of the Spirit (LK 4:14ff; Acts2:33).

2.2 SPIRITUALITY OF VATICAN II

Vatican II's contributions to a renewed Church began in the 1960's. Among these are the rediscovery of the Bible as belonging to the people, renewal of worship, updating religious life and responsibility for social engagement.

It was the renewal of ecclesiology during the Second Vatican Council that furnished the categories for a theological account of the Church-world relationship which could bring the supernatural and the natural planes into close connection.⁴⁹

The Council fathers were concerned to say something relevant to the present. They intended to discuss the world of today, which they could not do without a concrete reference to the present situation. They were going to speak not merely about the world, but rather with the world of today.

The major theologians of the conciliar era have made explicit the roots of their constructive work in their own faith experience and their conscious intention that their work should bear fruit in the lived faith of the Church as well as in its speculation and teaching.⁵⁰ Theologians like Mary Collins, Charles Curran, Monika Hellwig, Hans Kung, Bernard Lonergan, E.Schillebeck etc., are of the opinion that only a theology that is rooted in the spiritual commitment of the theologian and oriented toward praxis will be meaningful in the

⁴⁸ E. Schweizer as quoted by Josef Sudbrack "Spirituality" in Karl Rahner, (Ed.) *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol.6, (Herder and Herder, 1970), p.148

⁴⁹ Walter Kasper, "The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*" in *Communio*, (Vol.23, No.1, Spring 1996), p.132

⁵⁰ See Sandra M.Schneiders, *op.cit.*, p.16

Church of the future.

2.3 DEFINITION

In defining 'spirituality' one aspect that has clearly emerged from what has been said so far is its *experiential* dimension. Hence in defining Christian spirituality, my preference would be to give importance to, and single out this same 'experiential' dimension of Christian spirituality.

Christian spirituality is today above all a spirituality to be lived. It is something lived in a more personal, serious way among the people in the world. This understanding of spirituality makes sense and provokes interest. This spirituality takes as its starting point life lived in the world we know and which aspires to real personal experience.

There are as many definitions of Christian Spirituality as there are persons defining it. Some of them are simple and others a little complex but conveying somewhat the same meaning in different words.

Some would simply define Christian Spirituality by saying that it is an endeavour to live in obedience to the *gospel*. The lived response to the gospel will comprise one's whole spirituality. The whole of life then is placed at the disposal of the gospel.

Michael Downey defines Christian spirituality as "life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, being conformed to the person of Christ and being united in communion with God and with others."⁵¹

Elizabeth Dreyer defines Christian spirituality as "the daily, communal, lived expression of one's ultimate beliefs characterised by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbour, and the world through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit." There are many other definitions one could add.

According to these definitions, it can be said that Christian spirituality is a lived experience. It describes the whole of the Christian's life, which means that it is concerned with everything that constitutes Christian experience. To put it simply, Christian spirituality

⁵¹ Michael Downey, *op.cit.*, p.23

⁵² Elizabeth Dreyer, "Christian Spirituality" in Richard McBrien *op.cit.*, p.1216

is a life lived or modelled on the **experience of Christ** (an ever more intense union with God not neglecting one's horizontal involvement) through the power of the Spirit within the life of the community, the Church.

The implication being that there is a primacy of **love** in Christian spirituality: love of God and neighbour and God's love for the world. Whatever path one takes, or wherever one arrives, love cannot be absent. Nor can Christ be absent.

2.4 FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Sometimes there is the danger of referring only to those aspects of our faith which make us feel comfortable about the way we live and ignore anything that could question how authentic our Christian life is. Sometimes, some sort of numbness or 'I don't care attitude' may prevent us from seeing any alternatives to the present state of things.

Our faith as an organised religion is challenged everywhere in the contemporary world. In Asia for example the great religious traditions older than Christianity itself ask, 'What can Christian faith and its tradition offer us that we don't have'? Given the present state of affairs we seem to have no convincing answer. Some suggest that the only way out is, our deep rootedness with Christ.

For this we have to go back to the roots of our faith. John Fuellenbach says, "...there are times in history when nothing else can be done, other than go back to the original message and pursue a fresh path."⁵³ We can speak so many nice things about Christian spirituality without actually referring back to its real origin. It is here that one has to ask an important question: "What is the source of our Christian spirituality for today?"

There is no doubt that everyone would be willing to accept at the outset that Christian spirituality has its roots in the gospel. But a simple answer of that sort is not enough. One cannot simply say that whatever there is in Christian spirituality has its roots in the gospel. We should be able to distinguish between a Christian spirituality that is phoney and Christian spirituality that is true.

A phoney spirituality has no real substance behind it. It may contain pious words, or

⁵³ John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p.3

talk, or some series of religious practices. Real spirituality goes deeper than words and practices. One's attitude to the gospel has a very determining influence on one's spirituality. It is in the gospel that the words of Christ are found. Another important thing that one has to keep in mind is that the whole gospel was not spoken and written before Jesus died and ascended into heaven. Christ would continue to speak through another person- the Spirit.

Jesus gives his disciples a picture of the future, in which he would continue to enlighten and guide them through the Spirit (cf. Jn 14:26). Here we have a vital insight into the life of the Church. The Spirit is the life-thrust of the Church. The Spirit is **not** "...preserving Spirit, preventing the Church from deviating from a completed revelation. He is a Spirit at work - recalling to men's(*people's*) minds what Christ said or did, when a situation in life calls for such a remembering."⁵⁴

It is necessary therefore to become aware of this Spirit before we can correctly come to the gospel. It is the working of the Spirit that gave birth to the gospel. Gospels are part of the Spirit's leading people to the truth.

Christian spirituality has its inspiration and answers in the Gospel. But, we learn from the history of Christianity that there were times when Christianity terribly drifted away from the Gospel focus. The light we receive from the knowledge of history should enable us to avoid the danger of referring back everything found in Christian spirituality to the Gospel. We have to accept that in certain cases Christian spirituality has not taken the gospel as its real guide.

A critical look at our own history of failure and guilt will make this point clear. It is said that Christianity, despite its ethic of love and peace is often exclusive, intolerant and aggressive in its manner and activity. It is loveless and unpeaceful. The Basle assembly has convincingly voiced the self-criticism of the Christian Churches. They accept that they have not witnessed to God's caring love for all and their life style did not correspond to God's creator⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Finbarr Connolly, *God and Man in Modern Spirituality*, (Bangalore TPI, 1977), p.31
italics within brackets are mine (an opportunity to make use of the inclusive language.)

⁵⁵ For further information refer Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility* (London: SCM Press, 1991), pp.65-66

2.4.1 ECCLESIAL DIMENSION OF THE GOSPELS: Gospels were

born from the very life of the Church. The Gospels are the work of a group of people who were inspired by the Spirit of Christ. They were enriched by the various gifts to live their everyday life by the Spirit. The gospels are not just a record of authoritative teaching, nor are they just a record of what early Christians thought and remembered. They are born of the prophetic work of the Spirit in the lives of early Christians.

The early Christians met together in the Spirit, whose presence and action was very real to them. The Spirit would recall to their minds something that Jesus said or did which was relevant to their life situation. They would talk about the meaning they saw in the life situation of Jesus. These insights gradually came to be written down. The Church guided by the Spirit saw some vital elements of the good news of Jesus.

The early Church gives us the clue that as they felt the need to interpret the Christian faith afresh for their lives in their generation we should do the same for our generation. Christian spirituality is not to be fossilized for all time because "...people of each age can only grasp those aspects of the truth which are appropriate to the culture in which they live."⁵⁶

2.4.2 JESUS THE FOUNDATION OF THE GOSPEL: People are

eager to know what Jesus was like as a real person who gave a different orientation to history. Even there are times when we Christians are somehow compelled to ask some fundamental questions that touch our very roots. Who is Jesus for us? What did he bring to us? Is the message the Church preaches still the message of Christ? The list of questions can go on and on.

One fact is obvious that the person of Jesus is behind the Gospel. God is at work in the Gospel, through Christ building people into a unity of love, in the Spirit. We have the Gospels today because the early Church saw in them the revelation of the person of Christ and the event of God's salvation unfolding among them.

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Hugh Montefiore, *Credible Christianity, The Gospel in Contemporary Culture*, (New York: Mowbray, 1993), p.10

2.5 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS' SPIRITUALITY

2.5.1 'ABBA EXPERIENCE' OF JESUS: It is good to remember that the God of Jesus is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. But Jesus' uniqueness lies in bringing about a new understanding of the nature of God and his relation to humanity. In the Old Testament the utter holiness of God made him utterly separate, totally transcendent. The danger was that he became too remote. The only way one could relate to him was through awe and worship and in humble obedience.

Jesus brought God down to earth in his experience of God as Father. Jesus' own title for his God is, *Abba*. The gospel evidence points to Jesus' use of the term *Abba* in speaking of God and especially in prayer to God. It carried a connotation of tenderness. It shows his unconventional regards and intimate communion with God. Because he knew his God, he could dare call him *Abba*.⁵⁷ It is generally agreed that his *Abba* experience was unique.

Jesus is seen as the Person in whom the ultimate meaning of human life and history is revealed. Jesus was a person in the sense that he possessed a human body and human soul like every other person and he experienced himself through this human body and soul as all of us do. "But in the depth of his spirit,... he knew himself as one with that ultimate reality, which he called God, and he experienced himself in this Ground of his being, the relationship of a Son to a Father."⁵⁸

This experience of relationship, which he expressed in terms of knowing and loving the Father and being known and loved by him seems to be the unique character of Jesus' experience of God. Jesus knew himself as the Son of the Father, participating in the knowledge of God and communicating in his bliss. It was a communion of love. Jesus comes to reveal God's presence in himself. In Matthew 11:27 Jesus says, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Jesus here makes known his relationship of intimacy to God and also

⁵⁷ Wilfrid Harington, *The Jesus Story*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p.14

⁵⁸ Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1982), p.33

paves the way for all to share in that relationship as children of God.

In John the same relationship is expressed in a deeper way saying, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." In his prayer for his disciples in John 17:21 Jesus prays, "that they may all be one; even as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us..." This is the relationship of total intimacy and that he wants to share that relationship with his disciples.

By revealing his own relationship to God as his Father in the love of the Spirit, Jesus reveals the destiny of every person. Paul in Galatians (4:6) assures us that the early Christians could address their God in the same intimate fashion. Everyone is destined to discover this relationship of sonship in the depth of his/her spirit. "He knew himself as expressing the mind and will of the Father, and of accomplishing his purpose for the world. He knew himself to be 'anointed' with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that is present in the whole creation and in all humanity."⁵⁹

He knew himself as standing in a relationship of total dependence on the Father and of total surrender to him. Jesus' vision teaches us how we should look at reality. For him reality was not threatening or hostile, it was gracious and compassionate.⁶⁰

2.5.2 KINGDOM: From reading the Gospels it is obvious that the Kingdom theme is central to Jesus' deeds, words and prayers and hence a key to understanding him and his mission. The expression 'Kingdom of God' '*basileia tou theou*' is a common one in the Gospels. Sometimes it is better translated as the 'reign of God.'

