

CONVERSION: THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

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Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, SDB in this article scrutinises the concept, content, and controversy rallying around the foundational religious experience of conversion. Being rooted in the Indian culture and being a committed missionary at the core of his heart, the author examines the inconsistencies in the alleged accusation against Christian mission. Dr Menampampil critically evaluates the oft orchestrated usage of inculturation. The article encourages the readers to bring the Gospel into marriage and family, trade and commerce, arts and professions, politics and government, culture and national and international relations. Conversion, according to the author, should be an event of enhancement of the collective self of a community which should lead people on their path to their eternal destiny.

‘Conversion’ has become a controversial word. The very idea of conversion annoys our Hindutva friends. Reports of conversion provoke violent reaction in the press and on the streets. Christian thinkers and workers are on the defensive. Missionaries are on the retreat. Why upset people with your convictions when there is so much opposition? Why be too earnest about your own understanding of the truth when there are so many versions of it around?

1. All Universal Ideas Are Self-propagative

And yet we know that all universal ideas have been self-propagating. Science advanced because someone who had discovered something new that was true and beneficial to society shared it with others. Social sciences made progress because persons who felt convinced of a social theory propagated it with enthusiasm among his/her fellow human beings. Reforms were introduced, lives were saved, living conditions improved, because enlightened people followed up their personal insights in different

areas of life vigorously, seeking to convince others of what they knew was for the good of society. And no one considered any of these things wrong.

2. Change Often Provokes Resistance

Conversion means change. Given the natural inertia in human society, change always provokes some resistance, and change in the cultural and religious field invites even stiffer resistance. There was criticism when Lord Bentick abolished *sati*. It was argued that ancient Indian traditions were being interfered with. The immediate cause of 'Sepoy Mutiny' (today being referred to as the first struggle for Independence) was that the British guns were reportedly greased with the fat of the cow and pig to pollute the Hindus and the Muslims. True or false, perceptions counted.

Where there is a reaction to a proposed change, one needs to attend to two things: (1) The validity of the idea itself, and (2) The manner of presenting it. Even if one is perfectly confident of the validity of the idea proposed, one needs to give careful attention to the manner of presentation, especially when it affects the local culture. So too should the evangelizer.

3. We Are Moving into an Era of Free Choices

In any case, one thing is clear: We are moving further and further into an era of free choices. The liberty to choose what one likes is the most prized of all modern values. There are any number of options before the modern man/woman almost in every area of his/her interest: consumer goods, social doctrines, political theories, cultural pursuits, recreational activities. And people do choose. They are helped in their choices by vigorous propaganda. Advertisement is an industry by itself. Everyone proposes his product or service as the best. His right to do so is not questioned. No one objects as long as he limits himself to **ways of persuasion**. It is for the buyer or client to choose.

Similarly, social thinkers and political propagandists vie with one another in proposing their own panacea for social evils, political deadlocks, economic slowdowns. Their right to do so is generally recognised. But they have no right to impose, even if they are right, and even if they are convinced. It is not the conviction of President Bush that democracy is the best form of government that is wrong, but its imposition on Iraq or Afghanistan at the point of the gun. It is not the conviction of the individual Catholic about Christian beliefs that is wrong, but the way of presenting it, if, for example, he is insensitive to culture, local ethos, or human realities.

4. People Keep Changing Minds

Experience tells us that people keep proposing new ideas. Minds are changed. Conversions do take place. There have been some impressive conversions of late: that of Gorbachev from Soviet totalitarianism to Perestroika, of Deng Xiao Ping from communism to the Chinese form of capitalism, of Manmohan Singh from planned economy to free enterprise, of Buddhadev Bhattacharjee from Marxism to a search for private capital, of L.K. Advani from an anti-Muslim stance to admiration for Jinnah, of India itself from being anti-American (CIA, foreign hand, etc.) to pro-American. No one has questioned the right of these leaders to introduce such radical changes that affected the destinies of millions of people. We daily see that people give up ideologies, change parties, shift markets, swap loyalties, and accept new citizenships. If such things are considered normal, religious conversion need not be taken as a disaster, as the Hindutva leaders do. That is one way in which we exercise our mind and make our options.

But someone will argue that choice in every other area of life is legitimate, but not in the area of religion. Why so? For some, change of religion is like changing one's nationality. This is evidently wrong, as almost every country in the world has people belonging to different religious traditions, who at the same time hold fiercely on to their national identity. For some others, religion is like caste or culture that clings to one in an unshakable manner whether one

renounces it or not. History tells us something different. Individuals, groups and entire populations have shaken off one religion and accepted another, when they felt it was good to do so. People who have an ethnic notion of religion find it very difficult to accept diversity within their ethnic group. Our Hindutva friends are suffering from this disease. And yet people who belong to every ethnic group have the right to make their own choices.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says:

Everyone has the **right to freedom** of thought, conscience and **religion** which includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion and belief in teaching, practice, worship or observance.

5. For Our Hindutva Friends the Door Can Open only in One Direction

For Hindutva-advocates, the door can legitimately open only in one direction: tribals and foreign devotees may come in, but no one may go out. Hinduism is considered a universal religion, embracing all that is good in every other faith, and therefore the ideal one for the people of all nations and civilizations. Conversion of tribals to Hinduism is re-conversion, and is considered legitimate. In fact, such re-conversions are celebrated with the distribution of saris and other trinkets, and this is not considered an inducement. But any conversion of tribals or dalits to Islam or Christianity is taken for granted as unfairly done, through deceit or inducement, exploiting the poverty and backwardness of communities. Even speaking of eternal reward is counted a subtle form of enticement; much more serious is the offering of any poverty alleviation service in the field of health, education or development.

6. And yet, Hinduism Itself Was a Proselytizing Religion

We do not blame our Hindu friends for desiring that their community does not reduce, that the adherents to their religion keep increasing, and that the ideals that they have cherished

down the centuries be widely respected, accepted and treasured.¹ What we would respectfully ask is that they respect the same sentiments in others and allow them to share their convictions with their fellow human beings in ways that are universally considered right.

