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THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS AND SACRIFICE

1. Introduction

In the past the attitude of the Christian Churches to non-christian religions, for dogmatic, psychological, social and cultural reasons had been dominated by condemnations and disqualifications. Both the content and tone of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican Council II bear witness to a decisive and unique advance from the earlier position. The spirit of this document justifies the expectation that both in theory and practice, the Church is willing and able to make its contribution to a world united in fraternity and peace.¹

Long and strenuous dogmatic studies and researches in philosophy of religion and of civilization had gone into the making of the content of the declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Questions such as relativism and the absolute claim of Christianity, the difference between natural religion and supernaturally revealed religion, toleration and religious freedom, the salvation of pagans etc. are a few among these prominent topics. However the pace of transition from an ecclesiastical attitude which was unfavourable to non-christian religions to one of healthy understanding was very slow. In this context the contributions of Pope Paul VIth should be gratefully remembered. His breadth of vision and understanding of non-christian religions could be seen in his Easter Message of 1964. He said, "Every religion contains a ray of the light which we must neither despise nor extinguish, eventhough it is not sufficient to give man the truth he needs... every religion raises us towards the Transcendent Being... Every religion is a dawn of faith..."² Pope Paul exhorts the Christians regarding their duty to respect and reverence the non-christian religions. There are several reasons for this appreciation "they are the living expressions of the souls of the vast

1. H.R. Schlette, "Theology of Religions," in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 5 (Bangalore: 1975), p. 282.

2. A.M. Henry (ed) Vat. II, *Unam Sanctam* 52-53 (1966), p. 62.

groups of people;" "they carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God;" "they have taught generations of people how to pray." Slowly, the readiness from the part of the Church to reflect afresh on its practice and attitude in regard to non-christian religions and to undertake actual practical steps, led to the foundation of a special Secretariat for the non-christian religions.³

2. The Second Vatican Council and the non-Christian Religions

One of the significant achievements of the council was the clarification of the nature and position of the Church in relation to Christ and the world. The position of the Church is stated as a sacrament, that is, a sign and means of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race. The Church thus gets a renewed function of being a sign and sacrament of salvation. This involves a shift of emphasis from "church centredness" to "Christ centredness" – or what is called christocentrism. This re-setting of priorities has far reaching importance on her relationship with the non-christian religions and in her missionary activity.

Without undermining the uniqueness of Christ and his revelation, the Vatican II took a very positive approach to the religions of the world. Besides *Nostra Aetate* – the declaration specifically treating the non-christian religions – there are other documents, especially *Lumen gentium* and *Ad Gentes*, which treat the non-christians and their religions.⁴

The main points of view presented by the declaration (*Nostra Aetate*) are regarding the unity of history: God's universal salvific will, developments leading in the direction of one world, the non-christian religions as answers to the metaphysical and existential questions regarding the meaning of life. There is "perception" and "acknowledgement" of the divine everywhere in mankind. Religions must be considered as social forms which embody religious experience. To be true, good and holy is to be met within them. In this respect "*Nostra Aetate*" is different from the unfavourable judgements of the past.

Perhaps it may be said that *Nostra Aetate* goes considerably less far than what Catholic theologians and specialists in comparative religion

3. H.R. Schlette, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

4. Thomas Emprayil, *The Emerging Theology of Religions* (Rewa: 1980), p. 13.

had long been saying about "encounter" and "discussions" with the non-christian religions. Nevertheless, the value of this document cannot be belittled. The willingness for a new relationship of the Church to other religions was stated here solemnly and convincingly. But the respect for non-christian religions and the complexity of questions that arise from them are not excuses for missionaries to neglect evangelization. Pope Paul emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ and the Gospel, its universality and the christological foundation of the Christian religion. Hence non-christians "have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ—riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find everything that it is gropingly searching for God, man and his destiny, life and death and birth."⁵ Fundamentally this means a renewed understanding by the Church of her own nature.