The expression "reign of God" helps us to see the Kingdom as the divine redemptive presence which is active in our midst through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is something dynamic and active. It is God reconciling, renewing, healing, and liberating through Jesus Christ.⁶¹ The proclamation of the Kingdom of God was at the core of the message of Jesus. The Kingdom is so central to Jesus that it led Karl Rahner to the observation that, "Jesus

⁵⁹ Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, p.189

⁶⁰ John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p.174

⁶¹ Gideon Goosen & Margaret Tomlinson, *Jesus: Mystery and Surprise*, (Philadelphia: E.J.Dwyer, 1989), p.90

preached the Kingdom of God, not himself."⁶² In his teaching Jesus appears as the revealer (Mk 4:11-12), the initiator (Mt 11:12), the instrument (Mt 12:28), the mediator (Mk 2:18-19) and the representative (Lk 17:20-21) of the Kingdom of God. Jon Sobrino says that, "the topic of Jesus' preaching was not himself nor was it just God; it was God in his relation to the world."⁶³

Almost all exegetes and scholars are in agreement that the centre of Jesus' preaching and teaching is the Kingdom of God. The word Kingdom occurs 160 times in the scriptures, with 120 occurrences in the synoptic gospels. The word Church is used only twice: Mt 16:18 and Mt 18:17.

The symbol Kingdom of God remained an element of the early Church's proclamation. Albert Schweitzer states, "As for human kind today the realization of the Kingdom of God here on earth has become a matter of survival or extinction."⁶⁴ Paul Tillich came to the conclusion that the biblical symbol 'Kingdom of God', to be both a positive and adequate answer to the question and meaning of history, must be immanent and transcendent at the same time. Kingdom of God involves the fulfillment of life under all dimensions. God's Kingdom takes in all reality in all its dimensions or levels.

Jesus' use of the phrase Kingdom of God though it was unique was based on the religious experience of the people. The God of the Old Testament is a God who cares, loves, forgives and a compassionate God. His audience could at least sense and in some way participate in the 'new experience' Jesus offered.

The crisis of Christian identity asks for a radical inquiry into the origin of its history. We need a fresh look at the main topic of Jesus' proclamation and ministry, the Kingdom of God. Everything else has to be treated and developed from this point of Jesus' preaching. Not merely that everything else has to be judged in the light of the Kingdom.

Today the whole world is shrinking into one earthly society. This calls for a symbol that is deep enough to give meaning to humankind's most noble aspirations and hopes for this world. Tillich came to believe that the Biblical symbol 'Kingdom of God' is both a positive and adequate answer to the question and meaning of history: it must be immanent and

⁶² Karl Rahner as quoted in John Fuellenbach, *op.cit.*, p.4

⁶³ Jon Sobrino as quoted in John Fuellenbach, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Albert Schweitzer as quoted by John Fuellenbach, *ibid.*, p.5

transcendent at the same time.

2.5.3 PRIMACY OF LOVE: 'Love is the keynote of the Kingdom; the love of God for his creation, and the love for God and for all creation on the part of his children.'⁶⁵ Jesus' key for interpreting and understanding the law was 'compassion and love'. He saw love as the key factor in seeking to live in accordance with the law. In the Kingdom of God every law is replaced by the law of love. This is the good news of God's Kingdom, to which Jesus wants us to be converted and in which we are called to believe.

In an important sense Christianity is not a religion at all. It can be called a changed consciousness- change in the style of life, one's faith, change in one's understanding of God. Jesus did not have a code of beliefs and ritualistic practices. What captured the pagan world in the early years of Christianity was the way early Christians loved one another, including their enemies and their God, a God who loved humanity, who ruled by love and self-sacrifice. The new fraternal relationship, we all have with one another, is the result of Jesus' revelation that God is Father of us all.

"Kingdom of God morality requires that love become our inspiration not only to keep the commandments and do good works, but also to determine our priorities."⁶⁶ Love of God and neighbour is not something a disciple can do on his/her own; it is a response to God's prior action. It is God's love, God's compassion and forgiveness, that in turn enables us to love and forgive. Only the experience of being loved to the utmost bears fruit in a love of neighbour which itself endures through all disillusionment and setbacks. This love expresses itself in two characteristic ways: forgiveness and service.

Jesus' proclamation of God as unconditional love was always upsetting. It upset all standards. The real message of Jesus' Kingdom consists in his image of God that God loves every human being with unconditional love. Matthew 5:45 says, "...you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." This reveals the core of the new law of the New Testament.

Jesus in the Christian community came to be regarded as the supreme revelation of God as love. Nothing more true or meaningful can be said or known about God than to accept

⁶⁵ Hugh Montefiore, *op.cit.*, pp.150-1

⁶⁶ Robert Knopp, *Finding Jesus in the Gospels*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1989), p.122

that he is love, which is made explicit in the life of Jesus. Therefore St. Paul could say confidently that 'love is the greatest of all realities of life' (I Cor 13:13)

Love is the most basic of all principles for the operation of any society, for spreading the gospel message, provided it is rooted in God. To love everyone, especially the unlovely and seemingly unlovable, looks unrealistic. To accept this unrealistic way calls for a change of heart, mind and being.

2.6 MISSIONARY DIMENSION OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The idea of discipleship includes mission and service. In the Gospels it is clear that disciples are co-workers of Jesus. Luke 9 gives an account of the disciples' first mission, and it enumerates the conditions of following Jesus. There is also a warning against feelings of self-importance. Mission is not an action of ours. It is an action of God who is at work in all creation and in the hearts and minds of all human beings, whether they acknowledge him or not. Before our role in mission this action of God comes first.

2.6.1 CHANGE OF HEART: Closely associated with the proclamation of the Kingdom was the call to enter it and let its power come into one's life. The whole idea of the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed calls for a response. This call for a response is expressed with the words repent and believe. Jesus gave concrete directions for the new life he was calling people to embrace.

Jesus' aim was to make people aware of the presence of God as an urgent reality and to invite their appropriate response. He challenged people to rethink their ideas and hopes, only to be branded a heretic. He censured his contemporaries for casting aside God's warnings. Jesus did not come preaching a "new religion"; he came to renew Israel. His call was for metanoia, a radical change of heart. He had come to summon Israel to become what God had wanted his people to be.⁶⁷

In both the Old and the New Testament the word heart has a more complete meaning

⁶⁷ Wilfrid Harington, *The Jesus Story*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp.12-13

than in our modern usage. We tend to confine its figurative meaning to 'feelings.' In biblical language heart is the whole man or woman inspired by a new vision of faith, set aflame with new love. It is that evaluating centre of a person which engages the whole mentality, the whole emotions and which drives the will.

Today sin must be judged in the light of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Sin means that we refuse to let the power of the Kingdom determine the direction of our lives. In this context 'conversion means a change of our life, attitudes, and behaviour toward God and fellow human beings. Conversion means to turn to 'someone'. It means to accept Jesus as the centre of our whole life. It is a personal commitment to Jesus, an open declaration for him.'⁶⁸

Jesus had around him a very intimate group of disciples as well as a wider circle. Their expectations of Jesus were to be refined continually. They understood what the Kingdom was all about only after the Resurrection. In the Gospels the Master calls the disciples, and this call entails a rupture, to give up everything. The disciples in the New Testament 'left everything.' The model is thus one of "metanoia", becoming like a child, which is necessary for entering the Kingdom. The call requires total commitment, the burning of one's boats for the Kingdom.⁶⁹

Jesus challenges his hearers to examine their true priorities. What should we really love? What should be our fundamental option? What should we spend our lives for - something that will not last or something that will not rot or die? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes beyond merely forbidding certain actions to present the positive attitudes that he requires of his followers, attitudes that reverse the world's values.

Christian spirituality is a matter of continual conversion, until there is reached a stage where one's understanding, one's judgements of fact and of value, one's desires and one's choices, while not ceasing to be one's own, are a participation in the understanding, the judgements, the desires, the choices of God in Jesus Christ, who is working in oneself and in one's community.

The Joint document issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation* number 11,

⁶⁸ John Fuellenbach, *op.cit.*, p.186

⁶⁹ See Gideon Goosen and Margaret Tomlinson, *Jesus: Mystery and Surprise*, (Philadelphia: E.J.Dwyer, 1989), pp.94-95

says that the idea of 'conversion' includes always a general movement towards God. It is a humble return of the heart to God and the submission of one's life more generously to him.

This real conversion is possible only if one can imagine a God who is love, which is seen actualised in the lives of those belonging to the Kingdom.

One can also speak of Christian spirituality as the transformation of our interiority, of our basic core. Through this transformation one becomes God-centered and Christ-centered in one's apprehension of values and relationships with other persons. It is a faith-generating experience. One begins to relate differently to life and the world. The Gospel brings about conversion. It brings about a new life. A Christian having accepted the gospel conquers all oppressive forces within and without and rises to a new life in Christ. New life means a change in the value system, a new world view which is brought about by the change of heart of individual Christians.

Faith in the Kingdom becomes a kind of resistance movement against fatalism. The world does not have to stay as it is. Our lives and the circumstances in which we live can be changed. Our task is to patiently dismantle the destructive structures and direct our steps toward the coming Kingdom.⁷⁰

In this context of the Kingdom to convert means, to let in the unheard message of the Kingdom into one's life, to let oneself be overtaken by this great news.

2.6.2 CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOM: The Church which exists only for itself and its own enlargement is a witness against the gospel. It exists not for itself but as a sign and agent of the Kingdom of God.⁷¹ We are familiar with Loisy's great conviction and obvious disappointment, 'Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God and what came was the Church.' Although there is a close association between the Church and the Kingdom, Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom(Matthew 16:18) - one cannot simply identify them. The Kingdom is more than the Church. The Church is directed towards and belongs to the Kingdom. It is a herald and an anticipatory sign of the Kingdom. "The Church has a single intention: that God's Kingdom may come."⁷²

⁷⁰ John Fuellenbach, *op.cit.*, p.185

⁷¹ See Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1989), p.137

⁷² *Lumen Gentium*, 45

The Church's mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God established on earth in Jesus Christ, through his life, death and resurrection, as God's decisive and universal offer of salvation to the world. Hence "there is no true Evangelization if the name, the teaching and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed."⁷³ Snyder sees the Kingdom as a 'counter-system,' that is a way of conceiving and organizing society that is counter to its dominant form at present. The Kingdom consciously seeks to replace societies dominant values and structures.⁷⁴ The Church's mission is to be counter-culture in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Fidelity to Christ is the most important sign of the Kingdom now.

The Church is not the Kingdom now, because the Kingdom makes itself present outside the Church as well. Her mission is to serve the Kingdom and not to take its place. The Church is a Kingdom colony, a people of God on earth called and empowered by the Spirit to show forth the reality of the kingdom now in assurance that the Kingdom will eventually come in fullness and that their faithful service contributes to that final fullness of God's reign.

Hence the Church is at the service of the kingdom and witnesses to it. All the apostles were 'witnesses' of the life, death and resurrection of Christ(Acts 2:32, 3:15). Witness is given by words and deeds which are not to be set one against the other. The deed validates the word. At the same time the witness both in words and deeds are subordinate to the Holy Spirit. It is the power of the Spirit that enables one to witness to the person of Jesus.

