

CHRISTOLOGY AND ASIAN HERMENEUTICS

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Professor Sebastian Athappilly, CMI is making a sincere and serious search for interpreting Jesus Christ, the unique and universal Saviour of the world. The author invites the readers to think about the arguments and counterarguments concerning the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Theologically, Dr Athappilly concludes, Christian faith is a way more than a religion. It is a "new way" of being the people of God, with a New Testament, and a new law, with the instruction to become a new being. The article equally underscores the aspect of institutionalised way that leads us to Jesus Christ. Meditatively, the author takes us to the Jesus of the "Asian Horizons," the Sun that enlightens all making them into really enlightened ones and leading them to perfect union with God.

1. Need of Interpretation

Interpretation is the soul of communication. It is the key to the message *intended* (by the sender) or/and understood (by the receiver). While interpretation can enhance the original message, it can also distort it. Hence, the need of authentic interpretation. This is especially applicable in the case of Sacred Scripture. St Peter insists "that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Pt 1:20). The many divisions and discordant voices in the Church are consequences of individual interpretations, without recourse to the official and authentic interpretations of the Church (*Magisterium*). St Paul writes that "one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret" (1 Cor 14:13). In fact, everything we see, think and do is based on the interpretation we make or receive. And whatever we say and do, will be interpreted by others in different ways and with different mind-sets. All interpretation is coloured or determined by the background experiences of the interpreter as well as his expectations. This does not do away with the truth of the item in question. Can something

be interpreted differently? Of course, for there are various personal as well as collective experiences and cultures that work as the matrix for the interpreting subjects. The need of interpretation arises not merely based on physical features such as land and continent, but is based even more on the ideological landscape and firmament. An atheist or a materialist, whether in Asia or Europe, will have an entirely different way of looking at and understanding things as opposed to his compatriot, who believes in God. Even within the same cultural background and thought pattern there could be various interpretations depending on the angles and perspectives of one's own sight and the shades of light illumining the object. Besides personal interpretation, there is also the need of other interpreters, who can help us get to the right message and the appropriate action. All this is applicable not only to things and objects, but all the more to persons, texts, and events. In such cases the horizon and the formal object play a crucial role.

Any history is therefore interpreted "story" and there is no pure or mere story either. Even with regard to the "mere" happenings in the world of nature there is an element of interpretation. If this is so, the events in the world of personal freedom are all the more encoded by interpretation. In the movement of the search for the historical Jesus we come across two German terms to differentiate between *Historie* referring to mere chronicle-like reporting, and *Geschichte* referring to interpreted events. In this sense there is the difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith (interpretation). Another way of articulating this same idea is by speaking of the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic (proclaimed) Christ. Even the phrase Jesus Christ is the result of an interpretation, namely, Jesus of Nazareth is the *Christ* of God. The Gospels are not merely neutral biographical accounts of Jesus, but personal and communitarian **interpretations** in the light of faith under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2. Plurality of Christ Interpretations

When we speak of faith in Christ and Christology, we come across a number of varied interpretations even in the New Testament,

although all of them articulate basically one and the same basic truth that in Jesus of Nazareth we have the ultimate answer of God to the question of what the human being is and has. The early Church interpreted and expressed her faith in Semitic categories against the background of the Old Testament experiences of faith: Covenant, Exodus and hope in the kingly reign of God to be ushered in by the promised and expected Messiah. Interpretation allows also internal or organic **development** that does not represent an aberration or deviation from the original datum; on the contrary, only by interpretation the truth is preserved and faithfully transmitted. The definition of the Council of Nicaea (325) was, for instance, needed to articulate the authentic and original Christian faith at the time of the Arian controversy. Mere repetition of terms would have only damaged the faith and would have been a disservice to the Church.

It is a fact that Jesus of Nazareth was an Asiatic and that Christianity developed in Asia. In that case, what is the need and relevance of an *Asian* hermeneutics for the Asians? After the period of the great Christological Councils from the end of the fifth century, the Christological discussions all over the world followed a uniform pattern along the Western style of thinking. There is now a growing awareness of the need for an Eastern or Asian way of doing Christology at least as a complement to this, if not as an absolute substitution. The contemporary situation of the Asian masses has become very different from the Western world, and also from the erstwhile Asian situation. One of the obstacles in the way of preaching Christ to the majority of Asians is the lack of a suitable Asian hermeneutics¹ in Christology.

As A. Alangaram² rightly observes, context plays a vital role in the interpretation of Jesus, his work and message. The Asian context is characterized by poverty, illiteracy, socio-political injustice, corrupt and oppressive structures, and a plurality of religions and cultures. Of these, many items are common also to the African and South American contexts. The singularly Asian feature is the pluri-

religious and multicultural situation combined with poverty and oppression. To be more precise, it is not simply a matter of *plurality* of religions, but of being the birthplace and abode of many living religions of the world that characterizes Asia, and especially India. Christology under the *Asian Horizons* will look somewhat different from that under a different horizon, just as the skies look different viewed from the Asian horizons. (This is conspicuous with regard to the shape of the crescent: in Europe the crescent takes the shape of a vertical sickle, while in India it appears as a sickle, lying horizontally). A new hermeneutics in the Asian context is therefore needed. Theologians, hence, want to rediscover the Asian Jesus who spent his entire life healing, forgiving, and saving people.³

Ecclesia in Asia invites us to be courageous and creative. "The Church ... must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia" (EA 20). The "surprising ways" require creativity even at the risk of making errors. The Pontifical Biblical Commission says that "the risk of error does not constitute a valid objection against performing what is a necessary task: that of bringing the message of the Bible to the ears and hearts of the people of our time."⁴ As R.S. Sugirtharajah rightly observes, "The crucial hermeneutical question for Asians is not what the historical Jesus looked like but what he means for today."⁵ Whether in Asia or in Africa, we are all now aware of the need of a contextual exegesis and interpretation.⁶