After all, Hinduism itself was a proselytizing religion. It is often argued that only Semitic religions are self-propagating, while religions of Indian origin are not. A conquest mentality is attributed to the former. This is unfair. All universal ideas (political, social, religious or any other) by their very nature have always been self-propagating. Ethnicity-bound **Judaism**, though of Semitic origin, **did not have an active programme of propagation** while Buddhism, though of Indian origin, had it in the most vigorous form from the very beginning. Hinduism too was a proselytizing religion, continuously reaching out to others, as long as it was in a vibrant state. And it was eminently successful in this endeavour, while it kept learning from others and adapting itself to different cultures and societies to which it carried its message. But with the expansion of Islam, surrounded on all sides by advancing forces, Hinduism withdrew into its ethnic boundaries and developed cultural rigidities which made sharing and adaptability more difficult.

7. A Valuable Piece of Wisdom: Pay Attention to the Collective Psyche of an Aggrieved Community

Experience shows how difficult it is to dialogue with someone who has gone on the defensive. Hindutva activists (ultra nationalists, cultural nationalists) have been building up a 'siege mentality,' and with their 'Hinduism in danger' cry, they have been organizing their community into provocative positions. They have given their majority community a 'minority complex.' Certain psychologists have called it 'inferiority complex'. And their young men have become radicalized. In spite of the fact that the Christian proportion in the country has steadily been falling, Christian evangelism is carefully watched and fiercely opposed. With an inconsistency that

is typical of any movement led by emotionally charged persons, they look on 'conversion' as a crime.

In dealing with such people, one is tempted to try to outsmart them: argument for argument, retort for retort, studied answer for irresponsible and reckless allegations. All these may be considered legitimate at the first stage as a spontaneous reaction. But if we seek to be wise, paying attention to their collective psyche is more important. That is why a clear understanding of the position of culture in these matters may be valuable. Evangelization should not pose a threat to the cultural values that constitute the core of the inner self of an ethnic group. Conversion should mean the **enhancement of the collective self** of a community and contribute to the **flowering of its culture**. Only genuine **cultural sensitivity** will help in responding to the so-called 'cultural nationalists.'

8. The Convert-making Tradition in India: The Example of Buddhism

Crime or not, Indians have been the biggest convert-makers in the early period of human history. In the first chapter of our civilization's history there stands a great conversion. It was after the termination of a hundred thousand lives in 261 B.C. that Ashoka decided to give up his violent ways to win new territory and adopt **ways of gentle persuasion**, with respect for everyone concerned, in pointing to the path of righteousness (*Dharma*). And the world changed with him. Under his aegis a local sect became a world religion.

It was into a world that had experienced the harsh realities connected with the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* wars, Alexander's invasion, the Nanda and Maurya military harshness, and the sacrifice of countless animals in worship, that **Ashoka introduced** a new culture: **a culture of respect for people of all religious faiths**, of compassion for all living things, of concern for life itself, of a casteless society. Taking inspiration from Buddha's teachings, Ashoka taught that true conquest consisted in the conquest of

men's hearts by the Law of Duty (*Dharma*). It was in fact a **civilizational change** which gave a new direction to the history of the sub-continent. This change proved to be a reaffirmation and an enhancement of the egalitarian cultural urges of the tribal societies that inhabited eastern India. The mighty monuments that Buddhism has left behind, like those at Nalanda, prove that the native cultures truly flowered, with the acceptance of this change.

Caste-based Brahminism, beginning to spread from the Doab eastwards, was confronted by Buddhism in today's Bihar. The entire area east of Bihar (Bengal, Bangladesh, Orissa and NE India) was inhabited by tribal people as Northeast India is today, with their own distinct cultures and independent polities. It is an anachronism to call them 'republics' as many Western writers have done. Indian scholars like Romila Thapar have called them '*gana sanghas*.' They were in real fact tribal states run according to diverse democratic styles of organization, whether ruled by hereditary chiefs or elected leaders. Buddha sought to capture into his monastic traditions some of the organizing styles and **value-systems that were prevalent in his own Sakya tribal community**. Thus equipped, Buddhism was able to stand strong for centuries.

The second Minor Rock Edict said, "Thus saith His majesty: Father and Mother must be obeyed; similarly respect for living creatures must be enforced; truth must be spoken. These are the virtues of *Dharma*, which must be practised. Similarly, the teacher must be revered by the pupil, and proper courtesy must be shown to relations." He encouraged compassion to all, kind treatment of slaves and hired servants, almsgiving, and toleration for the creeds of other people; bodily well-being of his subjects, comfort of travelers by the provision of wells and rest-houses, trees planted along the roads; healing of men and beast.² Hinduism itself was compelled to change under the impact of Buddhism.

The challenge that Buddhism posed changed the culture of the Brahmin-led vedic religion itself, which had given great importance to animal sacrifices. It was Buddhism that showed Hinduism the way of

non-violence. Family feuds like those described in Mahabharata were to be given up. Aggression was to be abandoned. There was to be no room for bloody sacrifices. Food habits were changed. Respect for life became rooted in south Asia. Many metaphysical concepts were shared.

Carriers of Ashoka's convictions went forth from Pataliputra. His son Mahindra, for instance, went to Sri Lanka. Buddhist missionaries carried his message from the banks of the Ganga to the snows of the Himalayas, the deserts of central Asia, and the bazaars of Alexandria, to the Greek king Antiochos, to the Cholas, Pandyas, Yonas, Kambojas, Nabhapamtis, Bhojas, Pitinkas, Andhras, Pulindas, Keralaputras, and to many earlier unknown tribes and peoples. Buddhism reached Java through the zealous activities of Gunavarman of Kashmir. In the same way it spread to Tibet, lower Myanmar, Thailand, and n. In the process, *Buddhism itself was changed according to local cultures, beliefs and lifestyles in each place.* So we notice the divinization of Buddha, introduction of the bodhisattvas, diversification of Buddhism into Mahayana and Hinayana, and similar trends.

9. Change of Religion Was Constant in India: Hindu Precedents of Convert-making

Indian kings often changed their religion, patronizing Buddhism, Jainism, Sivaism, Vishnavism, or Tantrism in turn. The founders of Buddhism and Jainism belonged to casteless tribal communities inhabiting the sub-Himalayan regions of Bihar, and were culturally distant from hierarchical Brahminism. It is an anachronism to consider Buddha and Asoka as *kshatriyas* ; they were tribal chiefs like those who lead the people of Northeast India in our days. The Mauryas were related to the Lichchhavi tribe who lived by egalitarian tribal traditions. Such cultural affinity made it easier for Ashoka to choose Buddhism and look kindly on tribal people. Rock Edict XIII says, "Even upon the forest folk in his dominions His Sacred Majesty looks kindly and seeks to make them think aright".