At the same time, "One may not separate the Kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united with both."⁷⁵ Although the Kingdom cannot be identified with the Church it does not mean that the Kingdom is not present in the Church. *Lumen Gentium* puts it clearly, "She becomes on earth the initial budding forth of the Kingdom."⁷⁶

⁷³ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22

⁷⁴ Snyder as quoted by John Fuellenbach, *op.cit.*, p.256

⁷⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 18

⁷⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 5

In Redemptoris Missio (number 20), the threefold mission of the Church is clearly stated, namely:

(1) To proclaim in word and sacrament that the Kingdom of Christ has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

(2) The Church is to offer its own life as a witness that the Kingdom is present and operative in the world today.

(3) The Church is to challenge the society as a whole to transform itself based on the values of the Gospel.

The Church in the beginning was the community of those, who experienced the new birth 'in the Spirit', and whose lives were transformed by that experience on the day of Pentecost. The effect of this was seen in the fact that they were 'all of one heart and mind.'(Acts 4:32) and that they sold all that they possessed and 'had everything in common.'(Acts 3:21) The new life in the Spirit thus penetrated the economic and social order of the day and brought a power to transform human society.

Jesus was not concerned with the 'history' of the Church as an institution. The historical development of the Church is secondary to the great reality of the experience of the Spirit in the new life of the Resurrection.

Christian spirituality is concerned not merely with the techniques of prayer. It is a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit. This relationship is lived out not in isolation, but within the context of the community of believers which owes its commitment to Christ. The individuals as a community, strive to approximate more closely to the person of Jesus so that the Kingdom of God that he preached may be more clearly manifested in the life of that community.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERPLAY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY WITH OTHER SPIRITUALITIES

I would like to begin this chapter with the words by Krister Stendahl, "For by now most reflections on religious pluralism, including attempts at a Christian theology of religions presuppose a world of religious vitality and intensified spirituality."⁷⁷

A lot of work has been done, in an attempt to formulate a World spirituality which is global in its scope. It is an attempt to include all the major religious traditions of the world in its definition of the term 'spirituality'. It is not my intention to give that definition and prove its validity but to establish that such an attempt is being undertaken and is making an impact. It is a challenge for us Christians to identify the essentials of our own spirituality to Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and the followers of traditional religions. "It is not enough to be an outside observer who tries to present the situation as factually as possible; he has to become an inside participant with a part of his being."⁷⁸

One of the great and exciting facts of the history of Christianity in our time is that the Church has truly become global. It is undergoing a rapid 'de-Europeanization' to use the expression of Harvey Cox. The gospel is lived and witnessed to in more diverse languages and cultures than ever before. Some consider and appreciate this diversity of expressions as a 'rich blessing' upon the Church. Diversity should become no more a problem but a gift. We need each other especially when we are different from one another. Saint Paul (1 Cor 12) expresses this differentiation which is critical for the proper functioning of the human body

We are aware of the fact that the very nature of the gospel is universal. But it is not

⁷⁷ Krister Stendahl, in his foreword to Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, (New York: Columbia University, 1963), p.viii

⁷⁸ Paul Tillich, *op.cit.*, p.2

available to us apart from its embodiment in particular cultures. The story of Christ becomes the gospel only as it is enfolded in a particular culture. At the same time it cannot be identified with any of its particular expressions. It transcends its every particular expression.

But this has not always been the case. Aylward Shorter says, "For nearly sixteen centuries, from late Roman times until our own, a monocultural view of the world held sway among bishops, theologians and thinkers of the Catholic Church...When classical Greco-Roman philosophy came to be applied to the truths of revelation during the high Middle Ages, the immutability of the Christian cultural ideal was sealed."⁷⁹

Therefore at one time missionaries in foreign cultures were surprised by the new lifestyles they found and thought that they were of no value at all. The religiousness they found was so different that they branded it as inauthentic and sometimes as evil. The same attitude is still seen in a majority of our Christian believers. They don't seem to find anything of value. They are of the opinion that they don't find any spirituality in our present world when in actuality this is not the case.

"Too long the Gospel has been wrapped in European prejudices and unwittingly carried Western assumptions...Jesus had to squeeze in on the side, trying desperately to shed his colonial dress in favor of a reconciling, universal message...We have used Jesus for our own purposes for so long that we are not sure we want to return to him his sovereignty, his lordship over church and history."⁸⁰

In many situations the Church seems to be a stranger to its milieu and has little relevance to those who are outside. The young among us find the Church and its activities of little meaning and importance.

The 'other' is frightening and suspect. The ethnically and racially other is not welcome. The other cultures are fascinating as long as they do not enter our well fabricated structures. How do we break open such sealed tradition and become signs of a human community, which includes 'all' according to God's purpose?

The gospel story can never be the good news unless it is contextual, namely that it speaks to particular people in their particular language, 'connects with their symbols,

⁷⁹ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), p.18

⁸⁰ Joseph G. Donders, *The Global Believer*, (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1986), pp.v-vi

addresses their needs and awakens their creative energies.⁸¹

3.1 THE PRESENCE OF MANY SPIRITUALITIES

The post modern age is characterised as the age of pluralism. A persistent effect of it has been the ascendance of dialogue at various levels. Many call this encounter through dialogue as 'dialogue among colleagues'.

It is no longer possible for one religion to live in isolation from other religions. People of different religions or no religion are meeting with one another. They are compelled to face their differences. The necessity for contact is being realized more and more. It is not a compromise with error but a process of enrichment.⁸²

Each religion has to hold the fundamental truth in its own tradition and at the same time allow that tradition to grow, as it is exposed to other aspects of the truth.⁸³ There are no longer agreed-upon absolutes that apply to all peoples. In the post Modern Age we have not only plurality of cultures but plurality of spiritualities. Hence, it is commonly understood that there is not just one spirituality, but a great diversity. Each tries to understand the other in its own way. It is important for us Catholics to recognize that Catholic spirituality, with its diversity, is one among many. There are Protestant spiritualities, Jewish spiritualities, Islamic spiritualities, Hindu spiritualities, and spiritualities expressed in different traditional religions.

God is revealing himself at all times to all in all circumstances. There is no limit to the grace of God revealed in Christ. Christ died for all from the beginning to the end of time, to bring all to that state of communion with God, for which they were created.⁸⁴

Today there is not only concern about unity among the various Christian Churches and communities but also unity among all world religions. Vatican II has a declaration on the

⁸¹ see Christopher Duraisingh, (Ed.) in his editorial in *International Review of Missions*, (Vol.85, No.337, April 1996), p.163

⁸² Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1982), p.24

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.25

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.38

relation of the Church to non-Christian religions. The Catholic Church has established the Secretariat for Non-Christians for promoting dialogue. Today this whole idea of dialogue is being looked at with some kind of suspicion. The Non-Christians are suspicious of the invitation of the Christians to interreligious dialogue because they see in it a covert attempt to manipulate them after having failed to convert them through direct methods.

Hence today some tend to see that not only non-Christians may be saved but also that their religions are ways of salvation. They insist that Christ remains normative for all non-Christian religions and include them either by being present in them anonymously (Rahner) or by fulfilling them. In the context of interreligious dialogue Monika K. Hellwig argues that the ordinary way of salvation offered by God to all human beings is through their own respective, religious traditions and that conversion to Christianity is an extraordinary way desired by God for some people in order to perpetuate the witness of Jesus in the world.⁸⁵

Others who call themselves pluralists go a step further to argue on the basis of contemporary historical consciousness, that the claim of Christ's uniqueness, absoluteness and superiority should be abandoned.⁸⁶

Whatever the case, there is no escape from the fact that interreligious dialogue is an urgent need and a difficult enterprise. It is a matter of necessity. In a world which has so many problems such as mass-poverty, the destruction of ecology, religious fanaticism, war and ethnic hatred, interreligious dialogue has a lot to contribute to their solution.

3.2 INTERPLAY (DIALOGUE) BETWEEN SPIRITUALITIES

How do we Christians perceive the spiritual values of those, other religions, who collectively make up the majority of humankind? What can we learn from the values and practices of other religions? Is interfaith encounter and dialogue restricted to the level of mutual respect and humanitarian co-operation, or can it seek also some spiritual unity between

⁸⁵ see Monika K. Hellwig, "The Wider Ecumenism" in Peter Phan *Christianity and Wider Ecumenism*, (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1990)

⁸⁶ For more clarification read Peter Phan, *Christianity and Wider Ecumenism*, (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1990)

believers transcending the boundaries of our own religions?

In a rapidly shrinking world where the importance of cross-denominational and interreligious dialogue is rapidly increasing, it is not only in the area of theology that dialogue is possible but also in the area of spirituality. Wolski says that "there will be certain features that characterise the study or the discipline of spirituality today. One among them would be its commitment to an ecumenical and cross-cultural approach precisely because the context within which spiritual experience is studied is anthropologically inclusive. Part of understanding any phenomenon is seeing how it fits into the larger picture of the human quest for meaning and integration of which the Christian quest is only one actualization."⁸⁷

From now on, Christian spirituality cannot be true to its own identity unless it understands itself in relation to the other spiritual traditions of the world. "Even the study of Christian spirituality as such does not proceed on the assumption that Christianity exhausts or includes the whole of religious reality or that only Christian data is relevant for an understanding of Christian spiritual experience. A study of Christian mysticism, for example, must be carried on within and in terms of the ongoing cross-cultural and interreligious discussion of mysticism, religious and nonreligious, as a human experience."⁸⁸

Today dialogue has to be seen as producing mutual transformation. Dialogue is an unconditional good for Christians. It is a vocation of the whole people of God. "It does not obliterate differences, nor does it aim to harmonize, it seeks to orchestrate differences into the harmony of the whole. One may not forsake old convictions but it can make one to live a more enlivened way in the world."⁸⁹ People come to be partners in dialogue with their own founded faith convictions and spirituality.

Dialogue is not a polite chat or a scholarly discussion on comparative religion. It involves the human, social and the ultimate dimensions of our lives. The dialogue should be one that deepens and transforms the lives of all those involved. Dialogue is a way to mutual friendship for the sake of a global community with a desire to end mutual antagonism. In dialogue there is always the give and take process where we come to recognize each other

⁸⁷ Joann Wolski Conn, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), p.30

⁸⁸ Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy" in Bradley C.Hanson, *op.cit.*, p.32-33

⁸⁹ See Darrol Bryant, "Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue" in Peter Phan, (Ed.) *Op.cit.*, p.8

as fellow pilgrims. We all are seeking to move more deeply into the transcendent.

Christian faith is always in the process of finding adequate ways to articulate its faith in Christ and the whole history of Christianity testifies to this ongoing process. The dialogue of Christian spirituality with other spiritualities should take the example of Jesus who was open to all people of his time with his commitment of love. The episode of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:22-28 shows how Jesus was taught by the so called pagan woman's faith and humility to go beyond his original commitment to the house of Israel and open up to the Gentiles. Can we take this as Jesus' encounter with another spirituality and dialogue with it?

It is dangerous and futile to identify faith with its doctrinal expressions at any one stage of its development, or to engage in a perpetual return to a past taken to be definitive for all time. Truth is a living entity, and to be "true to it" means to live and grow with it.⁹⁰ One cannot arrest the growth of truth and its creative pressure towards change.

Phenomenologists who favour an unbiased investigation of reality tell us to take people's inner intentions seriously, which means that we have to enter our own and others' personal worlds. This in turn will require the ability to appreciate what the world looks and feels like to other people, whose experience of life is not the same as our own.

This entering into the world of other people, whose spirituality is not similar to ours, is often difficult and even painful. It might challenge us to admit that our own perspective is one among many which implies that we need to be sensitively aware of our own subjective experience if we are to appreciate the experiences of others.

