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THE WITNESS OF THE 'THIRD CHRIST' AND FUNDAMENTALISM VIS-À-VIS RELIGIONS-IN-DIALOGUE

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Abstract

This article argues that the witness of Jesus becomes all the more relevant and significant in the present scenario of cultural fragmentations, political polarizations and religious fundamentalism. The discussion mainly dwells on the "Third-Witness" of Jesus which is beyond religious and dogmatic constraints of Jesus' testimony and mission. The witness of the "Third Christ" is existential, realizational and experiential. The article describes the importance of developing a Christology of 'Third Christ' of awakening in the present multi-faith contexts and how Jesus can become a vital agency as well as empowering consciousness of this new fellowship of devotees/disciples of Jesus outside the borders of the Church, especially in the Asian scenario. This "Third Christ" is by and large, *Asian*, both in substance and style. The article develops further the concept of the 'Third Christ' meditating upon the meaning of Jesus' Cross. It also points out that Jesus the Risen One and his Witness transcend historical constraints and anthropocentric notions. Jesus, the

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Risen, as the Author of Life goes beyond anthropocentric profiling of God. The article indicates how such Christological dimensions can be developed drawing inspiration from Asian/Indian myths. The implications of the "Third Christ" for inter-faith dialogues are also discussed.

Keywords: Christology, Fundamentalism, *Hindutva*, Post Truth, Secularism, Third Witness of Christ, Visual intellection

Introduction

Strangely enough, we are living in an era of 'Post-Truth' in the present age of knowledge, democratic freedom and communication. "Post-Truth" was the Oxford Dictionary's international word of 2016. It describes the "Post-Truth" era as a situation "in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." It is otherwise articulated as a preference to "alternative facts" by rejecting "objective facts."¹ The public today is trapped in a "post-truth politics" in which a dedicated spread of false rumours, and repeat of lies make the sway and swing in the campaigns and public opinion formation, and the media become an easily available agency to manipulate, polarize, and entrench opinion and thus play a misleading game to serve their own commercial interests and publicity at the cost of truth and common good. Even democratic elections in America, and India are won under the sway of orchestrated lies and denigrations largely through the agency of social media. A defining characteristic of post-truth politics is that the interested parties, be they politicians, or religious chauvinists, continue to repeat fraud ideas and fake ideologies, oft in a slanderous and vitriolic manner so that the opinions are popularized and polarized in a fundamentalist vein. Falsification of truth is realized by managing the perceptions and beliefs of vulnerable populations through the strategic use of rumours and falsehoods, hoaxes, and propaganda. Thereby the truths become the objects of distortion. The narrative of *Hindutva* is well construed and constructed in this regard. With finesse, they mix and merge facts and fantasy in the historicization of Hindu myths and thereby it achieves saffronization of politics. It implies a disdain towards scholarship, and it appoints itself as a surrogate for value-based politics. It is not to be understood as Postmodernism's disdain

¹The term "post-truth politics" was coined by David Roberts in the online magazine *Grist* on 1 April 2010. It was defined as "a political culture in which politics (public opinion and media narratives) have become almost entirely disconnected from policy (the substance of legislation)." <https://grist.org/article/2010-03-30-post-truth-politics/>

towards literal truth but it is a well-thought out devious strategy to form public opinion through lies and fabrications so that a polarized politics for power and hegemony achieves advocacy and currency. Thus, the scenario becomes a regime of lies and distortion on its own right. The borders blur between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and fact in the post-truth era.² Deceiving is seen as a skill and art, a game and ultimately a habit. What is unaware engendered is a moral vacuum in which these amoral strategists, power hungry politicians and obsessed capitalists indulge deliriously.

It is in this culture of deceit and deception perpetuated by polarized politics and religious fundamentalism that the human kind needs authentic witness of truth. Truth is not a 'fact' but is hidden in 'facts' coordinating and configuring facts in harmony and in perspective. Truth is not a 'spectacle' (that can be watched); it is beyond 'gaze.' It is beyond the obvious and is inherent and hidden. It cannot be taught. We are caught by it; it is justified in virtue of itself and it can be 'known' (experienced) through discernment and intuition. Truth is not 'knowledge' but 'knowing' it becomes *experiential* in 'knowing of knowing.' The English word (experience) is not the apt rendering. Sanskrit word *anubhava* looks quite competent in this regard. The etymological meaning of *anubhava* means: that which follows; it is a consequence, it is an event; it is a posteriori consciousness. To indulge in the *anubhava* of truth what is needed is simply 'surrender' to the Reality which is beyond the grasp and comprehension of human mind. The 'surrender' is a 'dissolving' in the immensity and ineffability of the Reality. Then the Reality will flow into human consciousness. As the drop of water surrenders to the ocean it becomes oceanic. In this event the ocean too flows into the drop simultaneously! The ecstasy of *anubhava* of truth is this mutual inclusion between the 'drop' and the 'Ocean!'; it is pure energy, and pure delight. It implies that we cannot fully know the truth but we are caught by the truth; we can only be witnesses of truth by surrendering to the truth; thereby truth engulfs us; we become the truth through this mutual, simultaneous and instant inclusion and indwelling.

But it will only lead to travesty of truth if truth is understood in terms of 'spectacle.' In the present media-world people just believe instantly what they 'gaze,' and they are tricked and deceived in the logic of spectacular visuals which are fleeting; thereby they are mesmerized and hypnotised. They don't look into the inherent text

²See, Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, St Martin's.

and texture of the visuals. They do not care the intent of the author who messages through the visual. They take the visual as such and per se and in virtue of itself. They have no time and space to look into the 'metaphysics' of the visual. They don't think that visuals can easily be manipulated and trolled in present social media of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. When people come to know the verity of truth in retrospect it would be too late. It happens always in engineered democratic elections whether be it in India or the US. Then a regressive helplessness and a feel of repressive victimization sway the collective consciousness. Eventually people resign to this impasse.

The witness of Jesus becomes all the more relevant and significant in the present scenario of cultural fragmentations, political polarizations and religious fundamentalism because of which the disruption of the core values of integrity, tolerance, justice, honesty and truthfulness has become the text and texture of the contemporary life. The ensuing discussion dwells on the "Third-Witness" of Jesus which is beyond religious and dogmatic constrains and cultural confabulations of Jesus' testimony and mission. The witness of the "Third Christ" is existential, realizational and experiential and could be a radical referral to construct identity and meaning in the present world of ethical vacuum and distortion of religious truths.