Similarly, kings like Kanishka and Harshvardhana were inclined to egalitarian Buddhism. They too are believed to have been converts from their original tribal religion (not Hinduism). Several tribal shrines like those of Puri or Tirupati were first turned into Buddhist sacred places, and later into Hindu temples. It may be good to remember this fact, when so much of resentment is built up around the reputed Ayodhya temple.

From the time of Pushyamitra and of the Gupta kings, Hinduism (Brahminism, Aryan culture) established itself strongly in the north and began to spread, first eastwards, then southwards. And in north India itself, all invading tribes and communities were compelled to change their religion as they settled down and be **absorbed into caste-based Hinduism** for mere survival. Thus we find that even the mighty Sakas, Yu-echis, Gurjars, Kushans, Scythians, Huns, gradually falling in line with Brahminic expectations and seeking a position in the caste hierarchy.³

Rishis like Lopamudra and Agastya crossed the Vindhyas to become missionaries of the Aryan culture and religion in the south. Parasurama chose the west coast. It is said, he wiped out the entire race of *Kshatriyas* in that zone. *Krinvanto visvamaryam*—let the whole world be made Aryan (*Rig Veda* 9:63:5). Brahmins became priests, tutors and advisers of the petty Dravidian rajahs. They received land-grants (agraharams) and the gift of cows for their services. The Pallavas were among the first to be converted in the south. Over a period of time the ruling families of the Cholas and Vijayanagar in the south, and the Kacharis, Manipuris, Tripuris, Koches and Ahoms in the east, opted for Hinduism.

Hindu priests, traders and soldiers made their way to the various countries of Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Indonesia, Java, Borneo, Bali, Champa (Vietnam), Cambodia, Laos, Funan (China). Very impressive edifices like those of Angkor Vat (Cambodia) and Borobudur (Indonesia) give testimony to the beneficial result of that conversion and cultural exchange. The **massive proselytization work** of Sankaracharya and the manner in which he converted

Buddhists en masse to Hinduism is a story by itself. The Bhakti movement also was often linked with mass conversions. So it is not easy to say that the Indian civilization has not been a proselytizing civilization.

10. Mass Conversion to Brahminism, Radical Cultural Transformation

This mighty drive for Aryanizing non-Aryans continued down the centuries to our own days. Brahminism had its own way of winning adherents to the system: an entire *Jana* (tribe) would be accepted into the Brahminic hierarchy as a new *Jati* (sub-caste) and be given a suitable occupation as part of the scheme of division of labour.⁴ Some of the leading priestly families of the *Jana* would be given the *brahmin's* rank (always below the Aryan Brahmins), the aristocracy would be accepted as *Kshatriyas*, and all the rest would have to be satisfied with the *Shudra* position.⁵

“The conversion from tribe or clan to caste, or **from Jana to Jati** as it is sometimes called, was one of the basic mutations of Indian social history and, whether it was the result of persuasion or confrontation, would have varied with individual situations. For those being converted it would have **affected all aspects of their life**. Certain foods, such as beef and alcohol, would become taboo to such members of the tribe who were induced into higher-caste status, and eating together—which had been a form of bonding among clans—would be disapproved of; the assertion of women as equal members of society would be curtailed, forcing them to accept the subordinate part; religious rituals were new and strange as were some of the deities to be worshipped—although in this matter substantial concessions might have been necessary, with the Puranic aspects of the Hindu religion incorporating the deities and rituals of such new castes; the introduction of ownership of land and revenue collection could have resulted in the oppressive experience of debt bondage for some; and the notion of hierarchy in caste was opposed to the more egalitarian ethos of the clan. New activities encouraged the breaking apart of some earlier clans.”⁶

Thus we see that the tribal acceptance of Hinduism has been **ruinous to the tribal identity, culture and ethos.**

This manner of absorbing entire communities into Hinduism has continued. The same process is going on in most of the tribal regions of India, very visibly in the Northeast, e.g. among the Rajbansis, Koches, Hajongs, Bodos, Deb Barmas, Jamatias, Riangs, Pnars, Mishings, Dimasas, Rabhas, Tiwas and others. All these communities are in the process of being sanskritized, Hinduised. The senseless attack on Christian missionaries is merely an effort to divert public attention from the mass conversions to Hinduism that they are effecting in tribal territories. But whether it is an enhancement of the original identity of the ethnic group or a diminishment through its aggregation to a lower caste or position is a matter that is disputable. A clear example is that of the mighty Ahoms who ruled Assam for centuries, and who sank to the position of a backward community from the time of their conversion to Hinduism.

In tribal areas, what first appear are religious symbols: trishul, red cloth around a tree, or a wayside shrine. Those who would like to gain a higher social position seek to avoid pollution by changing their food habits, e.g. declaring meat and alcohol a taboo to them. The *shuddhi* service is performed. New feasts are introduced, Sanskrit names taken, new kirtans sung, new traditions accepted, the dress code changed. Temples multiply, new pilgrim centres begin to rise. New practices are taken up. Then arrive small shopkeepers and liquor vendors. Money-lending and **alienation of tribal land** begin to take place. There arise *mahajans* and landlords from nowhere. The dowry system replaces the bride-price, e.g. as it is beginning to happen among the tribals of Tripura. And the entire community ends up at the last rung of society. The local priest presides over the entire exercise. All this disproves the claim of the Hindutvawadis that Hinduism is a non-converting religion. Their very call for homogenization of Hindu society, with the cry *Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan*, or threats to those who have their *punyabhumi*

elsewhere, is a pressure for the 'conversion' of all citizens to orthodox Hinduism and/or acceptance of the cultural domination of the majority community.

Of course, there was no room for a personal acceptance of a faith in the process of Hinduization (from *jana* to *jati*) described above. There was never a genuine personal conversion nor any attempt towards it. That is why the Hindutvawadis find it difficult to understand the meaning of 'conversion' in the Christian sense. If conversion is merely a movement towards an exploitative system, it is always an unacceptable idea.

11. Cultural Changes, An On-going Reality

Every community undergoes changes as it lives out its life responding to new challenges and opportunities. The **Christian community too has been transforming itself** in the process of addressing new situations as they arose during its twenty centuries of history. Emerging out of Galilee and the Judaeen hills, the young Christian community was confronted by Hellenic philosophy and Roman organizing styles. Even as it had learned to accommodate to and profit by these civilizational assets and were happy to present their benefits to the Germanic tribes along with the faith, it was transformed by the folk traditions of the Germanic people who crowded into the Church.⁷ It was in this culturally transformed situation that the Christian community was challenged by the Word of God during the Reformation and Human Reason during the era of Enlightenment (modernity).