It is probably true that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful development frequently takes place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different cultural environments or different religious traditions; hence if they actually meet, that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow.⁹¹

Every genuine religion bears witness to some aspect of the divine mystery, embodied

⁹⁰ Harold Schilling, *The New Consciousness in Science and Religion*, (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1973), p.220

⁹¹ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1991), p.7

in its myths and rituals, its customs and traditions, its prayer and mystical experience, and each has something to give to the Universal Church. The narrow-mindedness which divided the Christian Churches from one another, has also divided the Christian religion from other religions. Each religion must learn to discern its essential truth and reject its cultural and historical limitations.⁹²

3.3 INCULTURATION OR INSPIRITUALITIZATION ?

Given the above description, we are very much aware of all the scholarly efforts that have gone on in the process of "inculturation," ("Accommodation," "Adaptation," etc) which means letting the gospel become enfleshed in the very depth of the life of a people in a manner that a local Church is born and continues to live. It is not a surplus which is added. It is the way of bringing to birth the Church as the seed of the gospel in the lives of the people who are rooted in their culture. Though the terms like 'accommodation', 'adaptation', 'inculturation', and the rest are much talked about in missionary circles, they are less understood or put into effect on the ground.

At the same time, side by side, there is a cry to free the Church from its captivity to cultural expressions that are against the spirit of the gospel. People can be so caught up with their self-image within a culture that they are unable to read and understand the biblical message correctly. Every culture has some traits in it to facilitate the suppression of everything that might threaten it.⁹³

Walter Brueggemann observes that a " dominant culture, now and in every time, is grossly uncritical, cannot tolerate serious and fundamental criticism, and will go to great lengths to stop it."⁹⁴

⁹² Bede Griffiths, *op.cit.*, p.200

⁹³ See John Fuellenbach, *op.cit.*, p.1

⁹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, (London: SCM Press, 1992), p.14

3.3.1 INSPIRITUALITIZATION: When Christian spirituality with its world view enters into interaction with the world view of other spiritualities the message of Christ truly becomes part of their own culture. The whole process of the Church to make the spirituality of Christ, as found in the gospel, relevant to the people of different spiritualities I would like to call "*INSPIRITUALITIZATION*".

Inspiritalitization is much deeper and challenging than simple inculturation. It is not simple borrowing from another culture. Inspiritalitization is an internal process. When the need arises it just happens. The Gospel will not be accepted unless the non-Christian feels that it is related in a vital way to his/her everyday life. It can be called an authentic and deeper inculturation. Any form of cultural adaptation that does not touch the core of that culture, namely its spirituality, is a superficial inculturation.

Inspiritalitization is a way to make all 'feel at home' with the values of the Christian message which become the values of that particular spirituality to which Christ is witnessed. "The starting point in instructing non-Christians is the non-Christian set of premises, values, and goals; from these existing assumptions, emotionally charged attitudes, and driving forces the missionary leads the non-Christian to new conclusions, new premises, new attitudes, and new motivations, and from there he progresses farther and farther, but always from the already felt to the still unfelt."⁹⁵

3.3.2 INTERPLAY: Kosuke Koyama sees, "Interplay as essential to religious plurality."⁹⁶ He continues to say that there is no 'chemically pure spirituality' which is Christian. All spirituality is formed within the context of the historical interplay of cultural and religious situations through a long process of encounter, accommodation and even rejection. A spirituality, with its encounter with another spirituality, becomes **enriched** and is **developed**. Hence interplay has become fundamental to the life of spirituality.

No attentive observer of the contemporary cultural scene can fail to recognise the breath and power of the "spirituality phenomenon" in practically every part of the world. There is a call for a real return to a wholistic and very honest faith, a faith that refuses to

⁹⁵ Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, (California: William Carey Library, 1970), p.65

⁹⁶ Kosuke Koyama, "Interplay with Other Religions" in Cheslyn Jones et al., (Eds.) *The Study of Spirituality*, (London: SPCK, 1986), p.555

hide behind religious jargon, a faith that begins by trusting, pondering, and sharing our simple and universal human experiences.

It is dangerous and futile to identify faith with its doctrinal expression at any one stage of its development, or to engage in a perpetual return to a past taken to be definitive for all time. Truth is a living entity, and to be "true to it" means to live and grow with it.⁹⁷ One cannot arrest the growth of truth and its creative pressure toward change.

Capra beautifully tries to show how the ways of the modern physicist and the Eastern mystic, which seem at first glance totally unrelated, have, in fact, much in common. Later on, speaking about their mutual influence, he says that both are complementary manifestations of the human mind. We need both. He is of the opinion that what we need is not a synthesis but a dynamic interplay between mystical intuition and scientific analysis.⁹⁸

I feel in our missionary task of Christian spirituality in its encounter with other spiritualities the same can hold good. Harold Schilling is of the opinion that Christianity has often seemed to imply that, because of "the historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ," Christianity can claim conceptual or doctrinal certainty and finality concerning the divine. But he says that this revelation has actually added to the Christian sense of the mystery of God.⁹⁹

Gabriel Moran says, "The closer God drew, the less conceptualizable he became... God did not become obvious and comprehensible in Christ. He became more confusing or at least more paradoxical; that is, we are driven to re-examine our most basic presuppositions of what God should be like."¹⁰⁰

One has to realize that no conceptual formulation, theological or scientific, can possibly present reality completely or adequately, when we speak of ultimate mystery. Our stand should be one of humility and of confident expectancy, looking forward, to change in belief and in our theological thought as the world changes and new reality emerges.

3.3.3 DIALOGUE AND WITNESS: God's world in the making is marked by great variety and vitality. A persistent effect of post modern pluralism has been

97 Harold Schilling, *op.cit.*, p.220

98 For a better understanding refer Fritjof Capra, *op.cit.*, pp.306-307

99 Harold Schilling, *op.cit.*, p.240

100 Gabriel Moran as quoted in Harold Schilling, *ibid.*

the ascendance of intercultural dialogue. It is only by taking the culture seriously that the presence of God can be fully perceived. If God is revealed through the religious experiences expressed in different cultures, then dialogue among these cultures is a necessity. Dialogue recognises the right to be different. It means accepting the validity of another's religious experience, even when that experience is different from one's own. It requires the willingness and ability to communicate honestly one's own religious experience to the other. It is an effort to be open to one another, to listen to one another, to share in one another's life.

Dialogue is not to convert people from one religion to another. Neither is it to find similarities and give them a Christian colouring but to **enrich each other**. Our role as Christians is to preach the gospel we believe through **witnessing** to it. **We dialogue from what we experience** and not from abstract formulas and theological speculations high up in the air.

Today in any particular local community, Christians and people of other faiths are held together by cultural values that they hold in common. Those who share the same cultural symbol system may belong to different religious traditions as in many parts of Asia. Increasingly many people live in families in which immediate relatives belong to different faiths. Hence many see the urgent need for the building up of creative and responsible relationship with people who belong to different religious traditions and hence different spiritualities.

Kosuke Koyama argues in a convincing manner that the gospel is essentially 'stranger-centered'. An inclusive love for the 'other', culturally and otherwise, is at the very heart of the biblical faith and it is the defining characteristic of the early Church's understanding of the person and work of Christ.

Christian faith is **communitarian** at its core. One of the essential dimensions of Christian faith is to affirm that God is community, hence relational. The Church can hardly meet creatively the pluralism outside of its life, or can it hardly be a sign of a God-intended unity of human community across the cultural divides, if it cannot come to terms with plurality within its own borders. How can we Christians testify to the fact that God is inclusive and reconciling and that his purpose is to unite all things in Christ? (Eph 1:9) What can be the nature of a community that Christians seek with their neighbours of other faiths?

One of the three possibilities which Stanley Samartha suggests is that of seeking

together a "community of communities," which does not eliminate different identities but holds them together within the living structures of a differentiated unity."¹⁰¹ This approach affirms the distinct identities of other religious traditions and works towards a mutually enriching community through a culture of dialogue. It is a culture of dialogue where our giving of an unequivocal witness to God's love in Jesus Christ is called for. "We recognise that both witness and dialogue presuppose two-way relationships. We affirm that witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but extends it."¹⁰²

Gaudium et Spes presents a Church that is open to dialogue with all cultures and all social systems because she is confident that the truth revealed to the person in Christ has the necessary power to enable every human being to discover his deepest vocation to the freedom that comes from self-giving in love.¹⁰³ Our unequivocal witness to the decisive manifestation of God's love in Jesus Christ will be effective and credible only within such a dialogical relationship.

Werner Heisenberg said, "It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different cultural environments or different religious traditions: hence if they actually meet that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow."¹⁰⁴

The Dalai Lama is of the opinion, "We must openly accept all ideologies and systems as a means of solving humanity's problems. One country, one nation, one ideology, one system is not sufficient. It is helpful to have a variety of different approaches on the basis of a deep feeling of the basic *sameness* of humanity. We can then make a joint effort to solve the problems of the whole of mankind."¹⁰⁵ He continues to say that the purpose of religion

¹⁰¹ Stanley Samartha, "Christian Community in a Pluralistic Society" in *Laity, Focus and News*, (Vol.1, No.17, November 1995), p.6

¹⁰² *San Antonio Report*, (Geneva: WCC, 1990), p.32

¹⁰³ refer *Gaudium et Spes* 41

¹⁰⁴ Werner Heisenberg as quoted in Fritjof Capra, *op.cit.*, p.7

¹⁰⁵ Dalai Lama, "Love, Compassion and Tolerance" in Benjamin Shield and Carlson Richard, (Eds.) *For the Love of God*, (California: New World Library, 1990), p.4

is not to argue which one is best. Over the past centuries, each great teaching has served humanity, so it is much better to make friends, understand each other, and make an effort to serve *humanity* than to criticize or argue. Buddha, Jesus Christ, and all other great teachers created their ideas and teachings with sincere motivation, love, and kindness toward humanity, and they shared it for the benefit of humanity.

This is clearly visible in the decision of the Council Fathers to start the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* by addressing the anthropological crisis which furnished a **common ground** for dialogue among members of the Church as well as with Christians of other confessions and non-Christians. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the principle theme, "Ecclesia ad extra," remained the determining factor in the final version. Anthropology is the Archimedian point of the Pastoral constitution, the basis for a dialogue with the world of today.

If I can quote again Dalai Lama, he says, " I do not think those great teachers created differences to make trouble. Our human mind always likes different approaches. There is a richness in the fact that there are so many different presentations of the way."¹⁰⁶ These ways of perceiving reality need not be in competition with each other.