3. Asian/Indian Christian Hermeneutics

There have been several attempts in India by Christians (natives as well as foreigners who settled in India or were interested in the theme), Hindus, and fresh converts to Christianity to interpret Christ to Asia by employing the traditional philosophical concepts and religious scriptures of Asia. We think here of the pioneering efforts made by Robert De Nobili, K. C. Sen, P.C. Mozoomdar, Brahmabandhab Upādhyāya, Sādhu Sundhar Singh, P. Chenchiah, A. J. Appasamy, and V. Chakkarai of the 19th century (all of them

tried to interpret Christ using the classical Indian philosophy of the high caste Hindus⁷) as well as those of Swami Abhishiktananda (Henry Le Saux), K. Klostermaier, D. S. Amalorpavadas, S. J. Samartha, R. Panikkar, A. Pieris, V. F. Vineeth, M. Amaladoss, F. Wilfred, P. D. Devanandan, and K. C. Abraham (to mention a few) of the 20th and 21st centuries. Recently there have also been attempts to employ the categories of the subaltern traditions and cultures of the tribal and primitive religions and of the religions of the outcaste Dalits in interpreting Christ to Asia. In addition to interpreting Christ's *person* some are engaged in interpreting his prophetic style and salvific *message*. Theology in Asia is regarded not primarily as a theoretical science, but a critical reflection on praxis. As the Latin American theologian of liberation G. Gutiérrez says, theology is only a 'second step' following the first act, which is active solidarity with the poor and the oppressed⁸. Thus we have the various interpretations of his liberating appeal and praxis in the specific fields of liberation of the poor, the Dalits, women, and nature. Indigenous theologies have thus emerged in India, Korea, and in the Philippines in the form of Dalit theology (India), third-eye theology (Korea: Choan-Sen Song), feminist theology, and eco-theology among others. Another general way of attempting to interpret Christ to Asia is being carried out by the theology of inculturation and triple dialogue (with the poor, the culture, and the religions) in terms of exposure-immersion and adaptation based on the paradigm of Incarnation and Baptism of Christ. The Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) speaks of a "pastoral cycle" with an Asian integral approach.⁹ Phan also discusses an "Asian multi-pronged hermeneutics"¹⁰ that urges three modes of interpretation as urgent in Asia: multi-faith, postcolonial, and people-based. According to Asian theologians an Asian hermeneutics is or has to be more complex than the traditional one, as it takes into account besides the interpretation of the *magisterium* (teaching office) of the universal Church (the Holy See), the "*magisterium*" of the local Churches and also of the poor (A. Pieris).

P. A. Sampathkumar¹¹ speaks of three categories of hermeneutic approaches in the post-independent India: looking back to India's past, looking at India's social problems, and the integrated Indian Christian reading. The first approach consists in attempting to reclaim ancient reading theories and methods of story telling. In this process the Greek and Hebrew symbols are transposed into Indian ones. Thus for instance, Sr. Vandana makes a link between the Prologue of St John's Gospel and the experience of the Upanishad. The "Aum" is described as *Brahman* as sound, the word spoken by the Absolute. Through this *Brahman* as sound, one reaches the soundless silent *Brahman*. To consolidate her view she cites a relevant text from the *Kathopanishad* II:15-17 that speaks of the word *aum* (Om). In the second approach one takes into consideration the actual problems of Indian society, focuses on Indian social concerns such as exploitation, caste discrimination, etc., and reads the Bible in the light of such experiences, aiming at structural and personal liberation. The third model reads the Bible both in the light of India's social problems and of religious traditions. Below we would like to mention some other aspects of Asian/Indian hermeneutics.

a) Interpretation by Life/Example

A significant Asian phenomenon is the importance of interpretation by life and witness rather than by text and teaching. Jesus Christ was himself the perfect hermeneut and exegete of God more by his being and life than by his teaching and preaching. Instead of simply preaching that God is love, he loved people and expounded God's mercy by forgiving sins. Asian hermeneutics has to follow a similar method. In matters of God and salvation, the Asians seek and appreciate realized persons of lived spirituality rather than specialized experts of theoretical knowledge. The varied activities of charity, education, and healing ministry are attempts at interpreting Christ to the people. The saints are concrete interpreters of Christ by life and example. Besides the interpretation of the many Christians by every day life we have also special and

heroic ways of interpretations. By dedicating her life for the poor and the abandoned, Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata interpreted Christ and his message in a way intelligible to all in Asia and outside, even to atheists. When Gladys Staines, the widow of the Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines, forgave the murderers of her husband and her two young sons,¹² she interpreted the message of Jesus in the language of life that could be easily and convincingly understood by everyone in India. Also the Hindus who came to solidarize with her and to protest against the heinous murder, gave a powerful witness of Christian interpretation by their example. Christians have to be in Asia hermeneuts of Christ by the example of their lives. It was the lack of such examples that scandalized Mahatma Gandhi and made him view the Church with suspicion. The image of Christian leadership and the way authority is practised in the Church also need a basic reinterpretation in Asia in terms of spiritual service, so that Christ can be rightly perceived by the Asian peoples as the spiritual leader and herald of the reign of God.

b) Interpretation by Worship

Salvific mysteries are interpreted by liturgical celebration. This happens in Asia by means of the various festivals as well as rituals. Christ and his mystery is interpreted in Asia/India through the liturgical celebrations in the church. In India this happens by means of the three Rites (Latin Rite and two Oriental Rites) that have been assimilated to a great extent to the life and culture of the faithful. Efforts and experiments are, however, under way to make the liturgies more integrated and inculturated through organic development, preserving the original genius of each Rite. The Catholic understanding of the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist combines in one both the aspects of the Indian tradition of *pūja* (offering followed by flowers and prayers) and *yajña, yāga, bali* (sacrifice). **c) Interpretation by Translation/Language**

Interpretation by life is a vivid way of translating the message. Another important way of translation is by language. Language

plays a vital role in the life and culture of a people. An Asian or Indian interpretation of Christ is thus closely dependent on Asian terminologies in Scripture and theology. As has already been hinted at above, as the Holy Eucharist is for us not merely a *pūja* but more a sacrifice, the translation *pūja* for the Holy Mass will not fully reflect the inner meaning. The Syrian Rite Christians use the word *qurbāna* (oblation, sacrifice), a word adopted from the Aramaic. They use also the Indian words *bali* as well as *yāgam* to denote it.

As another example we may consider the term "Incarnation." The approximate Indian (Hindu) equivalent is *avatāra* that denotes the descent (crossing over) of Lord Vishnu into the world, seemingly assuming different (human as well as subhuman) forms. To distinguish it from the implied docetistic understanding (of a seeming appearance of the deity), Christ has to be presented as the **real** *avatāra* in the form of man. The term *manushyāvatāram* (in the vernacular Malayalam) does not in itself contain this idea of a real coming down; it only means that the Logos came down as man. It does not convey the meaning of incarnation as "enfleshing" of the Logos either. To say that the Word became "flesh" (the equivalent of the Greek term *sarx*), can sound strange to the Asians. As long as we are not able to coin a new term for the intended message, we will have to use the mentioned terms with the limitations attached to them. For the Indians it is intelligible to say that God the personal Lord (*Īswara*) took on and appropriated human nature in name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) as Jesus.