Today it is facing a new challenge that comes from a sort of 'fragmented humanism,' arising out of diverse civilizational and cultural perceptions, philosophies, points of view, and visions of life. However, postmodernity has a new sensibility with openness to religious horizons.⁸ It is an opportunity for us to make our contribution. For, if Faith remains in our hearts, we continue to bear witness to it at all times and in all situations.

12. Hinduism Itself Has Been Changing

We have already seen how the expanding Aryan races extended their ascendancy over smaller tribes and scattered communities in the east and south of India, offering them the benefits of an advanced system of division of labour, today called caste-system (with also its discriminating consequences), shrewdly accepting local deities, beliefs, practices and devotions as diverse expressions of their own more integrated thought-and-religious-system. Excelling in agricultural competence and armed with subtle thought and organizing skills, they confronted Buddhism using its own tools of thought and action, absorbing them and integrating them into their theoretical scheme: *ahimsa*, *karma*, *moksha*, monasticism (especially by Sankaracharya).

In the same way, they wrested the way of devotion from the Muslim Sufis and the spirituals of the humbler communities, to prevent defections from the lower ranks, furthering what is called the *bhakti* movement. Often initiated by persons belonging to the lowest rung in society, its leadership eventually ended up in Brahminic hands or those of the higher castes. The same segment of the Indian society that has firmly established its dominant position over the sub-continent has continued to excel in its ability to retain their leadership in a vast variety of creative ways by **co-opting the opponent's thought or tradition**: e.g. Christian service in education, health, development, reach-out to the tribals; Christian evangelism; western humanitarianism, Enlightenment-inspired reform movements, Marxist concern for the working class.

In every case, the reins of power always slipped into the hands of the upper castes. In early history, they would have tackled opposition by accepting the chief rival like Buddha, or any local deity, or holy man as an *avatar*, and appropriating his wisdom. Today it is not easy to solve the problem by merely declaring Ambedkar, Jinnah, Stalin, or George Bush an *avatar*. My point is not to argue that all these things have been wrong. What is unfair certainly is wrong. But my point, instead, is to show that **all**

societies have always been changing while responding to new challenges. The Hindu society too.

13. Indian Society in Rapid Transformation

It is often alleged that missionary activity brings about many changes in a society, some of which turn out to be not beneficial. The fact is that entire societies have always been changing down the ages. Just as western society was totally transformed by Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, Indian society too has radically changed as a result of its **confrontation with the West**. During the colonial rule the whole of South Asia was brought under the influence of the western system of political and social organization, economic relationships, modern education: new ideas like the Rule of Law and democracy, new leadership with an emphasis on egalitarian values and accountability to society, and new technology with possibility for mass production, new economy with doors opening to the world markets. Also things like rising living standards, speedier systems of transport and communication, migration, interactions with people of other nations and cultures have been **influencing our cultures continuously**. And all societies have been undergoing changes.

Even isolated communities in remote areas where often the missionaries work have been deeply affected: the new administrative machinery replaced the old village leadership, the new educational system threw out the old socialization processes in traditional communities, ancient medical practices were rejected for modern medical sciences, traditional styles of production and barter gave place to new investment styles and the global market. Now with the rapid expansion of information technology, we are heading towards even more revolutionary changes still. While organic integration of everything of value is good, unhealthy absorption of things of dubious value can be dangerous.

14. The Threat to Cultures in a Globalised World

The culture of the globalized media threatens to corrode all inherited identities. All cultures coming under its influence stand in serious danger of **hybridization**. But, even as national cultures are being threatened by the global system, local cultures are threatened by the national media controlled from metropolitan centres. Modern media tend to use standard models for easy intelligibility and force a sort of homogenized culture on local communities, and build up new cultural tastes. They, further, tend to bring cultural levels to the lowest common denominator and mental capacity, so what really predominates in the media are often the "weird, the stupid, and the vulgar." **Commercial interests** urge the media barons to go for the bizarre and the titillating aspects of the news, until that style becomes a cultural norm, even the ideal. Complex social problems are often given the most simplistic answers, and handled as mere shallow curiosities. Principles succumb to particular interests. And the truth goes out by the window.

Glorious icons are degraded and weighty images placed at the service of profit-making, e.g., the image of Saraswati to promote sale of toothpaste or of Mother Teresa to popularize washing detergent. At one moment it would seem that those who control the media are more eager to serve their own commercial advantage than contribute to a social purpose or add to the ethical tone of society; they have at heart the promotion of consumerism and commodification. At another, it would appear that the media persons are trying to convert the audience to a particular ideology or biased point of view. In the name of freedom of the press, they assail traditional values of great moment. During the recent debates on the Danish cartoons showing Prophet Mohammed in a negative light, *Satanic Verses*, *The Last Temptation*, *The Sixth Wound*, *Da Vinci Code*, production of the films "Fire' and 'Water', or about the celebration of Valentine's day, beauty contests, dress code in colleges, we may ask ourselves whether we were more sensitive to the 'sense of the sacred' typical of Asia and cultural sensitivities characteristic of India, or to the claims of the Western-led media

supporting the so-called freedom of expression no matter how much others are hurt? **Radical disregard for native cultures invite radical resistance** and neo-conservatism, and various forms of fundamentalism.

15. The Preserving, Healing, Strengthening Role of the Church

We may ask ourselves this question: In the midst of all these transformations, has the Church been playing a useful role? It is better to begin with an **attitude of humility** admitting that, historically, like any other human institution, the Christian community too has acted at times unreflectingly and in haste introducing Christian faith and traditions, dealing harshly with minorities and dissenters, imposing social compliance and religious accommodation. Matters were often mixed up with political interests and ethnic resistance. Unfortunately, ruling classes often used religious instruments and pious rhetoric to promote their personal and dynastic ambitions, and racial prejudices found expression in misdirected missionary zeal or heresy-hunting, whether it be in the context of inquisitions or crusades. However, the Christian conscience has always revolted against every form of injustice, e.g., against slavery, mistreatment of American Indians.