3.3.3.1 COMMON DENOMINATOR: The fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993 in Santiago de Compostella said, "As we strip ourselves of false securities, finding in God our true and only identity, daring to be open and vulnerable to one another, we will begin to live as pilgrims on a journey, discovering the God of surprises, who leads us into roads which we have not travelled, and we will find in one another true companions on the way."¹⁰⁷

The Church is aware of the obstacles to her mission of fostering unity and love among human beings and nations. Hence, she gives primary consideration in this matter to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them.¹⁰⁸ Vatican II rightly emphasised that all people comprise a single community and have a single origin, since God made one race of people to dwell over the entire face of the earth. They also have

¹⁰⁶ Dalai Lama, *op.cit.*, pp.4-5

¹⁰⁷ Thomas F. Best & Gunther Gassmann, *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), p.234

¹⁰⁸ Nona R. Bolin & Gene G. James, (Eds.) *Dialogue and Alliance*, (Vol.3, No.1(-4), 1989), p.70ff

a single final goal : God. Speaking about it St. Paul says, "For God will reward every person according to what he has done. Some people keep on doing good, and seek glory, honor and immortal life; to them God will give immortal life." (Rom 2:6-7)

Although some use the name God, others the Great Spirit or higher power, and others the Dharma, readers can clearly understand that underlying almost all of the multitude of spiritual followings, a common *denominator* unites what may otherwise be seen as divergent beliefs. "The question of God, then, lies within man's(person's) horizon. Man's(person's) transcendental subjectivity is mutilated or abolished, unless he(he) is stretching forth towards the intelligible, the unconditioned, the good of value. The reach, not of his attainment, but of his intending is unrestricted. There lies within his(her) horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It cannot be ignored."¹⁰⁹

Some believe, although there exists a diversity of backgrounds, people have much in common while responding to questions about relationship with God and with life. For some people the word "God" is a limiting term, and for others it is a non-issue word. We use in an individual and heartfelt way different words and different metaphors toward a common goal: to bring us together as a human family, celebrating our oneness and not our separateness.

It is our thoughts, actions, and how we live and experience our lives, that is important, not the words we use. When we believe that the essence of our being is love, that our true identity is a spiritual one, it becomes easier to understand that all our relationships offer opportunities to experience that light of love in one another and to know that what we see is but a reflection of ourselves. Our experiences with that which created us, which many people call "God," therefore becomes manifested by our *relationships*.

Our perceptions of what the word 'God' means have differed so much, they have caused not only separation, but also many wars. The Dalai Lama writes, "When I meet people, in my mind there is no barrier, no curtain. As human beings you are my brothers and sisters; there is no difference in substance. I can talk with you as I would to old friends. With this feeling we can communicate without any difficulty and can make heart-to-heart contact. Based on such genuine human relations-real feeling for each other, understanding each other-

¹⁰⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p.103

* italics in bracket are mine.

we can develop mutual trust and respect. From that, we can share other people's suffering and build harmony in human society."¹¹⁰

3.4 INSTANCES OF INTERPLAY IN HISTORY

It is important to note that what we have been speaking about has already taken place in history, though in a limited way. There have been instances where interplay between Christian spirituality and the spirituality of other religious traditions has occurred. There are a few examples of missionaries whom we cannot ignore. By looking at such examples, we can learn a lot.

3.4.1 *MATTEO RICCI AND ROBERTO DE NOBILI:* Both Ricci

and De Nobili were Jesuits who lived in the sixteenth century and worked as missionaries in China and India respectively. They demonstrated remarkable understanding of the culture, spirituality and religion of the peoples of their mission land. They were deeply engaged linguistically and spiritually, in the interreligious context of their time.

(1) *MATTEO RICCI (1552-1610):* Ricci was born on 6 October 1552 in

Macerata, Italy, two months before the death of Francis Xavier. When he entered the Society of Jesus as a novice, he volunteered for the Eastern Mission. He was a missionary in China. He reached China in 1582 and never left the Chinese empire until his death. He recognised the futility of trying to make Westemers out of Asians, and demonstrated a great willingness to accommodate to the native culture.

He grew in sensitivity and began to take Chinese values more seriously. At first Ricci modelled himself on the Buddhist bonze. When he came to know that they were not highly esteemed by the Chinese and the disciples of Confucius, he exchanged the bonze's rough robe for a silk robe. He took the Chinese name Li-ma-tou. He presented himself as a man of letters from the Great West and adopted all the Chinese courtesies.

He grasped Chinese perfectly and wrote many books in Chinese which brought him the esteem and friendship of the men of letters. One of the most popular was the Treatise on

¹¹⁰ Dalai Lama, *op.cit.*, p.5

Friendship.¹¹¹ It won Ricci the respect due to a sage. He established connections between Christianity and Chinese morality, especially Confucianism. He made use of Confucius, since Confucianism was not a religion but a rule of life. He could easily accommodate it with Christianity.

Ricci took the men of letters seriously and lavished high praise on Confucius their prince. He was invited to banquets which were the ordinary forum for philosophical discussions. "Ricci presented an intellectual and spiritual challenge in Confucian terms to the Confucian literati at a time when they were open to fresh thinking within the parameters of Confucianism."¹¹² It is believed that it was Qu Rukuei, one of his first disciples, who appears to have played an important role in directing Ricci towards changing the emphasis of the Jesuit mission. He must have been the one who recommended a change of dress to better represent the mission to the Chinese society.¹¹³ What especially won him the respect of the Chinese was the scientific knowledge which Ricci displayed. They were also amazed at his powers of memory and mnemonic techniques.

As Ricci gained experience he concentrated more on small group discussions with men of letters which he found more efficient and not public preaching. He believed that without gaining a foothold in that class and thereby winning a general toleration for the Society of Jesus and its mission, there was no way Christian missionary presence could operate.

"Matteo Ricci was completely clear that his task was not primarily to build up worshipping congregations, and certainly not to attempt to initiate any kind of mass conversion...He understood his job to be to lay a firm foundation for the future. He was so to shape the Jesuit mission that it became part of Chinese society."¹¹⁴ "When that happened, that is when the Jesuits and the faith they proclaimed were no longer alien but in some sense Chinese, then a truly Chinese and Christian Church could be built which could then take up the task of the conversion of the nation."¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ There was probably little in that book that was original. Cicero and Epictetus and other ancient authors had already written on the subject. But it expressed those old ideas in Chinese for the first time.

¹¹² Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 131

¹¹³ For further information read *ibid.*, pp. 118-140

¹¹⁴ Andrew C. Ross, *op.cit.*, p. 135

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

He laid out a treatise on Christian doctrine in such a way as to commend it chiefly to the pagans. He drew arguments for his work more from nature than from the authority of the Holy Scriptures. In this way he prepared the way to arrive at mysteries which depend on faith and divinely revealed knowledge.

During his stay in China he had to decide whether the Chinese customs were compatible with Christianity. He considered the honors paid to dead ancestors as compatible with Christianity. He concluded that it was not superstitious but a gesture of filial piety. Similarly the ceremonial bowings and gestures of honor before a representation of Confucius seemed to Ricci civic rather than religious. Ricci noticed that the Chinese never prayed to Confucius nor asked him favours, but they paid honour to his memory as that of the greatest teacher of their race.

Ricci had to an extraordinary degree shed his foreignness. He felt the need to imbed the Christian Faith in the matrix of Chinese culture. He was the model in the matter of cultural accommodation in China. He did not make many converts. At the time of his death in 1610, the community numbered around 2000 Christians. Though he was condemned during his life-time, he proved himself right three hundred years after his death. There is a recognition that Ricci and the Jesuits of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries had done far better than their twentieth-century counterparts in understanding China.¹¹⁶

Ricci's missionary approach was a daring one and not everyone has the courage to embrace a daring idea. He felt that no people should be forced to give up their culture in order to embrace Christianity. He was able to see the distinction between the essence of Christian revelation and the cultural vehicle in which it has traditionally been preached.

(2) ROBERTO DE NOBILI (1577- 1656): Born in Tuscany of an aristocratic family, he was sent to Madurai in South India where he lived more than half a century. He lived in Madurai from 1606 until a few years before his death in Mylapore in 1656. His arrival in South India profoundly changed the perspective of evangelization.

He attempted to present the Gospel in a form less foreign to the Hindus among whom

¹¹⁶ refer Bonnie B.C., "Introduction" in Charles E. Ronan, and Bonnie B.C. Oh, (Eds.) *East Meets West, The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: University Press, 1988), p. xvii

he worked. He refused to be regarded as a "parangui."¹¹⁷ With his growing mastery of Tamil and his charming manners, Nobili broke the initial reserve of some Indians, and from their conversation he learned to understand some of their attitudes and prejudices.

He described himself as belonging to a Ksatriya(noble) class and later became a 'Sannyasi',¹¹⁸ dressing like a Hindu holy man. He learned the local languages- Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu fluently. He was the first European to study the Hindu holy books. He converted a number of Brahmins to Christianity. He insisted that those who converted be allowed to maintain most of the cultural forms of their previous way of life. He tolerated some cultural practices which he believed were not in conflict with the gospel. He baptized people without insisting that they change their names.¹¹⁹

Nobili's approach was so successful that within two years he had more than 60 converts. The number may not seem significant but compared to the old approach it was phenomenal. De Nobili has been held as one of the best examples of cultural adaptation in evangelization. By reason of his choice he could only limit himself to members of the high castes. He met people of low caste secretly at night. Hence he was criticised for this. At the same time, like St.Paul who made himself all things to all people, Nobili tried to make himself an Indian in every possible way.

Nobili was not without opposition from his own religious brothers. His colleague at Madurai, Gonsavo Fernandez gained support from his two superiors to denounce Nobili. The two superiors were determined to suppress the Madurai mission and to command Nobili to discard the 'sannyasi' life-style and become a 'parangui' like the rest. Even the Portuguese ecclesiastical establishment in Goa at a Conference condemned Nobili and his method.

"The denunciation of Nobili's pastoral approach while painful to Nobili himself and temporarily harmful to his mission, brought about at least one good result: it compelled Nobili

¹¹⁷ The term 'parangui' was used by the Indians to refer to the Portuguese and to their Indian converts. 'Parangui' was a term of opprobrium to them. It had the undertones of contempt. Some of them would even say that they would rather die than become a 'parangui.'

¹¹⁸ In India, a guru's credibility was measured not by his words but by the way in which he lived. To gain credibility Nobili imposed upon himself the strictest self-discipline.

¹¹⁹ His argument was that there was no point in insisting on the European translation of the name when the same Indian original meant the same thing.

to write a treatise explaining and defending his pastoral method."¹²⁰ The three principles that he formulated are:

- Every nation is entitled to keep to its customs and traditions unless they contradict the Gospel.

- To prove a custom contrary to the Gospel its nature and purpose has to be studied in the context of a people's culture and psychology.

- A distinction has to be made between religious customs and customs that are primarily civil and cultural. The latter are not to be forbidden to Christians if there is no taint of superstition.¹²¹

For his time he was far ahead of others. In our time we may be required to go much further than De Nobili. My impression is that we still have not a long way to go.

De Nobili's Indian experience of around 50 years did colour his understanding of Christian faith. He had a sufficient grasp of Hinduism to present Christ as the 'divine guru come down on earth'.¹²² De Nobili enabled Hindus to situate him and his God with respect to their own culture and religion. His use of the term 'Guru' was a legitimate adaptation for the sake of opening communication. His immersion in the culture enabled him to say something important and bring about some changes in the culture.