A further example is the word for "heaven." It is translated sometimes as *swarga* and at times as *mōksha*. Heaven as the **final** stage of salvation corresponds, however, more aptly to the word *mōksha*, the status of final liberation (*mukti*) from the cycle of rebirths, than to *swarga*, the place where the gods dwell but is still not the stage of final liberation. At the same time, if we do not see salvation in terms of liberation (alone), but in terms of a situation where God is, or in terms of the reign of God, then *swarga* presents

itself as the better choice than *mōksha*. In view of the double aspect of salvation we may use both the terms interchangeably for want of a better and more comprehensive term. As the Christian understanding of liberation is not the same as the Hindu understanding of it, namely, as liberation from *samsāra*, the cycle of births and rebirths, the term *mōksha* would need a Christian reinterpretation.

d) Interpretation by *Dhvani*

An important method of Asian/Indian Biblical hermeneutics is the *dhvani* method, by listening to the *dhvani* (tone, voice, meaning) that resounds within the text. It is a hint or a silent suggestion; it works through evocation rather than implication.¹³ The method of *dhvani* is described as the use of language that "takes the reader to a *depth-meaning which is experienceable [sic] but not expressible*."¹⁴ The parables of Jesus are good illustrations of such a method. We can find the use of *dhvani* in many instances in the New Testament.¹⁵ A brief and simple example would be the passage in Mt 2:12 that speaks of the wise men from the East leaving for their own country by "another road." There is here the *dhvani* that they went home as new and different persons; this evokes the message that anyone who encounters and experiences Jesus has to leave the old lifestyle and adopt a new way of life with new vision and value system.

e) Interpretation by Art and Literature

In Asia/India art and literature are used as a powerful and easily understandable way of interpretation of the transcendent. The numerous artistic works (sculptures and paintings) in the Indian temples as well as the various literary and art forms, such as music, dance, play, *kathakali*, etc., bear witness to the Asian way of interpretation. Several Christ-interpretations have been created in India. To mention some of these ingenious works, we have the contributions in poetry by Kattakayam and the *Kristusahasranāmam* (the hymn of thousand names of Christ) by I. C. Chacko; paintings of Jyothi Sahi, Sr Genevieve, Sr Claire, and S. Dhanapal; dance

presentations of Francis Barbosa and Charles Vaz;; lyrics of Fr Abel; Karnatic music by Fr P. Poovathingal; song, dance, and drama of P. Solomon Raj; and sculptures and paintings of Joy Elankunnapuzha. The National Biblical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Centre at Bangalore is a prominent Catholic institution that promotes Indian arts in interpreting Christ to India, as well as the Gyan Ashram, Mumbai, founded by Fr George Proksch, SVD.

e) Interpretation by Ashram-Life and Inter-religious Centres

As India is famous for spiritual life centres called ashrams, many attempts are being made to interpret Christ to the Indians through an ashram way of life. We have thus, to mention some of them, the *Saccidananda* Ashram of Swami Parama-Arubi-Ananda (J. Monchanin) and Swami Abhishiktananda (H. Le Saux), (and B. Griffiths) at Shānthivanam; of Francis Acharya at Kurisumala; Anjali Asharm founded by S. Amalorpavadas at Mysore; *Sameeksha* of S. Painadath at Kalady; and Vidya Vanam Ashram of V. F. Vineeth in Bangalore. Besides, there are also centres of inter-religious dialogue, where Christ-interpretation is carried out in the context of praying and dialoguing with the adherents of other religions.

4. Different Kinds of Experiences

Experiences are the co-relational points of reference of interpretation. This is especially applicable to experiences of salvation, at the collective-communitarian level as well as at the individual-personal level. These experiences are in turn at three levels: at the levels of memory, expectation and realization, corresponding respectively to the past, future-futuristic, and the present. The people of Israel longed for God's liberation (until the Exodus), and after that they hoped for similar interventions again in the future. In the Christian understanding we speak of Christ who has already come as the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise and expectation, and as the one who is expected to come again with final salvation. Here we do not focus on the "already

and not yet" dimension of salvation, but rather on the future and futuristic aspects of expectation.

Once salvation has been experienced, the consequent interpretation takes on the aspect of proclamation and of an appeal: proclamation of the great experience as celebration of joy, praise and thanksgiving on the one hand, and as information-sharing out of love on the other hand; and appeal as an invitation to others to experience the same salvation. The people of Israel, for instance, interpreted their Christ-experience in terms of their past experiences of liberation (Exodus). Thus Jesus is the mediator of the new Law and Covenant, the new Moses, one of the prophets, and also *the* eschatological prophet, the saviour, the Servant of the Lord, etc. In the light of their expectation of the future Messiah, they identified him as the Messiah and the Son of Man. Based on their experiences of the divinity of Jesus, they proclaimed him also as the Lord, Son of God, and even as God, although this could militate against the strict Jewish monotheism.

The background experiences of the people in terms of their collective memory of the past and by way of their expectations for the future also provide the syntax for the present proclamation of anyone who comes with the message of salvation. Jesus, for example, proclaimed the arrival of the kingly reign of God (Mk 1:15) precisely because the people were expecting it as a master symbol of salvation. He also alluded to the manna in the desert to present himself as the true Bread from heaven (Jn 6:31-35). The background experiences of memory can also be used as contrasting figures to bring to relief the new and liberating elements. Jesus would thus declare that all food is clean (Mk 7:20); forbid divorce, although Moses had allowed this provision (Mk 10:5-9); teach the love even of enemies (Mt 5:43-45); interpret the law of Sabbath differently (Mk 2:25-28, Mk 3:2-5); show fasting and prayer in a new light (Mt 6:5-18); support the disciples for not fasting (Mk 2:19-20), and forgive sins personally (Mk 2:5-10, Lk 7:48); express the law of

the love of neighbour as like that of the love of God (Mt 22:39), and even call God his own Father (Jn 5:18).

This means that experience of salvation need not perfectly conform to one's or a community's past experience and future expectation, but also **transcends and even contrasts** with them. One thing is, however, true: What God offers us as salvation, will fulfil us ultimately even though we may not understand it from our present human point of view. Precisely because of the contrasting or revolutionary ("scandalizing") element, many did not or would not accept Jesus as the expected Messiah! It need not be always in perfect conformity with the traditional ways that guarantees the success of any Christ-interpretation in any given culture; some instances may or have to be corrections as well as radicalizations of the original experience. Jesus taught us to love the enemies, pray for them, love one another as he himself loved us and even to die for them! The corrective and radicalizing element is especially evident in the case of the Sabbath observance (Sabbath is made for man, and not man for Sabbath!), and above all with regard to the Jewish concept of God as the **one**, who can be mediated by the law. As opposed to this, Jesus has brought us the fuller and radical revelation of the **triune** (communitarian) God, whom we can call Abba! Here we find a radicalization of Monotheism. We find in all these instances a certain transcending (going beyond) and exploding of the prevalent concepts for the sake of the authentic and original message.