It has again been alleged that the work of evangelization has been a threat to cultures. It is true that missionaries have been carriers of the secularizing value-systems of modernity to the Third World, without fully realizing what they were doing.⁹ They may have introduced a culture of individualism, competition, and secular worldview to communities to which these values were new and even hurtful. They may have imposed a Sanskritic culture on a non-Sanskritized people, dalits/tribals. Cultural sensitivity is required not only by 'convert-makers,' but also by those engaged in education, health, social work, justice struggle. They can become 'aggressive proselytizers' of the values of modernity, justice concerns, feminism, human rights, anti-establishment attitude, and anti-authority drive to the point of reaching a sort of inquisition and heresy-hunt....with no reference to the local culture,

and undermining overnight the existing systems of family and social relationships. Yes, indeed **we need to be very very sensitive to cultural identities.**

What the missionaries have mostly been doing was to **rescue vulnerable communities and their cultures** from the hands of insensitive colonizers and irresponsible promoters of the aberrations of modernity. Historically speaking, many heroic missionaries have penetrated the most inaccessible places, confronted the most unwelcoming situations, transcended immense cultural barriers, announced the Gospel, built up communities, put languages into writing, provided literature to linguistic groups, pursued ethnological studies, presented unknown communities to the wider world, created interest in anthropological reflections, intervened in behalf of oppressed communities, offered services in the field of health and education setting up impressive institutions, pressed for social reforms, introduced entire societies to modernity and planted new ideas into the hearts of people to guide their society to freedom and offer leadership in the Church and in the wider society. They initiated theological reflection in different cultural contexts, with an edifying measure of self-criticism, that laid the foundation of today's missiological thinking. The self-understanding of many communities in Asia and Africa has been assisted by missionaries in different periods of history.

In a world of disastrously confusing changes and of radical overthrowing of systems of thought and organization, in periods of cultural dissolution, the Church has often provided a **new rallying point**, a centre of reference, a unifying vision, a sense of direction, and created a healing and restoring atmosphere. It has diligently **preserved and strengthened values of permanent validity** in different communities. Just as the Greek and Roman civilizations that had resisted the Church survived only through the timely intervention of the Church, the values of modernity, postmodernity

or many sacred values present in our great communities will be handed on to the next generation only through Christian effort.

16. Where Does the Church Stand Today?

As tribal Arabs expanded into Mesopotamia and the entire area of West Asia under the Islamic flag, it was Hellenized Christian teachers that introduced them to the civilizations of the ancients, the accumulated wisdom of the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians; to philosophies and artistic skills of the Greeks. With that a sort of cultural transformation did take place in the entire Islamic world. Well equipped with these treasures of the ancient world, Arab scholars came to Spain to set up centres of learning that were to influence the entire intellectual development of the western world.

The same sense of respect for ancient civilizations and traditional cultures binds the Church in India today as we are busy with our work of evangelization. We ought to stand more with our own cultures than with various imports no matter how valuable they are, while encouraging and dialoguing with every one of them. In fact, we ought to respect our Hindutva friends to the extent they are eager to be the guardians of our civilizational strengths: religiosity, community cohesion, family values, attachment to traditions, admiration for renunciation, respect for elders, modesty, respect for life, commitment to service, and others. There are similar values treasured in the bosom of dalit and tribal communities with which we work.

The distance of a liturgical provision or rubric from our indigenous culture is not the biggest problem as many think, the problem on the contrary is that much of the training of our **intellectuals**, including clergy, religious and lay people, **stands between two worlds**. We need not go excessively on the defensive because our Hindutva critics keep saying that we are too westernized. They themselves will admit that most Indian intellectuals, ideologues of the right or the left are more westernized than 90% of our Catholics

who live in the villages, are struggling for their very existence, and generally belong to the deprived groups. Indian middle class as a whole, and the upwardly mobile element in our society, no matter what religion they belong to, are more westernized in their practical vision of life, value systems, living styles, consumer habits and many other aspects of life, than our dalit and tribal Catholics who are hardly aware of other possibilities than they have inherited.

But there is a section in our community, and this will include the clergy and the religious, who have studied abroad, whose reading references are more international than national, who are not near enough to the local communities, who have not sufficiently reflected with the thinking element in indigenous groups, who interact more often internationally than with the local cultural leaders, who often serve for periods of time in Western countries, the members of whose congregation are abroad in large numbers, who fight for Asian causes in a non-Asian way, whose **cultural rootedness has become weak...**, in their case the accusation of the VHP may be true. So let me proceed on to the second section of this paper.

Developing a Sense of Responsibility in Dealing with Culture

Entering into the world of culture we are stepping into sacred grounds. We are moving into intimacy zones of a community to which it allows admission only on a selective basis. Only to those who vibrate with the community are given access to the inner chambers of its cultural identity. Not every do-gooder, social activist or evangelical crusader is necessarily a welcome candidate. If he goes against the grain of the community, all his exertions will be wasted or their effectiveness greatly reduced. It is not the volume of cultural change that he introduces, small or great, that he needs to pay attention to be successful; but the dexterity, delicacy, the psycho-social perception and sensitivity with which he deals with individuals and communities, that **undefinable skill for**

understanding and dealing with cultural realities that makes him a wizard in culturally diverse communities, whether his/her services be in the field of education, health care, social work or evangelization. He/she addresses, debates with the soul of a community as it were, understands its inner genius, interprets its collective mind, builds on the resources of its hidden strengths.¹⁰ And even when he guides it in new directions, it is in the way of assistance to self-direction, help towards free choice. It is given in the form of encouragement, soft prompting, a whisper, persuasion. Even if at times it is strongly worded, it elicits compliance and evokes acceptance.

Here is where we need to realize the **importance of self-criticism as innovators** (whether we are there as educators, health workers, social activists, or evangelizers) when we introduce changes that affect individual human lives and human society as a whole. We can do harm to others even when we mean well, becoming justice-fighters, propagators of modern values, and evangelical crusaders...hurting cultures and sentiments, alienating communities. **Culturally sensitive presentation of the Gospel** has nothing to do with self-righteous denunciation of the other, even in the cause of justice, but with **drawing forth the dormant good (untapped potential for good)** of the person(s) and the community to whom the message is addressed. Notice how Herod liked to listen to John the Baptist (Mk 6:20), an arch-denouncer, because his words resonated with his own spiritual hunger. That was why crowds too flocked to him. It would seem that Patrick, Boniface, Xavier, Lievens, and other great personalities in mission history addressed the Gospel to the soul of the community, not merely to its individual members, in a way that made meaning.¹¹ Though it is not given to everyone to grow into such uniquely charismatic personalities, we can learn something from them and avoid certain mistakes. Let me highlight a few things that could easily be done.