3.4.2 PEDRO PAEZ: Paez is considered one of the most remarkable missionaries in history. He was a Franciscan missionary who worked in Ethiopia for nearly twenty years. Christianity in Ethiopia had its beginning in the fourth century. It was brought by Graeco-Roman traders from Egypt and Arabia. The large scale conversion of the inhabitants was the work of St.Frementius, consecrated metropolitan of Ethiopia by Athanasius of Alexandria. Thus from the start Christianity in Ethiopia was connected with the Egyptian Church and had its hierarchical dependence on the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

In the sixth century, the so called nine missionary 'saints' (Za-Mikael Aragawi and others) implanted *Monophysiticism*, which still survives, and established monastic

¹²⁰ Miguel Bernad A., *Five Great Missionary Experiments and Cultural Issues in Asia*, (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1991), p.100

¹²¹ refer *ibid.*, pp.101-102

¹²² refer Francis X.Clooney, "Christ as the Divine Guru in the theology of Roberto De Nobili" in Ruy Costa, (Ed.) *One Faith Many Cultures*, (New York:Orbis Books, 1988), p.25ff

communities.

Christian Ethiopia was cut off from contact with European Christendom till the middle of the fifteenth century. In 1441, as a result of papal negotiations with the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria and with the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem, the Ethiopian delegates were able to attend the Council of Florence.

It was in the early sixteenth century that a Franciscan Mission was sent to Ethiopia from Jerusalem. The Jesuit missionary Pedro Paez arrived in Ethiopia in 1607. This Spanish missionary was extremely tolerant of Ethiopian Christian culture. He accepted the Ethiopian liturgy and was able to persuade the Negus to profess the two natures of Christ and bring about a union of the Ethiopian church with Rome.

He was a man with a great sense of missionary adaptability learned in the field, unlike the rest, who had the spirit of 'undeviating rigidity'¹²³ of post Tridentine Orthodoxy. He tackled the issues of language and culture at a new depth of understanding and adaptation. He was sensitive. Everyone was struck by Paez's endearing personality, full of warmth and humor, and never judgmental. He became a master of both written Ge'ez and spoken Amharic.

He was alarmed at the Emperor Za Dengel's intention to become a Catholic because rejection of the authority of Alexandria was sure to stir up the anger of ten thousand monks as it entailed many ramifications:

- Acceptance of the authority of the Council of Chalcedon¹²⁴
- Abandonment of Sabbath
- Abandonment of circumcision.

The entire religious culture of Ethiopia was bound to seem threatened. Za Dengel chose to ignore it and quickly lost both his throne and his life. Za Dengel's fate was an invaluable message to Paez, and reminded him of St. Ignatius' stress upon *dolcezza* in instruction.

Against all these odds, it remains the supreme achievement of Paez to make an alternative outcome possible. "The personal charm of Paez was so powerful because it was

¹²³ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.148

¹²⁴ Council of Chalcedon was convoked to deal with the *monophysite* heresy of Eutyches (ca.378-454), which reduced Christ to one of his two natures, the divine. The Council affirmed the one person of Christ in his two natures, divine and human.

grounded both in the highest standards of personal morality and in great practical serviceableness."¹²⁵ Paez did not attempt to encourage any large movement of individual conversions. He engaged in as much discussions with monks as he could, while avoiding sharp disputation.

His achievements were short lived because of the imprudent missionary zeal of his successors like Mendez who was an uncompromising Latinizer. In 1632 King Susneos renewed the old ties with the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria.

3.4.3 BEDE GRIFFITHS (1917-1993): Griffiths was an English Benedictine monk, a spiritual writer (best known for his autobiography, *The Golden String*), Church critic, and interfaith leader. He was a student of C.S. Lewis. In 1955 he got permission to go to India from his abbot to establish a Christian monastic presence there. In 1958 he founded the Kurisumala Ashram. He stayed there ten years. In 1968 he took over the Shantivanam Ashram in Tamil Nadu from Abhishiktananda (Fr. Henri Le Saux) who was retiring to a hermitage in the north at Uttarkashi, a Himalayan town.

He became in 1973 the spiritual teacher of the pioneering Benedictine Ashram at Shantivanam in South India. He naturalized himself as an Indian and took the name Swami Dayananda. He lived in India for almost forty years and devoted his life to the search for truth in interreligious spirituality. He, like De Nobili, adopted the Sanyasi's garb and way of life.

He tried to establish a considerable amount of dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism. He wrote many meditations on Hindu-Christian spirituality. He established in his writings that *compassion (love)* is at the top of Christian and Hindu spirituality. His meditations on the mysteries of Christian faith and their relation to the religions of India sprang from his deep contemplation that became the centre of his life. The experience of daily encounters with the people made Shantivanam an 'abode of peace'. He achieved a moving spiritual dialogue with the mystical tradition of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and the Sufis of Islam.

He succeeded in providing to the world a kind of mixture of East and West, of Hindu

and Christian.¹²⁶ Thousands of people from Europe, Australia and U.S.A came to hear him. He made Bhagavad Gita, the sacred Hindu book, his own spiritual book. He once said that Bhagavad Gita when seen in the perspective of the Gospel gathers new meaning.¹²⁷ He was of the opinion that today no religion can stand alone because we share a *common humanity*. He felt the need to share the insights of all the different religious traditions of the world.

Writing on his experience he says, "I have made my home here in India, in the Tamil Nadu, by the banks of the river Cavery...For sixteen years now I have lived as an Indian among Indians, following Indian ways of life, studying Indian thought, and immersing myself in the living traditions of the Indian Spirit."¹²⁸ "Let me now reflect on what India has done to me, on how my mind has developed over these years, on the changes which have taken place in my way of life and in the depths of my soul."¹²⁹

To be a true missionary one "must break all those bonds of attachment which are rooted in the unconscious, which have grown up from childhood and become a second nature."¹³⁰ Bede's life in India is considered a great reversal of history. He had left behind his British superiority complex and his brilliant Oxford education to learn in humility and with passion the Indian culture. This made him a son of India's soil.

These examples make it clear that what we today call 'inculturation', or 'adaptation' which I have referred to as 'inspiritualization', which took place with the incarnation of Christ in a particular culture or spirituality, has taken place at some moments in history. In the course of history, the Christian faith has been allied to inculturation after inculturation.

In the encounter between Christian spirituality and other religious spiritualities, the latter cannot expect to remain unaffected. Similarly the Christian spirituality or faith cannot expect to come out of the encounter unaffected. Christian spirituality has to find identification with good and beautiful things in other religions. Just as Christ came from God to take on

¹²⁶ See Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, (London: Harper Collins, Publishers, 1982)

¹²⁷ Raimon Panikkar, "The Wider Ecumenism: An Explorer Crosses the Borders" in *The Tablet* (26 September 1992), p.1192

¹²⁸ Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1976), p.9

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13

our humanity and to die for us, so the Christian faith needs to be closely identified with the life and thought of any spirituality it encounters.

The reception of the gospel and faith in a new culture must result in the germination of a new expression of Christianity which draws its intellectual and ritual expression from the foundations of any particular culture or spirituality it encounters. The Gospel helps to transform cultures, and does not destroy them.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPLAY BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, Inculturation remains more wish than a realized fact. Inculturation of the Gospel remains a prime, if not *the* prime agenda of the Church in Africa. Africans were taught that their ways were deficient and hence to discard them to become Christians. Today it is clear that the process of Christianization was too often a process of Europeanization.¹³¹

In his address to the bishops of Ghana who were on an *ad limina* visit to Rome in 1987 the Pope said, "And so with serenity and confidence and with profound openness towards the universal Church, the Bishops must carry on the task of inculturation of the gospel for the good of each people, precisely so that Christ may be communicated to every man, woman, and child. In this process, cultures themselves must be uplifted, transformed and permeated by Christ's original message of divine truth, without harming what is noble in them. Hence worthy African traditions are to be preserved."¹³²

Many are in search of an authentic spirituality that is relevant and appropriate to the present-day African way of life. Given the understanding of spirituality as outlined in the first chapter, one can say that Africa is endowed with rich spirituality. We have only to find it intertwined with life. We may not find it in books like other spiritualities from West and East. That is the task of the African scholars to put in writing the various aspects and characteristics of African spirituality.

I cannot claim to have experienced this African spirituality. Hence, I rely on what is available in books written by those who have some experience of it.

Today, there are many writers who describe the experience of their people. Some say that all modern African writers are spiritual writers. The works of these writers are crucial

¹³¹ Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, (Ed.), *Paths of African Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1992), p.viii

¹³² As quoted in Kwesi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), p.115

in our search for an authentic African spirituality. These writers include state persons, playwrights, novelists and theologians.

African Christian Spirituality represents the beginning of a new trend towards a search for an authentically relevant African perspective on the Christian faith. It encourages the presence of certain tools within African culture which are useful for communicating the gospel message to make it part of African life. Christians are coming to the realisation that Christianity can be credible in Africa, and that it will make headway only if it recognises the importance of African religious aspirations. There is an acceptance of the sublimity of the concepts and the ideals of African traditional religions.

In an effort to re-express the Christian message with African tools, idioms and concepts, expressions such as *adaptation*, *accommodation*, *indigenization*, *translation*, *incarnation*, *localization*, *interculturalization*, *inculturation* etc are used to contextualize the Gospel message. Most of these expressions are used interchangeably.¹³³

Some are of the opinion that the study of African Traditional Religion still remains obscure and unclear, though there are some modest contributions made by some scholars. They say this mainly because of three reasons:

(1) Being an oral culture, some feel that the advent of Christianity and Islam has taken away some of its vitality and scope.

(2) Because it is so diverse in nature and scope, it represents different things to different ethnic groups.

(3) The beliefs and practices of ATR are studied and interpreted through categories which are very much influenced by Western thought and ideas.¹³⁴

One thing we know is that the Africans have not consciously systematized their beliefs. Instead, they experience religious ritual, they transmit myths which explain the nature of things through stories about gods, they use proverbs which contain folk wisdom.

¹³³ For the meaning and relevance of each of these terms, see Pete Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) pp.14-24; Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988.)

¹³⁴ Cf. Jacob K.Olupona, "Major Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion" in Jacob K.Olupona, (Ed.), *African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society*, (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1991), p.26

4.1 PRESENT SITUATION

4.1.1 AFRICAN SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW: A world view is a way a particular people look at reality - God, humans and the world. This is the core of a culture namely its spirituality. Spirituality of a particular people not only unifies them but also affects and influences its culture at its various levels. Like everybody else, Africans too look for answers to the profound questions and mysteries of the human condition. They ask questions like: what is humanity? What is the meaning and purpose of one's life? Why is there suffering? Where do we come from? etc... These basic questions have meaning, as we have seen, only in the religious setting. These questions in themselves can bring out a "spirituality of their own though they affect the whole of humanity.

The vitality and dynamism of African Traditional Religion in contemporary African societies, despite an accelerated movement toward Islam and Christianity, is demonstrated by the fact that its underlying worldview and philosophy have never been part of the decline. It is still "the religious and cultural context from which most Christians come and in which many of them still live..."¹³⁵ The traditional religions have always been an inseparable part of African people's culture.

Perhaps African Traditional Religion(ATR) is very close to what I have been describing in Chapter 1. There, writing about the meaning of spirituality, I have stressed the experiential dimension of religion. Today we fail to recognise this dimension when we speak about ATR. We have always judged ATR in Western categories. Religion always begins first of all with a series of unique religious experiences over a period of time and never as an "intellectual enterprise." In any religion, when the intellectual enterprise takes the upper hand there is a danger that the original experiences are being sidelined.

4.1.2 CULTURAL PLURALISM: Education, literature, and the mass media make us more aware than ever of the rich and basic differences between cultures within Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, the religio-cultural pluralism is based on diversities in religion, ethnicity and language.