1. Profiling Fundamentalism

More than ever before, the importance of inter-faith dialogue is recognized as a vital exercise to take on the rise of political-cultural polarizations which draw sanction and sanctity from religious Fundamentalism. In the present era of dialogues and culture of partnerships and social capital, it is indeed mind-boggling to witness the recent ominous rise of fundamentalist streaks of diverse cues and hues on political, cultural, economic and religious domains and discourses worldwide often with massive popular support. Fundamentalism *per se*, whether be it religious, or political, or cultural, is a debauched ideological reductionism due to the mistaken interpretations of the 'fundamentals' of religions owing to inordinate collective/individual fears and unwarranted ambitions. A fundamentalist positioning will naturally lead to intolerance, violence, terrorism, exclusions, mistrust, ethnocentrism, etc. Its stance is built upon the underlying fearsome concern of the threat of identity, be it religious, cultural, social, or political in the context of reforms at the event of new social movements, cultural interactions and knowledge revolutions, which interrogate and unsettle their deemed sacrosanct macro narratives.

It is appalling that the recent political developments in the UK and the USA give a democratic mandate to political chauvinism, and the consequent polarizations which justify an exclusive capitalism and cultural jingoism. The era of 'iron curtain' and 'bamboo-curtain' is reappearing under pretext of cultural and economic protectionism when the world hungers for building bridges of understanding and partnership especially in the context of the world peace being threatened by religious and political fundamentalism of ISIS and the spread of terror and the sequent mammoth migrations of people engendering cultural fragmentation and social dislocation worldwide. Many studies and surveys show that more people were killed in the ethnic and religious conflicts, and territorial battles spread over Africa, Asia, Middle East, South America and Europe than in the two World Wars together. A recent finding of *International Institute for Strategic Studies* says that the number of displaced people exceeded 50 million in 2013. The World Bank estimates that 1.2 billion people, roughly one fifth of the world's population, are affected by some form of violence and insecurity.³

We have diverse profiles of Fundamentalism owing to the interplay of religion, culture and economics, which construct overarching macro-narratives of political polarizations in the name of economy, culture and religion – be it the triumphalism of Trump, the Brexit xenophobic economic policy, Hindutva politics of monoculturalism, or ISIS' Islamic militant exclusivism. Traditionally menace of Fundamentalism is attributed to religious traditions. Nowadays, ideology, social issues, politics, cultural nationalism, ethnicity and religious traditions are mixed up so much so that frontiers among them are mixed and matched up. The problematic of fundamentalism is poly dimensional and multi-faceted in the actual context. A multi linear and lateral approach is needed while fathoming the gamut of prevailing Fundamentalism which is invincible and invisible in the texture of the present day politics, economy and religious vandalism. What we find implausible and anomalous mutations and permutations of culture, religion, economy and politics, and the sequent polarisations of diverse cues and hues. They look beyond the range and breadth of the existing tools of assessments and analysis. What we need is a new genre of approach and path to take on the unfolding challenge of fundamentalism and, the consequent polarisations which are now become systemic and have acquired ideological profiles.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/armed-conflict-deaths-increase-syria-iraq-afghanistan-yemen>

2. Fundamentalist Streaks of Religions

The menace of religious Fundamentalism in variant profiles and shades prevails on the world scenario in which polarizations happen through polemics and apologetics; thereby exclusive theories and praxes sway the people especially through trolled media narratives and discourses. People indulge in religious xenophobic absolutism in their identity constructions worldwide, and it factors into trans-territorial 'clash of civilizations' which, subsequently, tell upon diverse discourses, and policy making on the domains of culture, politics and economics.

In this regard, Indian scenario is not different from fundamentalist polarizations and polarities in the name of capital, caste, creed and cult. No doubt the present political dispensation is assiduously endeavouring a cultural and nationalist mandate through a politics of a polarized polity which is mandated by the Hindutva distortion of Indian historiography on the one hand, and on the other hand by invading the domains of citizen's personal life – be it 'decent' dress code, moral policing with the insidious support of the present political advocacy, dictating food habits (prohibition of beef), compulsory singing of national anthem in cinema theatres, insistence of yoga, moral policing, raking up the problematic of Uniform Civil Code, or cashless India through dictatorial demonetization flouting all democratic norms and practices. The list of 'dos' and 'don'ts' coming from the Government and courts in the name of nation building is disturbing and is ridden with badly conceived idea of a uniform national identity in a diverse and multicultural fabric of Indian polity. Today under the spell and spread of Hindutva dispensation V.D. Sarvarkar's ideal of Hindu nationalism as delineated in his book *Essentials of Hindutva* is revisited. Thereby, an advocacy is unleashed overtly and covertly that the Hindus are a people who possess a common *pitrubhumi* or fatherland, common blood, "common *Sanskriti* (civilization)" and a common *punyabhumi* or holy land. Even Indian historiography is brought under revision through a process of demythifying the Scriptures; thereby saffronizing of India's past is contrived to construct an Indian identity in terms of engineered overarching Hindutva Catholicism.

It looks relevant to elaborate the Indian narrative here. If one reads together the three post-Independence events, namely, Gandhi's assassination (January 30, 1948), the Babri Masjid demolition (December 6, 1992), and the unveiling of V.D. Savarkar's portrait in Parliament House (February 26, 2003) one cannot miss the advocacy of polarizing politics and cultural nationalism in the name of

Hindutva by design or default. The assassination was strategically planned by RSS to advance the idea of Hindu Rashtra by reversing Gandhi's appeal of "*Ishvar Allah Tere Naam*"; it shattered the renowned *pax indica* of tolerance and traumatized the Muslims especially in backdrop of partitioning of India.⁴ The first of these three made India's pluralism radically challenged. The second episode interrogated the Islamic identity and relevance in a sovereign Republic and made Muslims hostage in their own country. The third legitimized and valorised symbolically a Hindu Rashtra built on an exclusive and chauvinist political ideology of Hindutva.

The assassination of Gandhi was a carefully crafted strategic plot by people who owed allegiance to the concept of a Hindu Rashtra. Its sole devious agenda was to reverse Gandhi's idea of "*Ishvar Allah Tere Naam*." Thereby establish the primacy and power of Hinduism in India. By implication, it pronounces the Muslim collective a political non-entity. Nehru said that evening when Gandhi died, "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere." This political narrative of polarization was continued through the demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992; its insidious design was to deconstruct India's plural ethos. The following Godhra (Feb 2002) massacre let loose the ghost of Partition days to haunt again India's political psyche and fractured deeply her secular and plural fabric. This advocacy of polarized politics in the name of Hindutva is sealed when the BJP in power decided to put up the portrait of Savarkar in the Parliament house's central hall along with the great freedom fighters like Gandhi and Nehru. This unveiling poignantly symbolized the possibility of a conceptual alternative of Hindu Rashtra based on an exclusive Hindutva ideology grounded and figured out in a Hindu mono-culturalism. This political ceremony of the present BJP regime is an antithesis of India's centuries old ethos of pluralism rooted in tolerance and religious amity. By installing the portrait of Savarkar right in the Parliament house the ideology of Hindutva acquired deviously a political mandate.