5. Indian Experiences of Memory

In classical Hinduism the sacred scriptures are composed of the *Śruti* (what is heard) and *Smṛiti* (what is remembered or recollected). In ancient times, while doing their *tapasya* and *sādhana*, the great sages 'heard' the divine truths. Whatever was 'heard' was presented in the *Vēdās* and the *Upanishāds*. Thus they came to be known as the *Śruti* literature). Generally, the *Smṛiti* literature is based on the *Śruti*. The famous *Manu-Smṛiti* and other *Smṛitis* and *Śāstras* constitute the *Smṛiti* literature. They contain the guidelines

for ethics, moral obligations, social codes, customs etc. The great epics Mahabharata and Ramayana also belong to the *Smṛiti* literature.

As has been indicated above, the *Smṛiti* literature is concerned with 'that what is remembered.' The literature was based on the knowledge acquired through the experience or the tradition. This does not exactly correspond to the experiences of memory of a salvific event in history; there are no historical experiences in the religious landscape comparable with the history of the people of Israel. We have, however, in the *purāna* (legend) of the king Mahābali a myth of the remembrance-experience of a golden age of peace and prosperity. This "memory" is annually celebrated on the feast of *Ōnam* in the Indian State of Kerala. This expresses the longing of the Indian heart for a situation of peace, justice and prosperity rather than a nostalgic remembrance of a golden past. In this sense the "memory" turns out to be the expression of the inherent and latent search for salvation (a "searching soteriology"). In everyone's heart lurks the wish for peace, equality and well-being. But the present experiences contrast with this wish. This latent thirst for a future redemption/redeemer is articulated in different forms. It is specially to be noted that the human longing for salvation/redemption is for the most part linked with the expectation of an agent or **mediator** in history.

The *Avatāra* tradition, especially in the great epics Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana of the *Smṛiti* literature, also echoes the "memory" of the human experience of evil in the world and of the consequent longing for redemption and a redeemer, who would restore righteousness (*dharma*). This is, however, not so much related to a particular community as to the global societal situation. The idea of repeated *avatārās*, age by age (*sambhavāmi yugē yugē*), implies the "remembrance" of the experience of the continuous need of redemption and redeemer. According to Platonic philosophy, when one (finally) encounters a person or an instance as the fulfilment of what one has already been searching for, it becomes memory. In the

case of one's search for a redeemer, when one encounters and experiences Jesus Christ, one would say: "This is the one whom I have been searching for as the one who gives sense, meaning and assurance to my life, for in him I find forgiveness of my sins and assurance of eternal, immortal life." Here one "remembers" what one has been seeking for. The implied search of the Indian soul for a redeemer carries with it thus the potential element of "memory" that can be actualized in experiencing Jesus Christ as the one who fulfils the basic human search and aspirations. In this sense many Hindus accept Christ as one of the *avatārās*.

While the sacrifices in the Old Testament represented the need of peace, reconciliation, and expiation owing to human sin, the sacrifice (*yāga, yajna*) and homage offered at the Indian temples represent the need to appease the (angry) deities. They remind us of the experience of human dependence on a transcendent world of persons and powers. It is true that in the Indian rituals we do not find commemorative ceremonies of a historical deed of God nor its dynamic continuation as we have in the sacraments. The popular hymns and plays of the great epics and *purānās* mediate to the believers a sense of awe, devotion and thanksgiving to God or the gods for the great benefices done for humanity. People are reminded of God's friendliness towards humans and the power of the Lord's grace more than of any weapon. The epics *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* illustrate the final victory of truth and justice (*dharma*) with divine assistance. All these instances serve as imaginative remembrances of basic human truths in mythical forms.

6. Indian Experiences of Expectation

It is natural for humans to long for fulfilment and to expect it. The Asians in general and the people in India in particular have had such longings and expectations from time immemorial. At the same time we may not find a time of waiting for a definite saviour figure based on a historical promise. We may, however, presume that there has been among the Asian peoples a waiting on one or many "cosmo-theandric" (R. Panikkar) saviours based on a cosmic

revelation and transcendental promise. This corresponds to the universal salvific will (desire) of God, who wants all human beings to attain salvation (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). We may have only to bring them the “unknown God” or the unknown Saviour (Acts 17:23). Just as St Paul, we too may find in the words of the poets and sages of Asia the desire implanted in them by God for his salvation (cf. Acts 17:28). The Indian sages prayed for peace (*Śānti*), sin destroying light, and ever lasting life. The *Gāyatri Mantra*,¹⁶ the foremost *mantra* (verse) in Hinduism, as well as the numerous hymns for peace (*Śānti-Mantras*), especially the age-old prayer for truth and peace¹⁷ illustrate this. The first one is a prayer to God the Giver of Life, Remover of pain and sorrow, the Bestower of happiness, the Creator of the Universe for his “supreme sin-destroying light” and for guidance of “our intellect in the right direction”. The second one expresses the Indian longing for the Real, the Truth, the light, immortality, and for universal peace.

7. Indian Aspirations and Jesus Christ

The Indian longing for *Śānti* (peace), light, truth, and immortality has been fulfilled in the risen Christ; he gives us eternal life and lasting peace, not a peace that the world gives (Jn 14:27); he gives rest and fulfilment for our souls (Mt 11:28f.). The great Indian soul Gautama Buddha sought a solution to overcome suffering; his path was to annihilate all desire (*trshna*). Jesus taught us how to accept suffering for the sake of love and justice. He brought us salvation; he also entered bliss and glory, not by evading suffering, but by lovingly undergoing suffering as an act of supreme activity of obedience to the Father’s will! (Mk 14:36, Lk 23:46, Jn 19:30). Moreover, Jesus provided a **co-redemptive value** to our suffering¹⁸! Following him will turn our sorrow into joy (Jn 16:20) and no one will take our joy from us (Jn 16:22). The Indians thirst for liberation (*mukti*) from the chain of births and rebirths (*samsāra*). The resurrection Jesus promises is true liberation (*mukti*). He is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him, even though they die, will live (Jn 11:25). He is the bread of life; whoever comes

to him will never be hungry or thirsty, but will live forever (Jn 6:35.50.51). He can make us free (Jn 8:36). Union and harmony are basic concerns of the Indian spirit, and Jesus desires us all to be in full harmony with one another, with him, and with the Father (Jn 17:22-23). He is the true vine and we are all branches (Jn 15:1-5). We have to love one another (Jn 13:34-35).