¹³⁵ Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology, Inculturation and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p.72

(1) **RELIGIOUS PLURALISM:** Many are aware of the problem of *diversity* that bedevils the study of religions of Africa. The study of rites and symbols in the life of African peoples, and of the veneration they offer to their ancestors, and of their attitudes to God, lead us to the conclusion that religion permeates the whole of life- their personal, family, and socio-political life. Religion in Africa is a *cultural reality*. It is an integral expression of the African cultural background. Hence Okot p'Bitek is of the opinion that there are as many African Religions in Africa as there are ethnic identities.

It is still powerful in determining the thoughts and actions of all from an educated lawyer to a village peasant.¹³⁶ There is no dichotomy between the secular and the spiritual. The secular concerns are entirely appropriate spiritual concerns in African religions.¹³⁷ Although scholars today are aware of this religious diversity, they are also aware that the Africans share a *common world view* which underlies their religious practices and beliefs. They say that there is sufficient cultural and religious homogeneity to justify their view. This common world view is implicit and not explicit. More will be said about this later.

Though, Christianity and Islam, the two "guest religions" have gained ground at the expense of the host religion, the underlying philosophy and worldview of traditional African Religions have not declined.¹³⁸

(2) **ETHNIC PLURALISM:** The issue of ethnicity in Africa is a complex one. Ethnic groups have a common history, beliefs and tradition. They share common social, economic and political activities, common interests and a common destiny. This expresses their cohesiveness. Today, it is clear that "ethnicity" is looked upon with disfavor, especially in politics, since ethnic pluralism "has been seen as a major source of social and political conflict in the black African nations."¹³⁹

Ethnic group differences have presented obstacles to national unity and mutual co-existence in many countries, including, Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Kenya and others. Ethnic

¹³⁶ Emmanuel Martey, *op.cit.*, p.39

¹³⁷ Evan M. Zuesse, "Perseverance and Transmutation in Traditional Religion" in Jacob K.Olupona, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1991), p.173

¹³⁸ Emmanuel Martey, *op.cit.*

¹³⁹ D.G. Morrison as cited in Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology Inculturation and Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p.42

conflicts pose a great challenge to both church and theology in Africa. As a multi-ethnic institution, what is the role of the Church in situations of "ethnic conflicts"?

Ethnic pluralism is here to stay as an *African* reality. It cannot be ignored. It manifests both positive and negative elements. The *positive* elements include a feeling of identification and cultural anchorage. These must be promoted. The *negative elements of ethnicity*, such as "tribalism (ethnic conflicts)" and all that goes with it like divisiveness, corruption must be exposed and denounced.

How theologians in Africa respond to the issue of ethnic diversity will determine whether it is catalyst for enrichment in a pluralistic society or a catalyst for divisiveness and conflicts.

(3) LANGUAGE PLURALISM: Africa has four major language families with their own further groupings. They are:-

- Congo-Kordofanian
- Afro-Asiatic
- Nilo-Saharan and
- Khoisan¹⁴⁰

Language is an expression of the African cultural heritage and has a tremendous bearing on inculturation in Africa. Language is not merely spoken, it is expressed through poetry, literature, art etc. Hence the study of African languages is an invaluable means of exploring the riches of African culture. The language will provide one of the basic sources of African religiosity and *spirituality*.

Pieris speaking on the importance of language says, "I think it is only partially true to say that religion is an "experience" of Reality and language is its "expression"; the converse is closer to the truth: *language is the "experience" of Reality and religion is its "expression."*¹⁴¹ Language is very important in the discussion of theological reality.

4.1.3 SOME COMMON THEMES: Though the whole issue of ethnic pluralism poses a problem in speaking of one single African culture, scholars have enabled

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p.44

¹⁴¹ Pieris as quoted in Emmanuel Martey, *ibid.*, p.45

us with common elements found in African culture. Many writers have come up with certain common themes found in African Traditional Religions. Hence they prefer to use the singular term 'African Traditional Religion rather than Religions.' This also holds good for spirituality.

"Perhaps the most central and pervasive concern of traditional African religions is the maintenance of life as the integral interflow of relationships.... The more one ties things together, the more power and transcendence, for power flows through relationships.... As a result, one does not seek to separate oneself from the world, but to integrate oneself with it."¹⁴²

Shorter names some six common elements that could be found in ATR. They are:-

- The belief in a Supreme Being,
- The desire for abundant life,
- The emphasis on communitarian living,
- The vital relationship between the living and the dead,
- Preoccupation with the human cause of evil and
- The effective memory of past events.¹⁴³

Vincent Mulago cites, somewhat similar to Shorter, four essential elements in African Traditional Religion. They are:-

- Belief in two worlds, visible and invisible;
- Belief that both worlds involve community and hierarchy;
- Belief in the intersection of the two worlds, the transcendence of the invisible world in no way contradicting the immanence;
- Belief in a Supreme Being.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Evan M. Zuesse, *op.cit.*

¹⁴³ see, Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Spirituality*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p.5

¹⁴⁴ Vincent Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity" in Jacob K. Olupona, *op.cit.*, p.119; see also pp.120-126

4.2 ENCOUNTER OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION WITH CHRISTIANITY

Christians in Africa are seeking new ways of interpreting not only Scripture but also the human condition in their own cultural and political settings.¹⁴⁵ Today many African theologians rightly state that African Traditional Religion is the source for African theology and hence African Christian Spirituality. Kofi Asare Opoku described African culture as a God given heritage which is to be understood as "the sum total of all the traditions, ideas, customs, modes of behavior, patterns of thought, ways of doing things and outlook on life that have been received from God, learned and passed on from one generation of African to the other."¹⁴⁶

There is so much theological treasure buried in traditional African culture that African theologians must unearth that treasure and bring it to light. Any meeting of two different realities has the risk of conflict. Today, as there is strong emphasis towards "authenticity", those who are not aware of the essence of Christianity are quick to say that it is something foreign to African culture. But those who know the essence of both Christianity and African religious values do not see it that way. A few quotations from the Church documents will make this point clear.

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere respect ways of acting and living, rules and doctrines which, while they differ on many points from what she herself holds and teaches, nevertheless often reflect a ray of truth enlightening all men (people)."¹⁴⁷ Today we are realizing more and more that Jesus is a transcultural reality. Though he took his humanity in one particular culture he proved himself to be part, as well as above, that particular culture. Our criteria to judge a culture is not another culture but the person of Jesus who speaks to that culture in ways that can be understood.

Lumen Gentium puts it succinctly, "...the Church or people of God which establishes

¹⁴⁵ Emmanuel Martey, *op.cit.*, p.45

¹⁴⁶ Kofi Asare Opoku, as cited in Emmanuel Martey, *ibid.*, p.72

¹⁴⁷ Vatican II, Declaration on the relations with non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, no.2

this Kingdom does not take away anything from the temporal welfare of any people. Rather she fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and the customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them."¹⁴⁸

In one of his speeches to African Bishops Pope John Paul II said, "By respecting, preserving, and fostering the particular values and richness of your peoples' cultural heritage you will be in a better position to lead them to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ, which is to be lived in the noble, concrete, and daily experience of African life...It is a question of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life, and lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ in the members of his body is himself African."¹⁴⁹

The history of evangelization in Africa shows that most of the evangelizers imported *information* about faith in the form of "Catechism" and passed it on to the people. Those who could memorize well the questions and answers written down in the Catechism were baptized and were given the name Christians. It had no deep impact on life. The person of Jesus was at the background. People were made to "know" their religion rather than "live" their religion. That is the danger when religion takes the form of a book to be read. Africa has been given the Western academic philosophical teaching about Christ instead of Him being seen as a person relevant to all life situations. Hence during the times of crisis Christ seems to be absent. This fact has been proved by the *genocide* that took place and is still taking place in Rwanda and Burundi which are known to be Catholic countries.

The concept of "New Evangelization", which came to be used after Vatican II with Gaudium et Spes and Evangelii Nuntiandi, has changed the language of evangelization. It is no more a one-sided spiritualism. It emphasises that the Good News has to be addressed to the *who's person*, and not to one's reason alone. It has to include the heart and a passion for daily living.¹⁵⁰ The centre of Evangelization is the human life and the person.

The approach adopted here would no longer be aggressive, threatening and

¹⁴⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No.13

¹⁴⁹ John Paul II, "The African Bishops' Challenge," an address to the Bishops of Kenya given on 7 May 1980. Quote cited in Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), pp.8-9

¹⁵⁰ see, Joseph Gremillion, *The Church and Culture since Vatican II*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p.48

condemning all that is so called 'pagan' but one which involves a spirit of *openness, understanding and dialogue*. There should not be any problem as regards blending the African values with Christian faith and morals.

4.2.1 EFFORTS AT INCULTURATION: Pope Paul VI had declared in Kampala in 1969, "You can, you must, have an African Christianity." John Paul II spoke even more strongly in Nairobi in 1980: "Not only is Christianity relevant but Christ, in his members, is himself African."¹⁵¹ These statements by the Popes sound good but the real issue is: how far have they been materialised? The Synod for Africa is over. The papal document "*The Church in Africa*" is in the hands of many scholars. Though it has not affected much so far, the hopes are still there. One of them is the whole issue of inculturation!

With a view to indigenizing the person of Christ, most Christologies of African intellectuals have been artificial constructions that have had no relevance to the context or situation in which the masses of African people live. The question of Jesus, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:29) still confronts everyone including the African Christian and the theologian.

Any response to this question must begin with the concrete *human experience* of the African people. It cannot exclude the religio-cultural, socio-political and economic contexts that is, the concreteness of everyday life. In one's attempt to answer the question, "Who do you (African) say I am?", one must avoid the answers given purely from the chairs of Universities without taking into account the living, dynamic and active reality of people's experiences.

To answer the question one has to have the knowledge of African culture and the religious experiences of African people as Africans. What image of Jesus can solve Africa's multi-faceted problems (which are also the problems of other continents) of poverty, injustice, incurable diseases, ethnic hatred, genocide, etc., that hinder the promotion of full African humanity?

¹⁵¹ Both quotes cited in Brian Hearne, "The Synod for Africa: From Centralized Church to a Localized Church." in *Doctrine and Life*, (Vol.43 October, 1993), p.474

Many images have been put forward by the theologians.¹⁵² I cannot mention all of them here. I cite only two which I think are rather more prevalent than others.

(1) LIBERATOR: Christ will be meaningful in Africa if he can speak to the contextual life situations. What does it mean to tell an African that God was made flesh and dwelt among Africans in the midst of hunger, oppression, loss of dignity, suffering, pain etc.? How does Christ help Christians to be true witnesses in this situation? The only way one can understand Christ is through concrete historical *experience*.

As a liberator Jesus is seen as the hope of Africa, in whom God will deliver his people from oppression and forces of death. He will free the poor and the weak from the rich and the strong. For in him, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female.

This is an attempt to present the only Jesus that can be comprehensible and credible among the African rural masses, urban poor and idealistic youth. Jesus is also the liberator of the rich, the proud, the intellectually conceited. He pricks their consciences to conversion. Sometimes he strips them naked of their power in order to shame them (Lk 1:46-55). But he does it with the purpose of their salvation, which is meant for all.¹⁵³

(2) ANCESTOR: As an ancestor Jesus is part of the human family. He is close to the African people. As a common ancestor of all he breaks all ethnic barriers. He is *the Ancestor*. It is not an honorary title but fits into the African understanding of the ancestor.