The narrative of polarization continue to acquire, by default, cultural sanction owing to the episodes of the ghastly terrorist attacks in Mumbai of 1993, in Parliament House of 2001 and again in Mumbai in 2008. The demolition in Ayodhya was only the beginning of unfolding narrative of politics of polarization. Now the endeavour of building the temple through a massive people's participation on the demolished site will offer a focus and perspective to the

⁴Around 7.5 million Muslims left India for the newly formed state of Pakistan and about 7.5 million Hindus trekked to the new India from Pakistan.

polarizing politics. Strategically speaking a 'temple in waiting' is more conducive than a 'temple-built' for it keeps the spirit buoyant and the cadres motivated. All the same it keeps the terrorists agitated.

The struggle to keep polarisation at bay will be unrelenting for the memories of Partition and the mayhem of terror will keep churning up hate, fear. Bigots face each other, unblinkingly. Their bigotry feeds each other, untiringly. The higher the Hindu bigotry in India, the happier the Islamic zealotry in Pakistan. Polarisation is their common nourishment.⁵

Hopefully, the ethos of India and the legacy of Asoka, Akbar, Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar will not succumb, so easily, to these forces of disintegration, and bigotry.

Fundamentalism feeds on a mutual appropriation of politics of polarization and religious absolutism. The political praxis of polarizations deceitfully misinterprets the Scripture and market religious utopias like 'Promised Land,' Hindutva or Catholicism, or Islamic reign with overt or covert political ambitions. The historiographies of nations and religions show that the frontiers of "City of God" and "City of Man" (St Augustine) are diffusive and undefined; the history shows the political and economic compulsions make the Church at the service to the state and thus religion becomes covertly the referral as wells as source of polarised politics. Even violence is justified in the name of conveniently construed Divine Revelations, which serve political ambitions. It is horrendous to see that the appalling violence unleashed in the name of the God of Hosts in narrative of the invasions of the land of Canaanites in the Old Testament Dispensation and how Joshua justifies the violence by saying that the conquer is executed on the order of Yahweh. This same Old Testament mission theology has prevailed in the militant mission of the Church during the colonial periods especially in Asia, Africa, and South America. It is mindboggling that even Apartheid and slavery are justified by misinterpreting the Bible. By and large, the religions founded on revealed truths become easily absolutist; revelations are easily construed and constructed in the favour of political intentions. The narratives of Christianity, Islam and Judaism prove this. Hinduism and even Buddhism are not an exception. Look at the violence and vandalism unleashed by Hinduism towards the end of Sangam period (3 BCE to 3 CE) and how it erased the ubiquitous Buddhism from the Indian Subcontinent. Now only its remnants remain in India. In the recent history, the narrative of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is another harrowing narrative in which religion is used for ethnic cleansing. Even in the recent history the

⁵Gopalakrishna Gandhi, "India's Plural Soul," *Hindu*, Dec. 6, 2017.

President Bush (Junior) claimed that he received the mandate to indulge in the Iraq war from God! This abuse of religion by fundamentalist reading of Scriptures for polarized politics can be seen in the whole of world history.

In this game, the fundamentals of religions and the inclusive visions and praxis of the founders are forgotten or rather silently suppressed. Thereby, religious people and religious practices become irreligious and antithesis of the faith credentials; religions become self-defeating. The people are geared to ghettos of beliefs and are indoctrinated in blind cultic practices; conducive theologies are constructed to support the fundamentalist streaks like *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. Then, the Christians get every reason to engage in crusades; Hindus religiously indulge in Dharmayudh and the Muslims revel in Jihad and indulge in killing in the name of Allah! Strangely, even the religious conscience mandates the people to indulge in violence in the name of salvation, moksha and Allah!

In this context a lineal interpretation of the present deceitful fundamentalism will be a futile exercise. The need of the hour is a lateral and multilinear approach on the domain of micro narratives of people's sundries of day-to-day life in the secular spaces; such an exercise would be rewarding while taking on the menace of Fundamentalism. What is to be accomplished in this contextual and people oriented approach and practice is to dismantle (deconstruct) the dominant, oppressive and regressive macro narratives (e.g., Christendom, Islamic State, 'Dritte Reich,' Communist Utopia, 'Make America White' Again," Hindu-Holy Land, etc.) which are politically mandated and fostered in the global discourses and platforms unilaterally under the pretext of *pax Romana*, *Pax Britannica*, *pax Americana*, *pax Indica*, etc. To take on such sly fundamentalist discourses we need alternative topias, specific praxes and discourses which interrogate these disastrous advocacies on the one hand and new credible alternate consciousness as well as new promises. It is in this context that the critical role of inter-religious conversations is to be appreciated to promote and foster religious harmony and amity so much so that it leads to an interfaith or multi-faith consciousness which facilitates mutual empowerments, and appropriations. What we find in the people's religiousness especially in liminal contexts is that people in their wisdom begin to entertain even multiple belonging. In the process a challenging and an inclusive religious consciousness (rather than exclusive conscience) of multiple or double belonging is being triggered. Though there may not be a conceptual clarity in the customary sense in this multiple religious

faith, experience of harmony, and mutual empowerment in the daily struggles mandates such new creative praxis of religion in the present globalized context of religious and cultural pluralism. What is being churned out at people's level, is that religious faiths become more cultural, giving meaning and perspective in their sundries of griefs and joys. The very mandate comes from the very praxis rather than preconceived theories and formulas. To phrase this religious phenomena differently, one's religious faith has become interfaith which is dialogical, open, inclusive, and non-conclusive, and is practised right in the public spaces and sites, not in the 'Temple' or 'Mount Gerizim.' Above all this celebration of inter/multi-faith in the public squares draws its credibility from wisdom of common people while they figure out their faith right in the present confluences of religious movements and cultural flows in the globalized scenario. What is critical of this new religious consciousness among the people is its processual nature and is deeply grounded in the ever revealing Spirit who unravels in its own inscrutable ways. It is justified in virtue of *self-referentiality*; it does not need a referral outside of itself. It is more of a 'liturgy of life,' its rituals and cult are the sundries of day-to-day events of struggles to live out a life of the Gospel values. Above all, faith becomes more and more of a folklore and the literacy of multi-faith abides in orality, and abounds in a 'story telling'; its literature is naturally narrative, and metaphorical and deeply anchored in the 'stories of people'; Or rather, it is 'retelling' of one's traditional faith in the live parables and autobiographies in the public square. Jesus' praxis of religion of "truth and spirit" in the public square resonates the religiousness that abounds today in the public spaces where a real dialogue of religions takes place in live stories of people in the miscellanea of life, and in the pursuits of honest seekers who are not fettered by the tyranny of set patterns and, who dare to cross the boundaries of their faith traditions but without disowning them. In this context it demands a revisit to the ongoing praxis of dialogue of religions both in terms of its intent and style, especially as the very idea and relevance of dialogue is interrogated in the present fundamentalist streaks.