1. I generally prefer to speak of 'cultures in the context of sharing the Gospel' than merely of 'Inculturation,' which seems to mean all things

to all men. However, it has become an accepted word, and we are compelled to use it with the possibility of diverse understanding. To be precise, we are enculturated into a culture after birth, and acculturated to another culture by adoption. Inculturation is something different. It is not merely the insertion of a few *aratis* and dances into liturgy, or insistence on the 12 or 20 point programme we have in mind, but a **perspective** we take which influences our entire way of understanding, thinking, behaving; it is a **deep insight about a community's ways of living, relating, organizing** and celebrating. It is a way of responding to the Spirit of God who is alive and active in cultures.

Inculturation begins when the Gospel discovers itself in a culture, accepting the face of God already present, and rejecting those that do not correspond to the God of our faith (Magesa, 144). It is a way of discovering God in a community, in a culture and in the whole of humanity. If the Gospel does not touch the innermost depth of local cultures, the planting of the Church among them may look like religious colonization.

2. At the first stage of evangelization, inculturation implies offering the Gospel to a community and a culture in such a way that the **Gospel becomes intelligible and acceptable**, and that the culture can grow with all its values in keeping with the Gospel. The evangelizer tries to draw elements from the local culture that help the effective communication of the message. He/she uses local categories of thought and expression, and initiate inculturation. If he is close to the people and remains attentive to them, he can be eminently successful. However, missionaries can only take the first steps and set in motion the process. They listen, stimulate and canalize. In the same way, the local leaders (theologians, cultural experts) can only assist, not take over the inculturation process independently. They may stir, interpret and refine the creativity of the community.
3. **The community, on the contrary, evaluates, accepts, rejects, assimilates, transforms and works out a synthesis**, an authentic symbiosis—this is inculturation. A hasty style of acculturation may lead to mere juxtaposition of unassimilated cultural expressions, leading to syncretism and an illegitimate symbiosis harmful to Christian meaning. Only when the Christian meaning is integrated, true inculturation takes place. If not organically integrated, the unassimilated elements will search for curious new expressions (Shorter, *Evangelization and Cultures*, 1994:46). The more a Christian community becomes indigenized, the more it becomes open to the Universal Church. A closed-minded

attitude can bring into existence culture-bound Churches, that cannot understand and relate with each other.

4. The expert in the area of culture is not necessarily the one who has done a course of studies in a specific culture, nor a theologian or a member of the special committee appointed to spearhead inculturation in the diocese. It is the community, including the uneducated and the illiterate. It is in them that a culture is vibrant. Inculturation that is excessively 'clerical' (*Jyoti Sahi*) is bound to meet with some difficulties. In matters of theology, theologians may be experts. **But in matters of culture, it is the community's sensibility that is decisive.** I am referring to the entire community, particularly those who are sensitive to the cultural processes within the community. Poets, artists, and other similar sensitive cultural leaders have the freedom to break new ground and take the community forward, not because they know everything about their culture, but because they have vibrated with their community and have interpreted the genius of the community with amazing success.
5. To begin with, we need to understand **culture as an organic whole**. It is the inadequate understanding of this reality that leads inculturation-promoters to encourage the instinct that has been described as 'kleptomania' (*Jyoti Sahi*). Pilfering individual cultural elements from other religious traditions without reference to their cultural meanings and contexts can be extremely confusing, even hurtful. Global commerce has gone for such curiosities, e.g., placing a Krishna figure for promoting sales, or using the Tibetan prayer-flags as decorations. Adherents to the concerned culture or religion may understand it as an assault on their identity, individuality, and sacred meaning. The Christian community may feel deceived, alienated or humiliated. If the elements borrowed are from a religious community that has been dominating them or hostile to them, the negative feelings can be stronger.
6. What is most important of all is to cultivate a cultural sensitivity, give attention to the '**ethos,**' value systems, religious perceptions, inner orientations, collective perspectives, worldview of the community to which you like to come close or address the Gospel. How skilful a missionary becomes when he/she is able to interpret the religious psychology of his/her people and approaches his/her missionary work accordingly! Once this has been achieved, approximating of the lifestyles, organizational patterns, worshipping modes, education

methods, would normally follow, with spontaneous expressions of the inner dispositions mentioned above.

7. In the case of inculturation of faith-related matters, it is the **believing community** that provides the thermometer. Members of the believing community are not merely uncatechized people to be educated, but it is in them that the collective unconscious of the community operative and it is with them that the 'expert' will find it easy to interpret the suitability or unsuitability of a particular innovation. Successful inculturation should create security, not tension; enhance identity, not cause alienation; create social harmony not disaffection; provide a sense of purpose and direction not theological deviation and irresponsible leap into the dark. Theologians and other experts can certainly initiate or help, if they are close to the people and sensitive to culture.
8. **Culture-related mistakes** can be of different kinds. The most common one for a missionary is to look at others through his own cultural glasses and impose his own cultural views on other communities. Another mistake is to press the dominant culture (the Sanskrit culture) on to minorities or unsanskritised people, like dalits and tribals. There are too many missionaries who are carriers of Brahminic cultural loads to people who have never been exposed to Sanskritization. The damage they cause can be ruinous. A third mistake is to carry the cultural habits of the community with which one worked earlier to others.

The tragedy is that such mistakes continue to take place in seminaries and houses of formation, formators imposing the dominant community's views, tastes and spiritualities on smaller ethnic groups, promoting one form of Indianisation on others whose psyches revolt, persecuting community-oriented persons with self-scrutinies and inward journey to the point of a breakdown, trivializing or ridiculing unfamiliar cultural practices of another community.

9. Living and working together becomes easy when we learn to **respect differences**. Some cultures insist on being frank, others on being respectful. Some take pride in being outspoken, others on not being offensive. Some believe in prompt action, others favour a well thought out and planned involvement. The way of showing respect to elders, familiarity with colleagues, difference of opinion with opponents, relationship with women, joy, dissent and anger, differs from one culture to another. Persons from cultures that insist on self-assertion and on being specific, would be bewildered working among people

whose discussions seem to be elusive and unclear, euphemistic and suggestive. But accommodating to others' culture is always most rewarding.

