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**I LIVE; NOT I, BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME  
(GAL 2:20): PAUL'S CHRIST EXPERIENCE  
FROM A YOGIC PERSPECTIVE**

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**Introduction**

Paul, a zealous Pharisee and an erstwhile persecutor of the Church, turned to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, lived a life of mystical union with Christ ever since his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus. It brought about a real transformation in his life in such a manner that he stated that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ in him. His actions, knowledge and devotion were fused into a new relationship with Christ through which he allowed Christ to live and act through him. This was a mystical experience of personal union with Christ, which can be characterized in the Indian spiritual terminology as Yoga, which originally and etymologically means union.

Pope John Paul II had invited Indian theologians in 1988 in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* to take up the challenge of articulating

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biblical and theological concepts giving due respect to Indian thought patterns.<sup>1</sup> Responding to this invitation, this study attempts to interpret the Christ experience of Paul from a *Yogic* perspective. It strives to analyse the relationship of Paul with Christ from the perspective of a mystical union against the background of the Indian religious literature *Bhāgavadgītā*.

## Synthesis

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to help us comprehend the theme of the dissertation. It begins with a preliminary quest into the nature of religious commitment, concentrating on the theme of commitment in the Old Testament and Judaism in particular, analyzing the concept of covenant. This is followed by an analysis of the concept of discipleship in the New Testament. As a further step, the focus is shifted to the concept of Yoga as commitment according to the *Bhāgavadgītā*. The *Bhāgavadgītā* describes Yoga as a spiritual commitment that leads to union with the divine. There are three kinds of Yoga: *Karmayoga*, *Jñānayoga* and *Bhaktiyoga*. *Karmayoga* is Yoga of action. According to *Bhāgavadgītā* action performed without desire (*niṣkāmakarma*) can lead to spiritual union with the divine; it is a process of being in action without the expectation of any reward. This involves commitment and motivation to carry out one's own duty (*svadharma*) with dedicated performance. *Jñānayoga* is not a scientific knowledge that can be attained by study and research; rather it refers to an experiential and enlightened knowledge by divine grace (BG X: 10), which brings one to the realization of God and enables one to experience an inner awakening and look at the reality with a divine eye (BG XI:8). Through *Bhaktiyoga* one is totally attached to God in faith, love and surrender. The final goal of Yoga according to *Bhāgavadgītā* is union with the personal God. The analysis of different paths of Yoga clearly shows that it is a progressive spiritual journey that leads to union with the divine.

The second chapter mainly focuses on Paul's prior commitment to Judaism. As a Jew, Paul was so sure of his religious beliefs that he would not heed to any other teaching or practice other than those related to his own Jewish religious convictions. He belonged to the category of those people who were so committed to their own convictions that they would not enter into any form of dialogue or

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<sup>1</sup>John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 72.

compromise with others. On the basis of Deuteronomy (Deut 21:23) Paul had concluded that Jesus of Nazareth was a cursed one because he was hanged on a tree (Gal 3:13). Such a conviction gave him the impetus to destroy the religious movement that Jesus of Nazareth had started. It was nothing but a zealous and conservative approach to religion which failed Paul to recognize other traditions or rituals and forgo the traditions and securities on which he had put confidence and lived his entire life. He wanted to excel all others in his devotion to the Torah and he did succeed in this to a great extent.

The third chapter deals with Paul's encounter with the Risen Christ and its impacts on the person of Paul. For Paul, his Christ experience was the hub of his whole life. This empowered him to be a committed Christian, an active Apostle who took the message of Christ outside of his Jewish circle by placing complete trust in his call and commitment. His knowledge of Christ and his union with Christ leads him to a new understanding of his present mission and the future orientation of his life. Paul was convinced that his life in Christ was an ongoing process of entering into a deeper relationship and communion with Christ. For Paul, this process grew from his conviction about Christ that enabled him to see his past accomplishments in a different light, and look at the present situation and future life as a new direction in Christ. Thus Paul, without being encumbered by the burden of his past life, strives constantly towards the goal that was lying ahead, for which Christ had positively invited him. Paul's entire life was transformed by Christ at the Damascus encounter with him. Galatians 2:20 is a succinct and condensed expression of this radical change in Paul.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the exegetical study of the expression, "zw/ de. ouketiegw( zh/ de. enemoi. Cristoj" (Gal 2:20) as well as the meaning and significance of this expression in the context of the Letter to Galatians. The study of Gal 2:20 indicates that Paul had an extraordinary experience of a mystical union with Christ in such a manner that Christ dwelt in him totally and completely. Paul continued his natural life in faith, which animated this new life. His statement that it was no longer he that lived but "Christ lives in me" and "I live by faith in the Son of God" (2:20) clearly shows his union and identification with Christ.