Jesus is the Proto Ancestor- the unique ancestor, the source of life and highest mode of ancestorship.¹⁵⁴ One of the roles of the ancestor is to transmit and safeguard life. Christ the common Ancestor of all, is able to protect life in Africa that is destroyed through wars

¹⁵² For a detailed study on the images of Jesus read, Robert J. Schreiter, (Ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1992)

¹⁵³ Cf. Laurenti Magesa, "Christ the Liberator and Africa Today" in Robert J. Schreiter, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1992), p.157

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor*, (Gweru, Zimbabwe Mambo Press, 1984.)

genocide, ethnic clashes as he is able to rise above all ethnicity.¹⁵⁵

4.3 AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

The motives underlying the establishment of the independent churches are varied. The reasons range from the petty jealousies within the leadership of an existing church at one end, to issues of some theological significance at the other. As far as the latter is concerned it is acknowledged that the newer churches sprang as a reaction to Westernism which insisted on the undesirability of accommodating traditional spirituality.¹⁵⁶

Many feel that the African Independent Churches have succeeded in stripping Christianity of its foreignness (which has been a great handicap) and have shown that Christianity can be inculturated meaningfully in the African religio-cultural reality. They are a challenge to what are described as the "mainline" churches.

Some others consider that the Independent churches not only provide raw data for theological reflection but also a point of departure for authentic African theological reflection. I would go a step further and say that they will also prevent African theology from becoming simple academic exercises divorced from the life situations of African peoples. "A church which continues to be directed from outside is going to have an identity problem which, naturally, would not facilitate its theological maturing."¹⁵⁷

The Independent Churches make an African "feel at home" because they have drawn most of their insights from traditional religion and culture and are informed by the needs of the African soul and the Scriptures.

4.3.1 CRITICISM AGAINST: Though African Independent Churches attempt to authentically Africanize Christianity, they have not escaped scholarly criticism and

¹⁵⁵ For further information, read the article by Charles Nyamiti, "African Christology today" in Robert J. Schreier, (Ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, (London: SCM Press, 1992), pp.4-12

Also, Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor*, (Gweru, Zimbabwe Mambo Press, 1984)

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p.129

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.131

derogatory remarks. Mbiti says, "This excessive denominationalism is absolutely scandalous...This invites someone to call a halt, and if that someone is not the churches themselves, then it may well be the government. Christianity must not be allowed to become a cloak and cover for divisiveness."¹⁵⁸

Whatever the remarks against African Independent Churches, they have an important message to convey. The challenges these Independent churches pose to Christianity as practiced in Catholic and Protestant circles is great indeed. Some suggest that the Independent Churches show what a genuinely inculturated Christianity might look like in Africa.

4.4 SUGGESTIONS

Christians are coming to the realization that Christianity can be credible in Africa, and make headway only if it recognises the importance of African religious aspirations. The present form of Christianity has close similarities with the brand which the missionaries brought.¹⁵⁹ The training of clergy has left the finished products powerless to face real life around them. Sometimes it is sad that they are unsuited to minister within their own cultural area. Some strongly feel that the African Church is generally unimaginative in its outlook and is content to adhere to the belief and practice inherited from Churches elsewhere. The theological ideas developed elsewhere have simply been adapted to local conditions. Hence there has been very little engagement between Christianity and African life and thought.¹⁶⁰

Alongside the relatively pessimistic view about how incarnate Christ has become in African soil, there are striking images that may contribute to a genuinely African Christianity. Though a lot has been done in terms of research in the whole issue of inculturation, it is unknown to the majority of Christians with an exception of the "Zairean Mass." Some don't take the issue seriously at all. Inculturation has still remained on the academic level and has not reached the grass-roots except in the case of dance and the beating of drums. Some appropriate channels have to be found to introduce the whole issue of

¹⁵⁸ Mbiti as quoted in Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p.53

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Kwesi A Dickson, *Op.cit.*, p.3

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 3-4

inculturation into Christian churches. One among them would be proper *catechesis*.

The African situation presents a challenge to Christian life and theological reflection. If we assume that some idea, custom, or ritual in African religion is found to be good, it has to be incorporated into the life and thought of the Church. It has to have a place in the Church's belief and practice as means to introduce a new dimension of religious consciousness. Some scholars are of the opinion that African values and customs are often closer to the Semitic values that pervade the Scriptures and the story of Jesus than the European Christian values that have been imposed upon them.

The call for identification in itself demands that the Church incorporates not merely what is good and beautiful but what is considered to be the essence of African religion namely its *spirituality*. Spirituality then becomes the means of expressing the meaning of the Christian faith.

The Church in Africa has a lot to accomplish. It must undo what has been done poorly. It has the responsibility of reevangelizing what was badly evangelised. The Gospel as we know it was presented in Western European categories and thought patterns. Today the interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the contemporary African must take place in the light of African conditions so that there is hope for change. Unless inculturation or inspiritualization, whatever one calls it, continually returns to the basic level of *lived experience*, it falls into the danger of being simply another "academic ivory-tower exercise" which is untouched, unaffected, unrooted in the experiences of the people. Ultimately it will be ineffective as we know from the fact that so much scholarly material is lying idle on the shelves of libraries.

The assimilation of the Christian message is possible if it is based on the categories and representations of African culture. This will enable the Gospel to become part of African nature. The call of Ad Gentes was the same. Its call was for Christian life to be adapted to the genius of each culture.¹⁶¹ The thought behind it was to make the presentation of Christianity acceptable to peoples of other cultures.

Speaking about inculturation in Africa, Penoukou says that it is a matter of having the will and making the concrete efforts to evangelise the African traditions and convert its mentalities. In short, what he says is that inculturation is a matter of purifying and maturing

161 *Ad Gentes*, No.20

the African culture in the light of the Gospel.¹⁶²

The task is to create an African Christian Spirituality that arises from and is meaningful to African people so that there is no dichotomy between life and worship. The African Christian must be able to listen faithfully to the call of Christ. He is not called to renounce that which constitutes his identity. The Gospel has to be seen as a purifying and liberating force rather than something that makes one alien to one's own culture or spirituality. The Africans have a right and a task to express, communicate, celebrate and live out their Christian faith in an African way.

"An uncritical acceptance of the theology developed in the West, and an equally uncritical rejection of anything different from it, are both signs of theological immaturity and intellectual irresponsibility in Christian obedience- obedience to the Gospel within the context of a given, concrete, social situation."¹⁶³

I feel in their attempts at the study of African Traditional Religion, scholars should not make it a mere intellectual enterprise but give sufficient attention to capturing the religious experiences that are intertwined with life. One has to discover the religious meaning that is hidden within the life situation or the phenomenon. The elements of African Traditional Religion and culture like ancestrology, healing, sacrifice, the concept of the family and so forth cannot be ignored. The failure to inculturate them is incompatible with the Gospel.

¹⁶² Efoe-Julien Penoukou, *Eglises d'Afriques, propositions pour l'avenir*, Paris, 1984, Cf. Jean Comby, *How to understand the History of Christian Mission*, (London: SCM Press, 1996), p.168

¹⁶³ All Africa Churches Conference, *Africa in Tradition: The Challenge and the Christian Response*, (Geneva: WCC, 1962), cited in Emmanuel Martey, *op.cit.*, p.64

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was not to give neatly drawn, well formulated proposals, but to open up creative possibilities for inter-spirituality dialogue. Whether I have succeeded in achieving it or not, Christian spirituality has to learn to meet other spiritualities at a deeper level. Among many Christians in Africa and in India, for example, there still remains a deep fear and ignorance of their countries' spiritual culture. In India, the Western, isolationist and exclusivist conditioning has made Indian Christians strangers in their own land. Many of them know nothing of non-Christian religions and spirituality. In the context of 'inspiritualization' or interreligious dialogue this is surely not a healthy sign.

What I have been trying to say places before us a great challenge. At the same time the challenge will have creative implications. Any spirituality that wants for itself a place of dominance will be challenged. There is no exception for Christian spirituality.

In a situation like this, what is the greatest need of the Church today?

A limited and controlled earthing of the Gospel in the local culture has become respectable and inter-faith dialogue is encouraged by Church authorities. At least it looks so when one reads papal encyclicals and the curial documents. What is needed is a New Spirituality, a deeper process of integration and transformation, a spirituality that takes into account an *assimilation* of the cultures of the world into the life of the Church.

The Church needs a new way of experiencing and responding to the present reality. The option for Christian spirituality should be to interact with the spiritualities of other religious traditions. People look for a spirituality that is *interdependent* and that takes into account the real pressing needs of the people.

Modern changes in Christian formation remain largely superficial and nominal. The teachers and those in the seminaries show a lack of interest in the spiritual, experiential dimension of their theological studies. Today mere knowledge and information are not enough. There is plenty of it available everywhere.

The Church has to recover the perspective of the Early Church which assimilated first the culture of the Greeks and the Romans and then the culture of the so called "barbarian" peoples of Europe, if it has to have meaning in the world today. This is a task that remains to be achieved.

I am of the opinion that the Kingdom of God which is based on love is the **touchstone**

whereby Christians should tend to evaluate other religions or persons who are not committed to any practice of any particular religion. Today there are persons, though not professedly religious, who hold a high set of personal values and manifest in the quality of their lives personal integrity and authenticity.

Jesus seeing the faith of the Roman Centurion wamed, "Many I tell you, will come from East and West to feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But those who were born to the Kingdom will be driven out into the dark." (Matthew 8:11ff)

The Kingdom's goal is to create one great family, one people where all will find their home in the family of God. Here all discrimination against any individual or group will have ceased. This is the vision Jesus came to bring. This is the Kingdom message. Redemptoris Missio, (No. 20) makes a valid point: "It is true that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church, among peoples everywhere to the extent that they live "Gospel values" and are open to the working of the Spirit, who breathes where and where he wills." We have to see all our activities as having Kingdom significance.

In the interreligious dialogue, the Kingdom symbol, that I spoke of in chapter two furnishes us Christians with a broader perspective to enter into dialogue with other religious traditions. If the kingdom is the ultimate goal of God's intentionality with all of humanity then the question is no longer how these other religious traditions are linked to the Church but rather how the Kingdom of God was and is concretely present in these religions.¹⁶⁴

The Church has to discover its universal meaning and its relationship to all religious traditions of humankind, its relevance to the world in which people live. Christianity cannot be meaningful as a religion today, unless in its encounter with other religious traditions, it is willing to abandon its Western culture with its rational, masculine bias and its tone of universal validity. It has to be humble to learn from other religious traditions that which it does not have or has lost through the passage of time.

The character of the Kingdom is *love*. This love includes the adherents of other religious traditions. This love should express itself in two ways:

- Sharing the Good News with which we are entrusted and have already experienced ourselves; and
- Sensitive openness and listening to other religious traditions and willingness to adopt

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John Fuellenbach, *op.cit.*, p.16

whatever good we find in them.

To learn from others whatever truth they have to offer and to integrate that truth with our Christian heritage does not destroy our faithfulness to Christ. This is not going to be easy. It is a task to be accomplished and the time is ripe to take up the responsibility for this task.

The Christianity that will emerge will be something different from what it is today. It will not be less Christian but will be closer to the "Kingdom of God" which Christ preached during his earthly life.

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