3. Revisit of the Praxis of Dialogue

The culture of dialogue has decisively entered the Church's mind-space both in theory and praxis⁶ since Vatican Second Council and

⁶See, Antony Kalliath, "The Evolving Dialogical Identity of the Missional Church Among the World's Religions. A Theological Journey through the Catholic Teachings," in *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age, Christian Mission Among Other*

through subsequent teachings of the Church.⁷ Inter-religious prayers have, by and large, become the part of Christian cult and creed. Inter-religious conferences have become a routine of Church's academic institutions and are inviolable constituents of the theological discourses and training. Church's agencies like *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* (DIMMID), Vatican, *Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue* are quite active to promote dialogue of religions in a new enthusiasm and dedication. Nevertheless, the prevailing feel in the Church is that the initiative of Inter-Religious Dialogue has lost its momentum. It has become a ritual, and Inter-religious conferences have become apologetic and self-defensive if not polemic. Consequently, the competency and utility of inter-faith dialogue is silently questioned on the one hand and the simmering cultic absolutism and defensive positioning relying on the normative teachings of the Church to counter Islamic militant ascendancy on the global scenario further deepened the mistrust in the whole exercise of dialogue of religions in the collective consciousness of the Church on the other hand. Besides the Church's understanding of dialogue as a new strategic policy and praxis of mission at least in the mind of Church's top brass and echelons has silently eroded the integrity and credibility of dialogue. The people of other faiths think that inter-faith initiative is the Church's modern ploy to replace the militant mission which cannot be entertained in the present times.

Besides all these above mentioned factors, the core reason of the decline in the enthusiasm in the practice of dialogue in the Church could be that it has been conceived and practiced within the parameter and purview of western academic methodology. As it is known, the very idea of dialogue has originated from the Socratic method of enquiry, which engenders primarily a Socratic space/platform on which scholars participate and share their knowledge, and thus they are mutually benefited from the knowledge point of view. The conceptual parameter of Dialogue is basically an academic exercise for learning, knowing and deepening one's expertise on an inter-disciplinary domain. There is nothing religious or realizational about it; it is more a cultural, social and academic praxis. Etymologically the meaning of dialogue comes from *dia + logos*; *dia* means 'across,' 'through'; dialogue results in shared understanding without being judgmental. Such a praxis of dialogue

Faiths, ed. Lalsangkima Pachuau & Knud Jorgensen, Regnum Edinburg Series 2010, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011, 57-67.

⁷See, *Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions* (1964), *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), *Nostra Aetate* (1965); the Apostolic Constitution: *Regimini Ecclesiae* (n. 99); *Dignitatis Humanae*; *Redemptoris Missio* (1991); *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991).

has limited scope in the religious inquiry; and will remain always academic, notional and empirical. It is indeed a worthy academic praxis in its own right for it helps us to acquaint other religions within the dialectical and comparative method. However, it does not make dialogue a religious praxis. Dialogue *per se* is good enough to engender an atmospherics and a platform for religious amity. But to transform the interfaith dialogue we have to go beyond dialogue construed in the Western academics.

Real religious knowledge dawns in a radical surrender, and should be a grace ridden realizational event. Its realm is of different frequency and intensity. But one does not confuse academic knowledge with realizational wisdom which paradoxically surfaces when human mind becomes still. It is like rocket's leaping into the lunar gravity from earth gravity. The moment the rocket enters the lunar gravitational sphere it is being pulled up and it jets upward effortlessly. The religious knowledge, as *Patanjaly Yoga Sutras* advocates, dawns spontaneously at the stilling (not killing) the activity of mind (*cittavrthinirodha*); the implied allusion is that interfaith dialogue should move from academics to awakening – from a cultural, notional, social exercise to a *religious praxis*. It should evolve into more a communion of *seekers* than mere a collaboration of scholars. Dialogue domain in such scenario evolve into an equation in which the 'seeker,' 'seeking' and the 'sought' merge in the 'seer.' Seekers have no hidden agenda; they are open, inclusive and non-conclusive to the revealing Spirit and trusts in the happening revelations on the existential realm. It is spontaneous and live, not prefabricated and prejudged. It is not a project but its purpose is to be sought in the very process, not at the end of it. To rejuvenate Inter-religious dialogue we have to increasingly figure out and practise inter-faith fellowship as a religious act, not an academic exercise; it should evolve into a 'liturgy of life' on the public space in search of Divine, resonating with the present multi-religious liminal context and abounding stories of multiple belonging in the lives of the ordinary people in the Post-modern scenario.

When dialogue becomes a fellowship of *seekers*, its frequency embodies a new heightened wavelength of realizational knowledge. It gives more importance to *aposteriori* knowledge which is being revealed in the process; the dynamic of such a dialogue would be more of 'receptivity,' 'surrender' and 'openness' to the one and the same Spirit which reveals itself in inscrutable ways through diverse religious pursuits. In this context Asian praxis of dialogue looks enlightening. Fellowship of seekers (not scholars) happens at the being-level; hence it is called *satsang*. It is a fellowship of inter-being

and on the spectrum of communion of beings (saints). Such a communion at the being level is seeing God in everything and everything in God as figured out by St Ignatius of Loyola. Likewise Gita teaches: "A true yogi observes Me in all beings and also sees everything in Me" (BG 6:29). *Satsang* is built upon yogic union at the spectrum of existential simultaneity. Isha Upanishad's insight into this advaitic-yogic union at the ground of being is radically incisive: "Who sees all beings in one's own Self, and one's own self in all beings, loses all fear" (Isha Upanishad, no. 6). It is a communion of beings of which the latent characteristics would be spontaneity and fearlessness. Apologetics or polemics do not have any role in such fellowship. The mood is that of ease and effortlessness, surrender and 'let-go.' From an Asian perspective, a true religious person is the most spontaneous person; his/her life cannot but be a live-show. The communion in *satsang* is not engendered out of a colloquium of scholars but a spontaneous happening in the benediction of the ever revealing Spirit who is ever creative and innovative; who never repeats but prefers unbeaten path and makes new ways while revealing. The praxis of dialogue becomes, unaware, the pathos of religious reckoning beyond boundaries in such contexts. *Satsang* is justified in and through and by itself. Its mandate is its internal referral and it empowers itself by its own cybernetics. *Satsang's* purpose is verily the very *satsang* itself.

Satsang meeting would be full of surprises and 'disbeliefs' (not beliefs) because the conducts and conduits of the Spirit are always paradoxical and 'crazy'; mutations and permutations transpire through an inherent dynamic of the Spirit beyond human logic and reasoning. Inter-penetration of "networks of intelligibilities" of diverse religions (Paul Ricoeur) and "fusion of horizons" of different religious pursuits (Georg Gadamer) happen simply beyond human logic. Human mind cannot but surrender and be receptive to this overwhelming Spirit's benediction. At this heightened levels, Dialogue of religions takes place in the 'beyondness' of dialogue. An alternative religious consciousness surfaces firstly at the scape and scope of being, and it blooms out in the socio-cultural space eventually. It gives birth to a new inclusive consciousness. Such evolution of inter-faith consciousness cannot be tailed after the existing formulations and equations of the creed and cult. Swami Abhishiktananda would speak of 'bridge-consciousness' when dialogue of religions happens at the being level. A bridge should, indeed, have its own shore but it becomes a bridge along with the other shore. Its identity is not in terms of its 'shore' but of its inner capacity to hold the 'shores' in a 'coincidence of opposites' (Nicholas

of Cusa⁸). Its resource is "Golden Mean" of Yang and Yin. It's strength is the "Middle Path." The 'balancing' is not an arithmetic average of compromise or conformity but it is a heightened and intense 'co-herence' of "Many-in-One and One-in-Many" in a live simultaneity which is more a paradoxical event and incident than a logical or conceptual statements or equations.