The above considerations amply make it clear that Jesus fulfils the needs and aspirations of the Indian soul. What enables him to fulfil the Indian exigencies, which are also exigencies of human beings in general, is that he is **God** incarnate. The Indian tradition is familiar with the "incarnations" of God. The Indian concept of *Avatāras* (literally, the descents of God crossing over to our world below) allows frequent and many "incarnations" of Vishnu in various forms, including also subhuman forms (e.g., fish, tortoise, pig). This can be seen as incorporating also the subhuman **nature** into the salvific event. This could be understood in a Christian way, when we consider that the risen Lord commands the disciples to preach the gospel to the whole creation (cf. Mk 16:15), and St Paul speaks of the future glory and the present groaning of the whole creation for redemption (Rom 21-22). The Christian tradition speaks, however, of only one instance of the incarnation in the strict sense of the term. Is this actually an insurmountable obstacle to dialogue with the Indian genius? Not necessarily. The *Advaita* school of Śankara insists on the non-duality of Reality and admits only of one Being (*Sat*). The plurality of other beings is interpreted as the effect of *Māya*, the creative power (*sargaśakti*) of the one Being and as the consequence of illusion. At the phenomenal (*prātibhāsika*) level (of appearance) as well as at the practical or pragmatic (*vyāvahārika*) level there are the many beings, but at the deeper level of superior or ulterior truth (*pāramārthika* level) there is only one Reality, one Being. Applying this principle we could say that at the practical level we can admit of many "incarnations"; there is ultimately only one Incarnation, that is in Jesus of Nazareth. The various religious symbols and figures of different religions, and the many *avatāras*

mediate salvation and liberation to their adherents in their concrete historical contexts. This is made possible in the power of the Holy Spirit (the *Ātman*) of God the Father, the one Absolute Reality, who lets people participate in the effects of the Incarnation of his Son in Jesus the Christ. How he does this remains a mystery to us, as the Second Vatican Council states (GS 22). According to the Advaita philosophy of Śāṅkara there is the one Reality and the many "realities", the one Being and the many beings. We may also say that there is the one Incarnation or Mediator in Jesus Christ, and there are also the many incarnations and mediators of the other historical and particular histories of salvation.

8. Indian Images of Christ

Even within the Asian horizon there are the different particular horizons specific to each country. In this sense we can speak of an Indian horizon, Chinese horizon, Korean horizon, etc. In this article we would like to highlight the Asian hermeneutics with special emphasis on the Indian aspect of it. Just as Christ in the New Testament is seen as the fulfilment of the Old Testament Christology of the Semitic promise and expectation, we may view him as the fulfilment of the age-old prayers and waiting of the great seers (*Rshis*) of India.

While the Israelites were awaiting salvation in terms of the end-time kingly reign ("kingdom") of God, the Indian sages were eagerly longing and praying for Being (Reality), Light, Life (immortality), and Peace. And Jesus also answered their prayer, by coming as the true light that enlightens everyone (Jn 1:9), bringing the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68). He has come so that we may have life in abundance (Jn 10:10), he is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6); he leads us to God the Father, *the God (ho theòs), the Real (Sat), the Unoriginate Origin*. Above all, he fulfilled the desire of the Indian seekers by destroying death by his own death and resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is the stunning answer of God to the deep desire of the Indian sages and seers (*Rshis*), as also of every human being. Jesus Christ is the symbol of life, light, and

love. He reveals to us God's life, light, and love in person. His humanity serves also at the same time as something that veils all this. In him we have thus the curious phenomenon of concealment (*āvarana*) and revelation (*vikshēpa*). Precisely because of the concealing dimension of his humanity many did and could not believe in him. This indicates the need of light from above. Not flesh and blood, but the Father in heaven reveals the truth about Jesus (cf. Mt 16:17). Not through arguments and speculations do we attain faith in Jesus Christ; we receive it as God's gift and grace. Just as the origin of the Son is not ultimately "of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man" (Jn 1:13), but of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:20), so, too, 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" (Mt 11:27).

a) Jesus the Supreme Guru

According to the Indian understanding, everyone who seeks God and divine knowledge needs a Guru, who guides him to the hidden mysteries of God and salvation. The Guru is the one who discloses what is hidden. We read in the Gospel according to John: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son ... who has made him known" (Jn 1:18). As Jesus has come as the one who has revealed to us what he has seen in the Father, because he (the Son) is in the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:18) and the visible image of the invisible Father (Col 1:15), he is **the** Guru par excellence.¹⁹ This fits well with the concept of truth as understood in the Greek terminology of *aletheia*, which means unveiling, dis-closure, revelation. As the perfect revelation of God, Jesus is the perfect or primordial Guru. When he says that he is the truth, it means he is the Guru. The example of this Guru washing the disciples' feet is a striking feature of his lifestyle. He is the Servant (*dāsan*) of God and humans. His life was a living illustration of genuine service in humility. In this role he let himself be sacrificed for us. In this sense he is the *Ādipurusha*, the Primal Man of the Rgvēda, who was sacrificed, so that the world may originate. From him and from this sacrifice

came the world, the new world. This corresponds to what St Paul says about a new humanity born of Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 6:4).

b) Jesus the Loving Friend

Interpretation of Christ to India also has to take place against the negative cultural and societal background. The negative experiences of the people, their worries and fears, are indeed latent cries for a Saviour; they (these experiences) are hidden appeals for redemption. In this sense they constitute a searching Soteriology. Jesus wanted the people to interpret the time (Lk 12:54-56); we must interpret for our time Jesus Christ as the one who takes away all the worries and fears of those (Lk 12:22-33), who are like sheep without a shepherd. In India people worship the deities not merely out of love and devotion, but also out of fear; they try therefore to **appease** them by offering presentations and sacrifices. Jesus is not at all to be feared; he brings peace and kindness, not by killing and punishing, but by voluntarily accepting death (Jn 10), and granting forgiveness of sins (cf. Mk 2:7; Lk 5:31; Jn 8:11). He does not frighten anyone, but invites everyone who is weary and carrying heavy burdens, for he is gentle and humble of heart (Mt 11:28). Being born of a poor family, and appearing as a babe in a manger, he sends us the message of approachability and friendliness. He does not call us servants but friends! (Jn 15:15) A God who is the friend of humans! Jesus does not confine religion and morality to a private and individualistic affair between God and oneself, but sees it as reaching out to fellow-humans as one's sisters and brothers. What one does to the least of the brethren, that is of decisive importance to one's final salvation! (Mt 25) Here we have the strongest appeal to social concerns of the present life here on earth (cf. also Lk 16:19ff). The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37) clearly conveys the message that Jesus does not care so much for ritualism (ritual purity) as for living humans who are in need of help. Jesus is the great friend of the suffering and needy. The true meaning of Sabbath and sacrifice is intimately related to helping human beings