10. Never threaten the **selfhood of communities**. That is the most precious treasure they have...their individuality, their self-pride, their unique heritage. It is important to show absolute respect to this selfhood. If anything we do appears like a threat to the selfhood of a community, resistance is inevitable. However, what stands at the heart of this selfhood is not easy to define. Is it ethnicity, culture, language, lifestyle, cuisine, philosophy, or religious system? At a given time what looks like a minor thing in its life and culture may be chosen by the community as a symbol of its identity, e.g., a turban, a scarf, a language script. Samuel Huntington considered English language as most central to the American selfhood. The American dream can be dreamt only in English, he said.¹² That is why nearness to the community is important. They know best.

11. In recent years, a manifestation of exaggerated forms of religious affirmation has become a powerful way of reasserting a community's loyalty to its cultural values which it feels are under threat. So, the new phenomenon which is inaccurately called '**religious fundamentalism**' is a **conservative reaction to cultural change**, appealing to original sources and experiences in an oversimplified and literal way.¹³ Sometimes this trend is combined with an eagerness for self-marginalization from the rest of the world.

When hard times come for a society, it looks back to its real or imagined Golden age, and seeks to revive it. The Jews looked back to the time of David and Solomon, the Romans to the republican period, the English to the Anglo-Saxon era, the Slavophiles to 'Old Russia,' the Hindus to the Vedic age. Nationalists reconstruct the past, recast it, give it a new destiny, and engage in a selective presentation of the past omitting unworthy episodes.¹⁴

While studying carefully such shapes and forms of cultural and religious 'fundamentalisms,' we are tempted to be judgemental. What I would suggest, on the contrary, is '**respectful curiosity**,' meaning that we should remain 'diligent learners' of the psychological significance of what they say so that we can understand and be helpful. Despite all their exaggerations, we certainly have something to learn from their cultural (over-) sensitiveness.

12. If the test-tube production of inculturated expressions of faith is most unwise, even more unwise it would be to rush to introduce totally

unfamiliar cultural elements into the sacred area of worship and religious symbolism. **Graduality** has a special significance in proposing cultural changes. We cannot impose on communities that have distanced themselves from the society of their origin 400 or 2000 years ago, ancient forms of art, religious symbolism and social organization without provoking a reaction. Would one make of a liturgical setting an archaeological museum by picking up bits and pieces from the Ashokan, Kanishkan, Jain, Pallavan, and Persian art at random, or even from diverse regional art like the Kashmiri, Punjabi, Khasi, Konyak, Meitei, Nepali, South Indian dalit and North Indian Brahminic? No matter how beautiful individual elements from these distinct cultures may be, it would not be easy to bring harmony to such diverse material all at once.

Any reinsertion of a community back into its society of origin, even when it is considered beneficial, has to be gradual when the distance to be covered is great. After all, the society itself has moved forward, and the Christian community has created a **sub-culture of its own** within the larger society. In Asian societies such things have been taking place all the time and the individuality of each has found separate recognition over a period of time. The emergence, re-emergence and gradual re-immersion of sub-cultures is a theme of infinite interest for the anthropologist.¹⁵ All that an evangelizer/inculturator can do is to walk with the community, being with it both in its certainties and search, both in its confident self-expressions and its unintegrated explorations. If we admit that a culture is an organic whole, we will be hesitant to use unintegrated elements in haste. The evangelizer who has developed the undefined sense of being able to perceive the configurations of this identity, and takes care not only not to hurt this selfhood, but orients all his work for the **promotion of the same selfhood value-systems by the power of the Gospel**, achieves unbelievably great things.

13. Civilizations and cultures are usually studied from classical texts, the writing of scholars and interaction with intellectuals. This method has its own limitations: It does not give sufficient attention to the contemporary problems of the immediate situation. Cultures are in constant evolution. And unfortunately not many pastors are gifted in observing and reflecting on the contemporary psycho-social reality of the immediate community they are serving. Written studies may have become outdated, or may have remained too generic and distant from the prevailing situation to be relevant and useful, or they may be one-

sided to be of help. That is where it is important not to go only by written texts or scholarly expositions, but to take pains to **analyze living cultures** and pay attention to the **immediate psycho-social setting** of a community.

14. Evangelizing in the multi-cultural urban society has become very complicated. But the urban society in Asia has certain characteristics that make matters easier. Most communities migrating into cities or industrial complexes within the Asian continent or beyond show their eagerness to retain their individualities, hold on to their network of family and ethnic relationships, and are slow to compromise on their cultural and religious values. Even if one generation seems eager to play low their identity and integrate with the host society, the next generation begins to reassert its original cultural identity, study again and reclaim its heritage and its patrimony. Those missionaries who develop the skills to deal with the members of different communities with specific **attention to their individuality**, cultural uniqueness, and distinct character traits become wonder-workers.

15. 'Evangelization of cultures' is not directed towards lifeless cultures, but to living human persons and communities. The Dominican preacher, Lacordaire, once said, "I have not, perhaps, converted anyone, that is true. But I have converted public opinion - that is everyone."¹⁶ What 'evangelization of cultures' really means is the evangelization of the collective consciences of societies. It is not enough to limit ourselves to influencing society through the generation of ideas. Even more important is to effect a revolution in values, sentiments and mentalities. Evangelization of cultures should go to the roots, not remain on the surface (Gallagher, 50).

As a matter of strategy, it is good for a missionary not to sit in judgement over the social evils in the community he serves; on the contrary, to evoke thought and **draw forth self-criticism** and eagerness for self-correction in the community by the power of the Gospel. Historically the Gospel has always brought regeneration to cultures, changing mentalities and lifestyles.

16. The Gospel has a responsibility towards all peoples and cultures. It awakens people to the processes of cultural impoverishment and dehumanization that unfortunately go with the present form of modernization. It helps them to discover what is valuable in their own cultures and build on them, and to correct what is negative in their tradition.¹⁷ Rene Girard spoke of a '**conversion of culture**,' a healing of culture that comes through exposure to the Gospel.¹⁸

17. The Gospel must come into marriage and family, trade and commerce, arts and professions, politics and government, culture and national and international relations. The Gospel must be so appropriated that it influences the community's **collective thinking and doing** (ethos), typical behavioural patterns, dominant values and major interests, habits, customs, scale of values, and codes of conduct (Carrier, 87). There are other areas that call for evangelical attention as well: modes of education, styles of work, relationship with nature, religious customs, rites and celebrations. In fact, the evangelization of culture gives rise to a spiritual upsurge.

Conclusion

The greater the Christian zeal, the greater the respect for others, a respect that cultivates culture sensitivity. . . makes us more human, more attentive to individual and the selfhood of communities.