To phrase differently, real Inter-Faith dialogue should take place at the *return* (pilgrimage) of 'Many' to the 'One'; the whole existence is returning to its Source and interfaith dialogue should facilitate this return, rebirth of being in the life of God beyond *nama-rupa*. Christologically, the whole existence can be figured out on the paradigm and praxis of the 'Christic-Wheel': Jesus says in his discourse at the Last Supper, "I come from the Father and I return to the Father" (Jn 16:28). This sphere of 'return is of the activity of the Spirit. Interfaith dialogue can then engender new mutations and permutations when it is steered by the inscrutable logic of the Spirit. The present phenomena of "multiple belonging" or "lateral belonging" in the present liminal contexts has to be interpreted more from the 'Spirit' point of view rather than human logic. What is imperative in these moments of fluidity and 'confluences of flows of spiritual energies' is the art of 'listening to learn and learning to listen.' A radical receptivity (hermeneutics of reception) and a hermeneutics of "Common Sense" would be more appropriate to recognize and approximate these moments of "New Pentecost" in the Post-Modern ethos.

Moreover, *satsangs* get credibility and competence owing to autobiographical narratives since the seekers come together in their pilgrimage of life (experiment with truth as Gandhi put it). It will engender to 'marriage of religions' on one's personal historiography; mutations and permutations of religious ideals transpire first and foremost, on the spectrum of personal awakening. Religious re-configurations and re-visioning of religious perspectives spontaneously happen on the existential and experiential realms in one's enquiry into Truth. Eventually it brims over from the personal realm to social and cultural space. *Satsangs* play a crucial role for they offer seekers a platform to exercise this religious praxis. In Indian legacy, Sufism is a classical fruition of the fusion of Hinduism and Islam. Sufi mystics like Kabir are iconic realizations though their theological stances cannot be substantiated by the tradition or Scriptures. At the same time they are witnesses and agents of a new revolution of religious consciousness, resourceful enough to

⁸*De Docta Ignorantia* (1440)

enlighten and empower the people in their pilgrimage of life. Their language may not be notionally precise and intellectually accurate. Theirs would be more of narrative logic; their discourses would be of storytelling; their conversations are generally done through parables and metaphors unlike the teachings and canons of the Orthodoxy.

At the people's level this 'marriage of religions takes on the praxis domain beyond all theological formulations. Look at the narratives of Kristbhaktas who and many other Hindu brethren confess, they are Hindus by religion but devotees and disciples of Jesus by faith. A new interfaith ecclesia is on rise in such *satsangs*, especially in the places like Varanasi, in which we have to search for a theology of 'religious double/multiple belonging' or 'being religious inter-faith.' It has now become the praxis of faith churned out of an inter-religious *sensus fidelium* in the pluralist diaspora spaces in India. This inter-faith consciousness is often configured and resolved unaware in a Christology of a 'Third Christ' of enlightenment rather than a historical or dogmatic Christ. We need a new Christology for the advocacy to conceive faith as 'inter-faith' or 'multi-faith,' and the practice of 'multiple belonging.'

4. Christology of Third Christ

What is attempted here is to hint at the importance of developing a Christology of 'Third Christ' of awakening in the present multi-faith contexts and how Jesus can become a vital agency as well as empowering consciousness of this new fellowship of devotees/disciples of Jesus outside the brim of the Church especially in the Asian scenario. This new 'ecclesia' of the Kristbhaktas (devotees of Christ) and Kristsikshyas (disciples of Christ) offer a new imagination and a praxis to explore the 'unknown Christ' in Christianity. It would be presumptuous that Christianity has exhausted the mystery of Jesus, which is unbound, all-inclusive and ever organic. Incarnation of the Word is ever a processive event, it commences from the First Adam born in the Godhead, and progresses through the Jesus of Nazareth, and is still continuing through the Risen Christ and his Spirit. Maybe the domain of inter-faith fellowships is new site on which the Father is revealing the Son beyond the "flesh and blood" of the Church!

If we track the trajectories of Christology we can find twin overarching profiles of Christ, namely, "Historical Christ" (Scriptural Christ) and "Dogmatic Christ" of Conciliar teaching. In the Bible, Jesus was attributed to numerous Christological titles, to name a few: Messiah, Son of God, Saviour, Christ the King, Mediator, Lord, Son of

Man, Logos, Suffering Servant, etc. which enhance these two profiles of Jesus in worship and theological discourses. Besides, the context of attributing Christological titles to the Jesus whom we encounter in the Gospel narratives was Mediterranean world and they were conceived in the Semitic religious pursuits toward a Saviour in the history. Here Saviour is figured out as the One who comes from outside the brim of history; he becomes coterminous with historical process; he saves the mankind by being a host and hostage in the human pilgrimage. These two profiles of Jesus look, by and large, being exhausted in the Biblical hermeneutics, theological eruditions, Ecumenical Conciliar debates down through the centuries. Paradoxically, both these Christologies have contributed heresies, divisions, and even wars in the history of the Church. Even the core Christological formulation of hypostatic union is not without political underpinnings; it is more a conceptual negotiated statement than a realizational rendering. These tensions and rivalries continue to linger in the conglomeration of the followers of Jesus even in the Catholic collective, in the name of rites, theological constructs, liturgical rituals and sacramental stances to the extent that Jesus amounts to be the reason of conflicts and rivalries. It is the reality bite, the intra-religious dialogues are badly choked with polemics and rivalries on account of the disagreements regarding dogmatic and historical Christ! It triggered wars and had been the source of political polarization down through centuries. It is in this context that we have to explore a "Third Christ" of enlightenment as a new agency for both intra and inter religious dialogues. This "Third Christ" seems, by and large, *Asian*, both in substance and style.