The fifth chapter tries to interpret Paul's mystical union in the light of the Indian *Yogic* perspective and to see Paul's *Yogic* experience as a paradigm for Christian discipleship in our times, without ignoring however, that besides the basic similarities there are also certain

dissimilarities between the biblical concept of mystical union and the Indian concept of such union according to *Bhāgavadgītā*. While Christian spirituality perceives mystical union as a total gift of God, *Bhāgavadgītā* sees it more in terms of the result of human effort. In Christian understanding the union between God and human being is not an ontic merging, whereas in *Bhāgavadgītā* it is apparently an ontic and ontological fusion. Against the background of the Upanishadic statement (*mahavakya*) *aham brahmasmi* (I am Brahman), this union in *Bhāgavadgītā* seems to be a gradual realization of what is already there in a person, while in the Christian understanding mystical union is something entirely new, which can take place as the result of God's grace. Although the basic philosophical and theological presuppositions of mystical union in the *Bhāgavadgītā* and in Christianity are totally different, the nature of devotional commitment in both is very much similar. This is illustrated in the Pauline commitment to Christ, which comes close to the understanding of Yoga in *Bhāgavadgītā* and its threefold exercises and experience.

### ***Jñānayoga, Bhaktiyoga and Karmayoga as Applied to Paul***

Paul's Christ experience resulted in the new realization that power of all *jñāna* is in Christ alone. Paul could perceive all things through the eyes of faith (*śraddhā*) in a new way. God experience is a gift and it cannot be achieved except through faith. Paul had acquired knowledge about God from the sacred scripture, from the mouth of his great teachers and his own parents. As a result of his experience and knowledge of Christ he understood that all this worldly wisdom could not be a help to reach the goal of his commitment. It was no more the human effort that offered enlightenment but divine grace. He came to realize that he had to be detached from all those claims of his past life not because they were bad in themselves but because they could not bring him the way of perfect union (Yoga) with Christ.

Paul's encounter with the risen Christ created in him a deeper knowledge and faith in Christ as the Lord, which meant for him total reorientation of life, a new vision of reality. Transformation of one's mind is required to be receptive to God's grace and light. This experience of faith included the whole person (Phil 3:12). The intensity of this experience is articulated in these words: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Paul makes clear that the true *jñāna* is Christ himself insofar as he is the crucified One (1Cor 1:23; 2:1-2). When Paul found true

*jñāna* in Christ crucified he preached this *jñāna* of God boldly and publicly.

Paul responded to the love of God; he lived and conquered everything in such a way that nothing could separate him from it. This is expressed in his words: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8:39). Paul's experience of Christ was very profound that led him to deep and intense devotion (*bhakti*), which gave him the impetus to work not for earthly reward but for the Lord. He worked for him selflessly through his total involvement in proclaiming the Gospel, yet at the same time not affected by the advantages and struggles in his work. Paul thus became a *karmayogi*, who was fascinated by Christ. In his missionary endeavours he was courageous, pure in motive and unselfish. In the case of Paul, the law of Christ motivated him to work selflessly for Christ and he also motivates his readers to follow the same pattern of life (Phil 2:3-4). In his proclamation, Paul was aware of the ultimate agent of his action and wanted to be for Christ and to be of Christ during his entire missionary task, in total freedom and commitment. Thus Paul was a true *Karmayogi* in all his being and doing.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion it can be stated that Paul was a real *yogi* at all the three levels of *jñana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion) and *karma* (action). It is the knowledge of Christ as the self-emptying Son of God (Phil 2:6-11) that catapulted Paul towards a devout and committed life to be a devotee of Christ transforming him to be an ardent disciple of Christ to witness every moment and thus lead an action oriented life. It is his conviction of Jesus Christ as the Lord and God that led him to be devoted to him and to proclaim the good news of Christ. This awareness and knowledge set him on fire to preach Christ and to live for him. His passionate love and commitment for Christ challenges us to live our discipleship in close communion with Christ and transmit it through a life with burning zeal and love which requires self-sacrifice, denial of self-interest to the point of losing our life for the sake of Christ. The close union Paul had with Christ shows that it is a relationship everyone can have in his/her life and that this relationship is something possible. To be a witness to Christ today requires that they become men and women of faith who have abundantly encountered and experienced the Lord.