Conversion, when it is truly an **enhancement of the collective self** of a community and **enrichment of its value-system**, while ridding it of all its weaknesses, contributes to the growth of a people and the evolution of human society to further greatness. From the point of view of faith, it places people on their path to their **eternal destiny**.

Notes

¹Even Mahatma Gandhi, for all his universal outlook, remained inconsistent when he referred to the matter of conversion, sometimes affirming that a genuine conversion was legitimate, at other times showing great hesitation in accepting any conversion as really genuine, always manifesting a great sense of pain when any one seemed to leave the Hindu fold. He was inconsolable when his son for a while declared himself a Christian. Though he never said it in so many words, every conversion for him was like a humiliating denial of one's identity. He kept criticizing missionaries, missionary styles, and missionary mistakes. He rarely corrected himself even when it was pointed out to him with clear evidence that the negative report he received about a particular missionary's activity was incorrect. But in all fairness it must be admitted that he admired the services of missionaries, enjoyed their company, dialogued with them and appreciated

the support they gave to his cause. His early learnings about Christianity in London, which was mostly from groups that were marginal to the mainline churches, accompanied him all through his life. Though unconcerned about specific Christian doctrines, he had certain insights into the essentials of the Christian Faith that would amaze many a born Christian.

²Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 129.

³While it is recognized that Hinduism is tolerant of diversity of beliefs, Brahminic orthodoxy has always been most intolerant of people who refused to accommodate to their social system, *varna-ashrama-dharma*. The VHP leaders know that the Muslims and Christians are unassimilable into their caste system. Hence the Hindutva anger against these minorities. The much acclaimed Hindu tolerance of the Parsis, Muslims, Jews and Christians on the west coast needs to be understood in its own historical and geographical context. Like Taxila in the northwest, the west coast developed several centres of intense commercial activity. The Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Egyptians, Byzantines and Arabs kept visiting the ports of the west coast. Brahminic orthodoxy looked down on the coastal chiefs and their subordinates who traded with these visitors and did not give much importance to caste rules and prohibitions.

These coastal towns were peripheral to *Aryavarta* and were ruled by tribal chiefs of non-Aryan origin, who were defiant of both Brahminic orthodoxy and Aryanized *Kshatriya* ruled and controlled mainland India and highland *Deccan*. Such coastal potentates gave more importance to the economic prosperity which these outside settlers with their skill in commerce and distant connections ensured than to Brahminic rules. In fact, they were happy to defy Brahminic orthodoxy. If therefore the Jews, Parsis or Christians thrived on the west coast, the credit goes to heterodox local rulers like Cheraman Perumal than to orthodox Hindu tolerance. The fact that the *maharajahs* of Travancore and Cochin, who in particular were patrons of trading communities like the Jews, Christians and Arabs, followed the matriarchal system of succession gives ample proof of their non-Brahminic origins. Such rulers were determined and happy to flout Brahminic patriarchal traditions and their orthodoxy.

What we know for certain is that on the mainland even the most formidable invaders like the Huns had to bow to Brahminic orthodoxy, be sucked into the caste hierarchy and lose their identity lest they should be considered contemptible *mlecchas*. They intermarried with local tribals and emerged as

Rajputs. In the heart of *Aryavarta* no one who did not accommodate to Brahminism survived.

⁴Thapar, p. 67.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 63, 65, 244, 260, 293, 325, 341, 422, 455.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷In the present Christian traditions one may notice traces of the various cultures that the Church encountered in its long history, e.g., Jewish, Hellenic, Roman, Germanic, Celtic, Asiatic, Byzantine, Syrian, Egyptian, and Arab.

⁸Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, London: Darton-Longman-Todd, 2003, p. 107.

⁹It was a 'wry paradox' that, while the Church was being persecuted by the agents of modernity in the home-countries of missionaries, the same missionaries became unconscious carriers of modernity to the Third World—a culture that absolutizes possessions, power prestige and pride (Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* 53). Hiebert says missionaries taught secular sciences in schools and secularized the students (Paul G Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1999, p.114). Missionaries became active propagators of democracy, industry, education, enlightenment, civilization, human rights, and they 'proselytized' for these causes. According to Kenyatta, the missionaries undermined the sense of community and the moral authority linked with it; they imposed their religion of individualism (Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, London: Marshall Pickering, 1993, p.156). On the contrary, missionaries who could fuse religion, society and politics received spontaneous recognition from Africans (Sanneh, 1993:158).

¹⁰Dr. Radhakrishnan claims that the early Aryans displayed a rare and high degree of sensitivity to the psychology of the conquered people in their attempts to civilize them.

¹¹Conversion of Ireland was a miracle. Patrick seemed to have touched the soul of the Irishmen, stirred their Celtic genius, and tapped the resources of their culture that gave importance to asceticism, monasticism and love for nature (Marcus Tanner, *The Last of the Celts*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, p.7). Irish monks dominated the missionary endeavour in Europe for four centuries from the conversion of their people and assisted the spread of learning (Derek Wilson, *Charlemagne*, New York: Vintage Books, 2005, p.17). The Church itself was enriched by Celtic spirituality and

the Irish evangelistic spirit. Boniface did something similar for the Germanic tribes.

¹²Samuel P. Huntington, *Who are We?*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, p. 256.

¹³Aylard Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, p. 41.

¹⁴Henry Harris, *Identity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 142.

¹⁵The appearance of Buddhism on the Eastern horizon, its gradual submersion into the Hindu fold, its reappearance due to Ambedkar's initiative, the existence of communities on the Himalayan borders half-way between the two great faiths... these are all interesting matters for research and study.

¹⁶Herve Carrier, *Evangelizing the Culture of Modernity*, New York: Orbis Books, 1993, 145.

¹⁷Aylard Shorter, *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*, p.262.

¹⁸Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, p. 39. Our present form of individual approach to evangelization has proved inadequate in the context of the general rejection of the Gospel by entire societies. The Church should draw close to those in society who wield greater influence within the context of a particular culture. It is in this way that the entire society is addressed. John Paul II kept meeting people of culture, artists, intellectuals, educators, media men (Gallagher, 55). The fact is that we seldom live by ideas and ideologies, but by images of life prevailing in the world around. That is why culture is central to the mission of evangelization, and 'cultural disbelief' is damaging (Gallagher, 7). We must identify dominant cultural patterns and hold them up for both analysis and criticism. That prepares the ground for education for values (Carrier, 61-62).