As we re-read the New Testament to understand Jesus from the Asian perspective and through the *sensus fidelium* of the inter-faith *satsangs*, there emerges a 'Third Christ' who seems unbound and unfettered; he looks exuberant in and beyond all cultural or social or historical constraints and compulsions; he defies all definitions and formulas; surprisingly he is accessible and available without the mediation of any existing theological or cultic formulas to the devotees and disciples who surrender to him in their pursuit of the meaning of life, irrespective of their religious upbringing and adherence. A new Christology is in making on the domain of the inter-faith discipleship and devotions outside the precincts of the Church! Jesus belongs to humankind as the followers of Jesus outside the Church claim. He is no more the private patrimony of the Church. Whether you like it or not this emergence of discipleship of Jesus in the devotions to Jesus beyond the grip and grasp of the Church seems to belong to the present dispensation of the economy of

salvation. One cannot but recognize and appreciate this unfolding phenomenon. It is slowly and steadily growing into a veritable alternative 'ecclesia' of 'Third Christ' challenging and interrogating the Orthodoxy; it may not necessarily be contradictory but it subtly unsettles the status quo while opening new ways to explore the 'unknown Christ' both within the Church and outside the Church. The veritable question would be who this "Third Christ" could be.

The "Third Christ" who is beyond the historical and dogmatic construct prevailing in the Church seems to pulsate with Asian religious genius which upholds a higher consciousness of Enlightenment. If you entertain an Asian reading of the Gospel there is an immense potential to construct a Christology of Enlightenment which is the forte of Asian religious pursuit. If we surf through the realizational statements (*mahavakhyas*) of Jesus, like "Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38), "I and Father are one" (Jn 10:30), "I am he" (Jn 8:28), "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25), etc. we can discern the inherent higher consciousness of his being. Jesus delineates his higher consciousness metaphorically: "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). Simultaneously, Jesus conscientizes us that we are also of the same divine gene, and empowers us to evolve into this enlightened consciousness. Jesus ignites our consciousness and offers a new awareness when he says: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14) as he is the light. He even says, "you are gods" (Jn 10:34). He substantiates and justifies his statement by saying that "In that day you will know that I am in my father and you in me and I am in you" (Jn 14:20). He thus reveals that our consciousness is Christic consciousness as we are created after the 'image and likeness' of the First Adam, the first born of all creations (Col 1:15). Resonating with Jesus' mind, St Paul elaborates our inner nature, the newly constructed identity core in the mystery of the Incarnate Word quite succinctly and aptly: "For in him we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) to the extent that "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). It is seemingly the Pauline rendering of advaitic formula: *Tat-tvam-asi* (You are That)!

Thus Jesus awakens us to our newly accomplished self-knowledge, the domain on which we can really experience God 'face to face.' It instils in us a new confidence and thereby a new inner empowerment anchored in a subject referral. But he insists that 'we become the light' of the world. Let it shine forth as the city is set on the hill. The Christic consciousness is the divine potential inlaid in us but the potential energy is to be explored and realized in the narrative of our life.

Jesus sounds Buddha's great saying: *Atmo deepo bhava* (Become a light unto yourself). Jesus is conscientizing us on the inherent divine consciousness which is to be enlightened through a radical engagement in the life process as we see in the story of Jesus. It is the vocation, mission and witness of one's life as we find it in Jesus' mission which is conceived, figured out and practiced in and through the Abba consciousness. He was deeply grounded and resolved in the Abba Consciousness, his internal referral. Jesus invokes us to trigger the divine consciousness inherent in us. It is like the fire in the fuel. Jesus has shown the way how to enkindle the inner fire and become the 'burning bush' on the 'holy ground.' Everyone is invited to tread the Jesus' way so that one can participate in the New Life and the New Light of the Risen One. To employ some other metaphors, it is the tree hidden in the seed or salt. As the case of 'light' it by 'dying' and 'dissolving' they exist as the light exists by burning.

Jesus was, thus, a consciousness raiser and he wanted to trigger a revolution of consciousness so much so that one becomes self-sufficient in one's religious pursuits. He reminds us, the treasure is vitally hidden in oneself; there is no need of searching it outside.

A perceptive reading of Jesus' teachings will drive home the idea that the source and summit of salvation are already within us as reality is now reconciled and restored in the mystery of resurrection. The New Light has already dawned; the New Life is born. The Spirit of the Risen Christ is now the hidden ontological principle of Existence (Rom 8:11), and the "hope of glory of the Risen" is the abiding presence at the ground of being, which has to be proclaimed (Col 1:27) and witnessed in one's life's narrative. Jesus' Gospel is that the Kingdom of God is within us; he challenges us to become the king of the kingdom within. Jesus' Gospel is: You are already the light and salt of the world and of yourself. No need of outsourcing; what is needed is insourcing as the spring of eternal life is already operative within us (Jn 4:14). Thus the Third Christ of Enlightenment (the First fruit of Resurrection (1 Cor 15:20) is ubiquitous through his Spirit both within and without; he is innate, immediate and existential; he is the constant at the ground of our being; he is beyond all mediation of dogmas, laws and cult.

5. Ecological Christology

Moreover, the "Scriptural Christ" and the "dogmatic Christ" are, by and large, construed and constructed in the Semitic anthropocentric world vision. When the Greek philosophy argues

that the man/woman is the measure of everything the Christian theology would advocate that man/woman is the measure of everything because God has become man in Christ! Indeed, the Bible is core anthropocentric in its flow, vision and wisdom. Even God is imagined as a Super Anthropos, that too in the ambit of a patriarchal gestalt especially in the Old Testament. He is a warrior God of Hosts who protects the people. As a distant Sky God he shows his solidarity through his condescending love through a covenantal rapport. Moreover, the economy of salvation narrated in a progressive historical unfolding from Creation to Eschaton is essentially conceived and figured out in the compass of the redemption of humankind. This anthropocentric reduction of God and his activities is because of the compulsions of human pursuits. What is inherent in this exercise are human preoccupations and anguish rather than knowing God in and through and by God. The Anthropocentric symbols speak more of human agonies and desires. The Psychologists would satirically say that 'heaven' is the ultimate symbol of human greed while 'hell' the iconic symbol of human fear. These human postulates are, per se, feeble attempts to measure the Depths of the Divine. It is like measuring the depths of the ocean with the help of a small scale. They are good but not good enough to know God. But the danger is that these human constructs are absolutized and thus the God is fossilized in our cult and creed, dogmas and scriptures, customs and traditions. In this process the Divine is frozen and enslaved so much so that they are abused to promote human arrogance and power and sequentially it is easily translated to cultural chauvinism, religious bigotry and religious nationalism as in the politics of Hindutva, Jihad and Christendom. What is imperative is to emancipate us and our moorings from these compulsive anthropocentric categories so that our encounter with God grows into a face-to-face 'experience' of mutual inclusion. The claim and the challenge of the witness of the Third Christ empower us to entertain such theological praxis and religious exercise.

The new cosmology and the discourses on Ecology will be able to emancipate theology from its anthropocentric loop and will open up new enhanced domains to do a theology resonating with the witness of the Third Christ. The on-going cosmological discourses and discoveries drive home the bare fact that human being is only a cosmic spec in the ineffable vast infinite space. The earth and the humankind are only miniscule dots and spots in the immense spectacle of multi-universe of millions of mars and stars. The existence is a much larger reality than an anthropocentric reductionist

world. Humans are only a part of this vast and immeasurable existence. Our Christological discussions can take a paradigmatic turn if they become ecological and cosmological. The witness of the Third Christ would be an insource in this stream of theologizing. Though a thorough discussion on this theme is beyond the scope of this paper some salient perspectives can be delineated here.