(Mk 2:11.27; 12:7; 3:4). Such a liberating message is good news to the people of Asia in general, and of India in particular, especially in the context of the growing anonymity and the intricate structures of bureaucracy.

c) Jesus the Friend of the Marginalized

In India, a country with a large population, individual persons do not count before the masses. Structures override a person's value. People starve and die, and the government and politicians care only for their own advantage. In mega-cities like Bombay (Mumbai) no one is worried about the many deaths that happen daily on the streets and railway platforms. (When a human being dies, it is referred to as "a mouse has died." That is the value of man in the busy streets of Bombay!) Jesus is a leader who pays attention to each one, especially to the least. His behaviour at the Temple illustrates this. While the disciples were busy admiring the structure of the temple edifice, Jesus was interested in the widow's offering (Mk 12:41-13:1). He wants us not to despise any of the little ones (Mt 18:10); he accepted women to be in his company (cf. Lk 8:1-3; 10:38f.). He blessed little children (Lk 18:15), entered into deep conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7ff), healed a crippled woman (Lk 13:11ff), let himself be touched by a sinful woman (Lk 7:38), took a little child in his arms (Mk 9:36), instructed us to be like little children (Mk 10:14f). This is good news for the numerous children and women, whose dignity is often violated, who are ill-treated, and subjected to hard labour. This is of great significance to a people distressed by numerous dowry-deaths of women, killing of female-foetus, and forced child labour. Jesus gives hope and consolation to all the downtrodden. His table-fellowship with the sinners (cf. Lk 5:29-32) raised their self-confidence and made them aware of their dignity before God.

d) Jesus the Integral Liberator

Jesus sees the human being in all the dimensions. He has liberated people not only from sin, but also from bodily illnesses and hunger. He brings new hopes and possibilities. People in Asia are especially

afraid of the powers of nature as these are considered numinous. A liberating message in this connection is that Jesus as God is Lord of nature and has power over it. This is illustrated in many instances. He stills a storm (Mk 4:35ff), walks on the water (Mk 6:47ff), multiplies the loaves (Mk 6:39ff), turns water into wine (Jn 2:5ff), curses a fig tree (Mk 11:12ff). The Indian masses stand under the spell of fatalism and astrology. They believe in predestination based on astrology. They are simply victims and spectators of the fate happening to them caused by the position of the stars and planets. They also fear the evil spirits. Jesus liberates them from all these fears by introducing them to a provident and benevolent God who cares intimately for each and everyone of his children very intimately (Mt 6:25-34). While horoscopes and astrological charts create fear and worries, Jesus enkindles the light of hope and consolation. In a country where people are afraid of evil spirits and of black magic, Jesus brings courage and confidence; for he has power to cast out demons. The many exorcisms performed by him bear testimony to this (cf. Mk 5:7ff; 9:25f).

Jesus is also the liberator sociologically for the many who are oppressed under the caste system and discrimination. Jesus brings them the message of love and equality, for all are children of God and have equal worth and dignity. By touching the leper (Lk 5:13) and healing him, Jesus broke all the laws of social taboos on the basis of external features. For Jesus there are no untouchables. He touched and let himself be touched (cf. Lk 6:19; 7:38ff; 8:46). Against the background of the bitter experience of the Dalits, an Indian reading of the New Testament sees Jesus as the liberator and redeemer of the downtrodden Dalits.²⁰ According to the dalit Christian understanding in the light of the religion of the Paraiyars, Christ is interpreted as "the Drum" and the voice of liberation. This is an excellent example of a Dalit Christology.²¹

e) Jesus the Compassionate and the Great Sannyasin

Jesus is a man of great compassion (Mt 15:32; Mk 6:34; Lk 7:13; Jn 5:6f; 11:35). Jesus the compassionate prophet is a welcome figure to

our people who find themselves in great misery. In Asia where family ties are intense, Jesus comes as the eldest brother, for he is the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15). We have received adoption as the children of God in the Son and so have become joint heirs with him (Rom 8:15f). Wandering monks and sannyasins are a welcome scene in India. This represents the spiritual thirst of the Indian soul for transcendence. Jesus is the Great Sannyāsin and Sāddhu. He renounced the highest possible glory. Although he was in the form of God, he did not cling to it as a treasure, but emptied himself and took the likeness of a servant (Phil 2:5-7). His great example of renunciation makes him a perfect Yogi. He led a life of the poor and wandering preacher having no place to lay his head (Mt 8:20). Where people are driven to forced poverty, Jesus' heroic option to be poor opens their eyes to see the need and meaning of trust in God. It also makes them aware of the fact that life and the goods of this world have only a relative value. Jesus wants to liberate us from the slavery to consumerism and materialism. He also challenges the consciences of those who exploit people for economic profit.

f) Jesus the Supreme Example of Peace and Non-violence (Ahimsa)

Leaders and politicians are all eager to boast of themselves and their achievements in order to win the votes of the poor masses. Only seldom has anyone his wounds to show as evidence of his love for the country. Most often the powerful make use of the country's machinery for their own advantage in terms of possession, position, and prestige. People are often cheated with false promises at the time of elections. Corruption abounds and organized crime increases. But Jesus has only his wounds to show as credentials of his love for us (Jn 20:27). He is our wounded Healer.

Jesus is the perfect example of non-violence (*ahimsa*). His principle of *ahimsa* was greatly manifested in his teaching of the love of enemy (Mt 5:43-48), in his own patient acceptance of the most

shameful death on the cross, and in his prayer for his own executioners (Lk 23:34). It is well-known how greatly Mahatma Gandhi was influenced by Jesus' teaching and practice of non-violence. Jesus interpreted the law against murder in a radical way. Murder does not merely mean for Jesus physical killing, but also wounding a person's psyche. He forbids us to be angry with a brother or sister, or to call someone fool (Mt 5:22). His words that if you remember that someone has something against you, you should leave your gift before the altar and first be reconciled with him (Mt 5:23-24), is a marvellous teaching on reconciliation. Not only India, but the whole world needs such a radical vision that gives more importance to personal relationship than to mere ritual acts in the temple or church. In other words, according to Jesus the **vertical** act of sacrifice to God demands as its antecedent as well as its consequence the **horizontal** relationship of peace and reconciliation. Jesus brings out the higher meaning of the protest of Buddhism against a mere ritualistic observance of sacrifices. Though he is not a priest by birth, he is **the** High Priest by vocation and life example (Hb 5). He did not sacrifice any animal or another human being as a victim, but became himself the victim (Hb 9:14; Jn 10:10,18). He *is* our peace (Eph 2:14); he reconciles everything (Col 1:20-21). In India where religious fundamentalism and communalism have become a big threat to peace and national integrity, Jesus brings the message of universal brotherhood and open-mindedness. He helped the Jews and Gentiles alike. He appreciated and praised the members of other faiths, and envisaged their salvation (cf. Mt 8:10-12; 15:28). He died not only for a select few, but for **all**. His gospel is addressed to the whole creation (Mk 16:15).

The Hindu brethren begin and end their prayers with "*Om Śānti*". This reflects a cry for true Peace (*Shānti*) personally incorporated in the eternal Word of God made man in and as Jesus Christ. He is the one, who is A, U, and M, the eternally reverberating Voice (*Śabda*) of God the Word (*Vāc*).

Such an interpretation of the Hindu religious symbol of OM has its problematic side though, for three reasons, if we would uncritically begin to use it in Christian prayers, without filling and "informing" it with new and Christian interpretation. The first is that the Hindu brethren themselves do not find it acceptable that the Christians adopt their sacred religious vocabulary without respecting the "copyright". The second reason comes from within the Christian faith, namely, that accepting the sacred symbol of a **living** religion runs the risk of a syncretism that could confuse believers. Om is the Hindu symbol of the Absolute, for the manifest and unmanifest aspects of God. It does not in itself evoke the **personal** aspect of God. Although some theologians like the Korean lady theologian Chung Hyun Kyung would defend syncretism in religion in the present global situation,²² we have to be discrete in using the symbol in our prayers, since the essence of Christian prayer consists in an intimate and personal dialogue between man and the triune God.²³ (Such a problem is inherent also in the use of the terms such as "Guru", "Avatara" etc. if we do not give them Christian contents). Thirdly, at times fierce controversy is generated among the Christians over prayers used to interpret the Christian Gospel through Hindu symbols and forms of worship used by the exponents of inculturation, taken from the higher forms of Hinduism and Sanskritised Culture of the dominant community. They argue instead for a process of inculturation that takes seriously the symbols emerging from the life and struggles of the oppressed.

g) Jesus the Perfect Moral Teacher

The Bengali Brahmin Raja Rammohun (Ram Mohan) Roy (1772-1833), one of the pioneers of religious and social reform of modern India, and the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, wanted to present a Jesus acceptable and intelligible to the Indian mind. Rammohun employed **reason** as the interpretive key to the Gospels. For him, scriptural exegesis "is largely a literary, historical, linguistic, and rational enterprise."²⁴ His hermeneutical concern was with the

ethical and practical implications of the Scriptures.²⁵ This led him to demythologize and demystify the Gospels (similar to what later R. Bultmann did in Germany). He found in Jesus the perfect moral Guide and Teacher. For him Jesus was a "Messenger of God" and a "Spiritual Teacher." According to Rammohun the teachings of Jesus contained perfect moral principles. Rammohun selected the ethical or moral precepts of Jesus from the Gospels and published them under the title *Precepts of Jesus*. For Rammohun, as for most Indians, the essence of the Gospel of Jesus was not the doctrines, but the moral teachings.²⁶ This was his hermeneutical position in starting the book with the Sermon on the Mount (from Matthew), and including the moral teachings from Markan and Lukan materials, and selecting eclectically certain passages from John. Thereby he expunged the miracles as "heathen notions" and the dogmas (especially of the Trinity and of atonement) as irrelevant.

Although Rammohun Roy's approach was rationalistic, his concern for the moral and practical (praxiological) aspect of the Gospel had a valid point to make, especially when we consider Jesus' parable of the last judgement (Mt 25). In the parable Jesus teaches us that one's final salvation is intimately linked with one's behaviour to one's fellow human beings, more than on the doctrines one holds. This is sympathetic to the Asian mind, that does not bother as much about doctrines as with praxis. We find in the Indian systems no defined doctrinal positions, nor an authority to safeguard orthodoxy of doctrine. What matters, is *dharmā*, righteousness. At the same time we will have to observe that right conduct has its sound basis in right doctrine. A blind moralism will not satisfy nor motivate the human will and intellect. In order to be rational, human beings need to know the rationale behind a prescribed moral action. The authority of Jesus' moral teaching is again based on his being the Son of God.

Although Rammohun Roy thought in a rationalistic framework, most Indians are not so rigorous in interpreting Scriptures. Myth and mysticism do play a great role in Asia.

9. Concluding Remarks

Presenting and representing Christ and Christianity to Asia in Asian categories is a great task and the challenge of evangelization today. This does not mean that Asia will accept Christianity as a result, just as the whole of Israel did not accept Jesus and his message although it was preached in the culture of the people. But evangelization does not mean increasing the number of explicit Christians. It is hence not true that it is merely the lack of Asian inculturation that was solely responsible for Asia not accepting the Christian faith. If acceptance and growth of the Christian religion depends entirely on inculturation, and if one holds that Christianity is a religion in Western culture, one may ask why Christianity does not now flourish in the West. One complaint has been that Christianity is presented in the Western garb and culture to Asia. If so, one wonders why Christianity was accepted at all in Asia, and why it has a great many adherents in the Philippines, an Asian country! Did this happen *in spite of* the Western character in which Christianity was preached/presented, or *precisely because of* it? In certain cases we may have also to think of “deculturation” to promote evangelization! One thing is certain: Christ and his message have a universal appeal to human beings *as* human beings. It is precisely because of this that all over the world Christ and his message have been accepted. Inculturation will, of course, make this more affective and effective. Another factor we have to consider is that although evangelization can lead and must be also principally open to the acceptance of *explicit* Christian faith, the two need not always converge. In other words, the success of evangelization cannot be measured by the number of conversions to Christianity as a religion.