Jesus the Risen One and his Witness transcend historical constraints and anthropocentric notions. In this age of 'space' the Risen One is to be figured out more 'spatial' domain than 'historical' plane; his presence is existential, immediate, innate and ubiquitous here-now. In the discourse of the Modern Physics and Einstein's theory the separation between time and space has not any valid value to the extent that the 'time' is lost in the space. To give justice to the redemptive presence of Christ we have to see and interpret the Witness of the Third Christ as ever permeating in the Space both within and without as New Life; thereby a new harmony and rhythm is engineered. The ubiquitous and 'spatial' Risen One is more ecological and cosmological rather than historical and notional. Jesus' death on the cross is the beginning of the new order of the Incarnate because it is enshrined in the mystery of Resurrection. Jesus as the first fruit of Resurrection (1 Cor 15:20) becomes trans historical and becomes an existential in the space here-now ever available and accessible. He vibes primarily with the simultaneity of existence rather than on an evolutionary historical stream. As the risen one, he is freed from the bearings of history and its names and forms (*nama-rupas*). This was possible for him through the second kenosis on the cross, where he absorbed brokenness of humanity and groaning of creation in love and transformed death as a sacrament of life. If the first 'kenosis' is enfleshing in the *nama-rupas* the second kenosis is transcending them. Paradoxically, 'death' is imperative for a God to become God! Here death is not mere a biological one but 'soteriological' event in which he became a wounded healer (1 Pet 3:24). In the Dalit soteriology there is a stream of thought that God is born in a murder (*kolayil-udita-deivangal*) and thus he can only become the redeemer. The solidarity with human struggles is an imperative for a God to become God. In the case of Jesus, he positively wanted to be vulnerable by becoming Immanuel and thus he became 'host and hostage.' In this vein of argument, what happened on the cross is the 'Rebirth' of God; it is the second Baptism of Jesus (Mt 20:17ff) which made "Son of man" the beloved "Son of God." It is in this context that Jesus oft speaks of the hour of death on the cross as hour of glory (Jn 12:23). Thus the 'cross' became the 'plus' of transformation, transcendence and new life. The cross became the "Tree of Life."

Hence St Peter verily recommends Jesus as the “author of life” (Acts 3:15), implying Jesus’ witness reaches out beyond the restrictive anthropocentric world. The bandwidth of Jesus as new life is all pervading; Life is an ecological phenomenon in which humans are constitutively embedded. Theophany is now verily ecological and existential, which does not, obviously, exclude historical.

There is a striking myth in the Hindu tradition in which God is profiled as a Natarajan (King of dance). God, as a Dancer, indulges in a cosmic dance out of a creative playfulness. He dances ecstatically to the extent that he becomes the Dance, and he fragments his body in the bliss of ecstasy; thereby the whole creation is made. It is a ‘sacrificial’ but blissful death so much so that the Dancer Creator dissolves (incarnates) in the Creation. Jesus’ Death on the Cross is verily of this genre. His sacrificial death engenders a new life of reconciliation in which the whole of reality is redeemed, restored and reconciled. It is not a future, virtual utopia but an existential potential event which has to be prolonged following the Kingdom path that Jesus has lived out. As indicated above, Jesus saw the death on the cross as a Kairos of realization of his mission. Patristic literature often narrates that Jesus embraced the cross as the bride embraces her bridegroom to commence a new life. His death was an ecstatic dance which engendered a new life, new promise and new vision to the whole of existence. In this process Jesus’ witness through his martyrdom is of an existential inclusion of the whole reality. It is untenable to interpret Jesus’ witness in exclusive and restrictive anthropocentric profiles and categories. By and large Christian theological concern is to present Jesus exclusively as a personal God. This is an anthropocentric preoccupation or obsession of theologizing because Western psychology upholds person sacrosanct and sees human person is the zenith of evolution. No doubt this advocacy is partially valid from the point of humans. But such an approach will not do justice if we interpret on a larger canvas of life, which is fundamentally existential.

Religious experience is more existential than psychological and historical; both of the latter are only the properties of the former. The existential ubiquity of the Risen in virtue of Resurrection is not virtual or philosophical but ecological. For the New Life that Jesus has brought is to be sought in the vibe and vitality of the ecological continuum and ecological equity, in which humans as ecological beings are incorporated. The New Life that emanated from the empty tomb will have greater articulation and imagination if it is interpreted on the domain of Ecology. No doubt, the faith in the Risen Christ

helps us to argue that it is the witness of the Risen One as the New Life both within and without of Reality, that the ecological balance and harmony can be sustained and fostered. This should be the core and chunk of the trust in the Risen Christ henceforth when humans are increasingly interpreted as ecological beings in the on-going discourses.

Jesus, the Risen, as the Author of Life goes beyond anthropocentric profiling of God. The present discourses on Ecology and modern Cosmology argue that the whole existence cannot be frozen in the anthropocentric reductionism. Anthropos is only a part of this vast cosmos. Humans are also made in the depths of earth (Ps 139:15), and fact of the matter is that our being is also an interplay of five elements as that of any other living being. The modern science and physics based on the quantum theory see this universe (multiverse) and the creation not as a dead matter but as manifold expressions of life. God is not an anthropocentric postulate but Life, Life in abundance so much so that God is Life and Life is God. In this present ethos, one has to be life-sensitive so much so that the earth and its manifold manifestations of life are protected, sustained and fostered. Seeing and experiencing God as the Life force and energy in the whole of reality offers us an inclusive and a non-conclusive ecological space without boundaries to do theology in a competitive frame. The modern physics offers competent metaphors and live patterns to do life centric and affirmative theology.

The quantum as the fundamental constituent unit of existence is a configuration of energy and knowledge; it is always in a live flux which can never be objectified and contained as science once claimed. Even the idea of utter objectivity of the matter as the empirical science once thought is no more valid in the modern science. Existence is a vital confluence of flows of energy and information in myriad mutations and permutations. Reality is a kaleidoscopic mix and mingle of life energy and knowledge configurations. How is then empirical objectivity possible when the reality is always in a momentum of wave and energy? The Modern Physics advocates that the inclusion of the subject is subtly operative in the objective analysis; the subject is not an outsider but the vital constituent of the whole process of analysis. It leads to the fact that there does not exist absolute division between subject and object per se when the reality is, de facto, a holistic quantum. Every bit and byte of reality is a living constituent of the wholeness of live reality. Wholly is holy! The whole reality is a "burning bush" on a "holy ground" (Ex 3:1ff). The holy ground is the New Life which is the Ocean, the substratum of the burning bushes. This stream of advocacy leads to a new equation:

God is Life and Life is God. Jesus says, "God is a God of the living" (Mt 22:32). In the present discourse on God, the paradigm of patriarchal God, as a distant monad, outside the brim of reality but concerned with the "cry of the poor" and the "cry of the lost" through his condescending love seems no more palatable and acceptable. God as Life dissolves in his/her creation as a creative presence and pure energy. There cannot be any division between the subject and act in God. When God 'acts out' God becomes instantly 'ACT.' There is an absolute coincidence between the 'subject' and 'act' in the life of God. Then, God, as the author of life is equally KARMA and is ever processual of 'One-in-Many – Many-in-One.' The division between One and Many is human conjecture. This immanent presence as Life in the whole of reality is 'Godliness.' It is more revealing to see and experience God as 'Godliness' than as a monad aloof from the flux of reality. The incarnation compels us to revisit the idea of God who is figured as an immutable and a distant sacrosanct monad rewarding and punishing the humans. God who is incarnate in Jesus is the Divine creativity inherent in this immense multiverse sustaining and fostering the harmony of the whole of existence. The divine Creativity is the 'kabod,' the Glory of the Risen deep within the recesses of reality (Col 1:27) as indicated above. This ever creative presence is ever present, agile, creative, innovative, immediate, innate, accessible and ecological. This presence is not a philosophical construct but experiential, existential, personal and is communion of beings here-now. The witness of the Third Christ is thus life sensitive and affirmative theophany!

If we give an Ecological churn and spin while making a hermeneutics of the witness of the Third Christ, it will offer a new gestalt to do theology. The New Life is empowering and steering the existence as an inherent 'holy quantum.' St Paul would say, "Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:10) because he is the first Adam (Col 1:15) in whom and through whom and for whom the whole creation is envisaged. We live and move and have our being in Christ (Act 17:28). Paul becomes ecstatic when he says that it is 'no longer I but Christ who lives' (Gal 2:20). The whole existence is then Christological to the core. Jesus of Nazareth is the creative visualization of this invisible and invincible presence of the Godliness, the Goodness and divine Creativity innate and inherent in the wholeness of reality. Jesus of Faith steers us to this indwelling presence of Divine Creativity. The Risen Christ is the magnificent spectacle of unity and harmony of the New Life of the reconciled world. If to phrase this Christophany as New Life, the Risen Christ is the ecological equity and balance and he is the divine grammar

offering meaning, vision and wisdom to the whole phenomenon of Reality. The existence is fundamentally ecological in the sense that it is a network of beings in a communion of mutual inclusion and mutual appropriation. This inner reconciliation was made possible owing to the New Life that Christ has brought about through the mystery of Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. The risen Christ, the awakened One is the ultimate referral, the wisdom and vision of existence. The New Light and New Life unleashed from the empty tomb (womb) is the new potential, promise and possibility. It is the witness of the Third Christ and we are challenged to participate in this Christological élan to further and foster the Joy of the Gospel.

What is needed is to turn within and tune within and to open the inner eye (Third Eye) to awaken to the perennial presence of Spirit of the Risen at core of the being and in whole existence. To employ scientific metaphors, the Spirit of the 'Third Christ' of Enlightenment is the divine 'holy quantum' at the ground of being steering and empowering the history and the cosmic process; he is the Energy and Information in which the whole reality is configured. The inherent Christic Consciousness is the new inner cybernetic in and through which meaning is constructed and celebrated. Karl Rahner would say, Jesus, the Enlightened is the 'Holy Optimism' of the Existence. The Risen one is the divine 'Software' of the Reality, the inner referral of the new hermeneutics of reality. Invoking this hidden "Third Christ" should be the praxis and celebration of inter-faith dialogues for he is the ultimate Dialogue of all dialogues. "Third Christ" is to be appropriated as the new pathos, logos and perspective of the praxis of inter-faith dialogue. This Awakened One at the core of being is beyond all fundamentalist xenophobia and disastrous polarizations. This ubiquitous presence of the Risen beyond as well as in all pursuits is not the 'hub' but the 'web' that reconciles the 'many' in the communion of beings.

What is needed is a radical shift as delineated above, both in theory and praxis of dialogue so that dialogue becomes a religious experience in virtue of itself because it is exercised in the 'New Life' and 'New Light' of the Risen Christ, the Third Christ. It is not an academic exercise. This Christic epiphany is now happening in the interfaith satsangs; the Church should recognize and appreciate the presence of the Risen One in such fellowships in humility and wisdom; thereby mission of Christ is furthered and sustained without being unnecessarily preoccupied with our normative idioms and notions. The witness of 'Third Christ' can only become the ultimate antithesis of the present fundamentalist streaks in a sustaining manner. Moreover, it is through the Christology of 'Third-Christ' of

Enlightenment at the domain of Inter-faith dialogue that the uniqueness and unicity of Jesus can be upheld through a hermeneutics of inclusion rather than exclusion. One should see dialogue as a spirit activity of the Risen One in the present age of cultural and religious pluralism. It entails a radical trust on the inscrutable ways of the Spirit. As Isaiah says, we have to 'widen the tent' (54:2) of the theological and spiritual precepts and perspectives, and appreciate new 'Cyruses' (Is 42:12) from different religious pursuits so that the mission of Christ is enhanced and deepened in the perennial *Missio Dei*: God does not wish that anybody should perish (2 Pet 3:9).

Conclusion

Therefore, the praxis of dialogue should explore the witness of "Third Christ" who is 'unbound' (Samartha⁹) and 'unknown' (R. Panikkar¹⁰) but is already being 'acknowledged' (M.M. Thomas¹¹) in religious pursuits so that interfaith dialogue may turn out a collective appreciation and recognition of the inherent 'universal salvific will' of the whole existence and a veritable praxis to further and foster *Missio Dei*. Thereby, interfaith *satsangs* may evolve into a new worship and an honest religious inquiry which is not constrained by *a priori*. Its fundamental dynamic is a radical trust in witness of the Third Christ who is the Dialogue of dialogues. What is now needed is a Christology of the "Third Christ" who resurrects in the interfaith *satsangs*. The witness of this 'Third Christ' of awakening on the domain of the Inter/multi-faith fellowships would hopefully turn out a new source and mandate while Asian Christians muse about scripting 'Asian Gospel' and Asian Christology. Moreover, the theological imperative to disseminate the "Joy of the Gospel" among the teeming millions of Asians is a convincing and a credible Christology, which resonates with Asian sensibilities and ethos. The witness of the Third Christ in the present scenario of multiple belonging and inter-faith *satsangs* especially at the people's level is pivotal and enthusing to construct a Christology of a Third Christ especially in Asia, the continent of awakening and enlightenment. Thus the Third Christ becomes the vital agency to invigorate the praxis of dialogue to promote the harmony, peace and reconciliation in the present polarized world in the name of religion, culture and ideologies.

⁹S.J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, Madras: CLS, 1974.

¹⁰Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Bangalore: ATC, 1982.

¹¹M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Madras: The Senate of Serampore College and CLS, 1970.