How do we then view Christianity/Christian faith? Theologically it is a way more than a religion. It is a “new way” of being the people of God, with a New Testament, and a new law, with the instruction to become a new being. It is also an institutionalized way (or *mārga*) that leads us to Jesus Christ, who in turn is *the* Way (Jn

14;6), the *Mārga* to God the Father, the “unsourced” Source of existence, the absolute Brahman. To accept Christianity was therefore understood in the primitive Church as joining the way (Acts 18:25-26).²⁷ Taking a cue from the Indian wisdom of seeing the way itself as the goal, we could also say that Jesus Christ as *the Way* is also the goal of evangelization; this is applicable also to the Church in a relative and related sense. Considering the Indian way of the three ways (*mārgās*), we could view Christianity as a combination of the *jnāna mārga* (way of the knowledge of Christ), *bhakti mārga* (way of devotion to Christ), and *karma mārga* (way of right action of Christ’s love). We do not deny that as an organized and institutionalized way, Christianity can be sociologically considered a religion.

At the outset it was pointed out that the Asian horizons are different from the horizons of other continents. As a rejoinder to this we may also observe that no horizon is so different from the other as to allow no common experience. The sun, moon and the stars are experienced commonly as such to certain extent everywhere, from all corners of the world. No one would mistake the sun for the moon or for a planet or vice versa. There are also certain experiences common to all humans and even to all living organisms. Similarly, there are also many common patterns of interpreting and understanding Jesus Christ in every culture and continent. The longing for life and the desire for love, peace, and forgiveness of guilt are universal phenomena. Not only Asia, but the whole world, is in need of and in search for the one who would fulfil these inborn human thirsts. The Jesus of the “Asian Horizons” may shine forth as the Sun that enlightens all (Jn 1:9) making them into really enlightened ones (*Buddhas*) and leading them to perfect union (*Yōga*) with God.

Notes

¹On the theme of Asian Hermeneutics, cf. S. Chackalackal, “Asian Hermeneutics. New Horizon”, *Journal of Dharma* 30 (2005), 281-291; P.

- Kalluveetil, "God's Word for the Indian Folk. Towards Exploring the Indian Milieu of Biblical Hermeneutics", *ibid.* 321-336.
- ²A. Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples. Towards an Asian Contextual Christology based on the Documents of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Bangalore, 2001, second revised edition*, xx.
- ³A. Alangaram, 13.
- ⁴(*Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, IV, A,3).
- ⁵R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism. Contesting the Interpretation*, New York, 1998, 119. For a critique of Sugirtharajah's division of colonial and post-colonial perspectives in biblical hermeneutics, cf. P. Kalluveetil, "An Asian Biblical Hermeneutics: Perspectives and Prospects", *Asian Horizons* 1 (2007), 8-36, 12f.
- ⁶For more on this theme, cf. F. Adedeji, "Contextual Exegesis - An Interpretative Method for Bible Hymnic Texts: A Nigerian Perspective", *Asia Journal of Theology* 17 (2003), 17-25, esp. 18-21.
- ⁷The best example is how Brahmabandhab Upādhyaya explained the ontological structure of Christ as the Logos presiding over the five layers *annamayakōśa*, *prānamayakōśa*, *manōmayakōśa*, *vijnānamayakōśa* and the *ānandamayakōśa*. In an ordinary human being the individual self (*jivātman*) presides over those layers, while in Christ this place is taken by God the Logos, (the *Paramātman*). K. C. Sen adapts the *Saccidānanda* (*Sat-Cit-Ananda: Being-Consciousness-Bliss*) and thought of Christ as the *Cit*.
- ⁸G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, New York, 1988, 9, as referred to by P. C. Phan, "Whose experiences? Whose Interpretations? Contribution of Asian Theologies to Theological Epistemology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71 (2006), 5-28, here 7.
- ⁹For a description of this, cf. P. C. Phan, 7ff.
- ¹⁰Cf. P. C. Phan, 21ff.
- ¹¹Cf. "Current Trends in Indian Biblical Studies", *Biblehashyam* 25 (1999), 64-77.
- ¹²They were burnt alive in India in 1999 by some Hindu fundamentalists.
- ¹³F.X. D'Sa, "'Dhvani' as a Method of Interpretation," *Biblehashyam* 5 (1979), 276-294, here 277.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.* 279.
- ¹⁵An illustration is given by F.X. D'Sa on "Your Father in Heaven"; cf. *ibid.* 285ff. For other examples, cf. G. M. Soares-Prabhu, "And There Was a Great Calm. A 'Dhvani' Reading of the Stilling of the Storm (Mk 4, 35-41)," *Biblehashyam* 5 (1979), 295-308; M. Vellanickal, "Drink from the source of the Living Water", *Biblehashyam* 5 (1979), 309-318; A. Amaladoss, "Dhvari

method of interpretation and biblical hermeneutics", *IndTS* 31 (1994), 199-217; R.J. Raja, "Seeking God, Sought by God: A *Dhvani*-Reading of the episode of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:10)", *Jeevadhara* 25 (1995), 139-148.

¹⁶*Aum Bhur Bhuvah Swah, Tat Savitur Varenyam Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat* (Yajur Veda 36,3). Meaning: Oh God! Thou art the Giver of Life, Remover of pain and sorrow, the Bestower of happiness. Oh! Creator of the Universe, May we receive thy supreme sin-destroying light. May Thou guide our intellect in the right direction.

¹⁷*Asato maa Sadgamaya, Thamaso maa Jyothir Gamaya, Mrithyor maa Amrutham Gamaya, Om Śanti Śanti Śantihi*. Meaning: Lead me from the unreal (untruth) to the Real (Truth). Lead me from darkness to light. Lead me from death to immortality. May there be peace everywhere.

¹⁸This insight is beautifully developed by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering), 1984.

¹⁹We deal here only with some of the important Indian images of Jesus. For a brief and more comprehensive list of different Indian portraits of Jesus, cf. P. Kalluveetil, pp. 27f.

²⁰For a dalit hermeneutic approach, cf. M. Arul Rajah, "The Authority of Jesus: A Dalit Reading of Mk 11:27-33", *Jeevadhara* 25 (1995), 123-138.

²¹Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "Some Features of a Dalit Theology", *Asian Journal of Theology* 18 (2004), 146-167, here 153ff.

²²Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org> on her theology.

²³Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on Certain Aspects of the Christian Meditation (Orationis formas)*, Vatican, Oct. 15, 1989, No. 3.

²⁴R.S. Sugirtharajah, 41.

²⁵R.S. Sugirtharajah, 42.

²⁶Cf. R.S. Sugirtharajah, 33.

²⁷In Malayalam, the vernacular of the State of Kerala, the word used is *mārgam kooduka* (to join the way) and the convert is consequently known as a *mārgawāsi*. Christian faith was preached in Kerala by the Apostle St Thomas.