The Church in India because of her existence amidst several of the religions of the world, has a unique opportunity to develop a theology of religions. An encounter of Christianity with other religions has become a necessity for several reasons:

- 1) The theological consciousness of the mission of the Church has deepened, during the past few decades. Mission is being realized more as witnessing to Jesus Christ by word and deed rather than as mere self-proclamation, and the extension of the visible boundaries of the Church.
- 2) In the post-independent era, there is a growing awareness among Christians that the art, literature and philosophy of ancient and modern India and of her religions, are part of the common cultural patrimony of every Indian.
- 3) The ancient non-christian religions are asserting themselves confidently, after centuries of defensive posture against the onslaughts of Islam and Christianity. In fact, Indian Christianity is entering into a very crucial period of encounter with non-christian religions of India, forcing her to rethink the very *raison d'être* of her existence.⁶

In the past, Christians often regarded other religions as hostile to the plan of God. Hence Christian mission was considered to be the promotion

5. Encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 53.

6. Thomas Emprayil, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

and propagation of faith together with a refined and advanced culture called Christian culture. But today more and more Christians acknowledge that God is at work in all cultures and religions and that in Christ all men have to be liberated from the fetters of sin. But this saving work of Christ is not limited to the organized Christian religion. The Church is seen rather, as the leaven, the salt and the sacrament of salvation. Domination, arrogance and force are, therefore, outside the mission of the Church.⁷

Since the Vatican II, theological writings have been prolific, and the writings of a few outstanding theologians have contributed considerably for the construction of a theology of religions. In this context I gratefully remember the writings of Raymundo Panikkar, Amalorpavadass, Abhishiktananda, Neuner, John Chethimattam and a number of others on non-christian religions. These writings give us a clear picture of an awareness of the universal salvific plan of God and His ways of effecting it in the human circumstances even independently of man's awareness to this plan. As is unavoidable, the writings expose this universal cosmic plan of God as seen from a Christian world view. Accordingly Christ is God's definitive and ultimate historical manifestation, who by his death and resurrection placed mankind in an objective state of redemption. But at no time in history of mankind is man outside of this eternal salvific plan of God. Though the Christ-event is a historical event, limited in time and space, Christ as Logos is eternally present in His creation, before and after incarnation. And grace, that essential ingredient for salvific faith, was always present and available in the world. The visible Church neither limits nor restricts salvific grace.

The Church in India, living in the midst of non-christian religions, has a duty to perform. To quote the words of Pope Paul VI; "If in the past our insufficient knowledge of the hidden riches of the various civilizations hindered the spread of the Gospel message and gave the Church a certain foreign aspect, it is for you to show that the salvation brought by Jesus Christ is offered to all, without any privileged link with one race, continent or civilization."⁸

3. The Concept of Sacrifice

Closely related to religion is the topic of sacrifice. In almost all religions, sacrifice occupies the central place of importance. Man, right

7. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

8. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 30th Jan. 1971, p. 25.

from the very beginning of his existence, has expressed, in some way or the other, his awareness of a transcendental reality. Mircea Eliade thinks that man becomes aware of the Sacred or the Holy when it manifests itself as something wholly different from the profane (or the natural). Confronted with it, man senses his profound nothingness and feels that he is only a creature.⁹

The relation between man and the Sacred can take a variety of forms. Although moral conduct, right belief, and participation in religious institutions are the commonly recognized constituent elements of religious life, cult or worship is generally accepted as the most basic and Universal element. Worship is man's reaction to the experience of Sacred power. It is a giving of himself, especially by devotion and service, to the transcendental reality on which he feels himself dependent. Sacrifice and prayer—which are man's personal attempts to communicate with the transcendental reality are the fundamental acts of worship. E.O. James is of opinion that religion performs its proper function in society through an organized cultus. Of the many rites that have been employed for this purpose, the institution of sacrifice has gained a position of pre-eminence in most of the higher religions.¹⁰

Sacrifice is the deepest and the most common expression of man's relation to the Infinite. In its general meaning, sacrifice may be described as a symbolic action, expressive of man's consciousness of a superior power (howsoever it may be conceived) and through which he enters into contact with this absolute power. Often this action consists in the offering of a gift, which however does not simply mean the disposing of some object, but the placing of oneself in relation to, and then participating in, a second person, by means of an object, which, however, is not an object at all but part of one's own self. To give then is to convey something of oneself to the strange being so that a strong bond may be forged.¹¹ Therefore, the sacrificial ritual is a symbol of real life; the visible gift is not a substitute for man and his self-gift, but it is the exterior expression of his own attitude and self-gift to God. It is the characteristic of ritualism to concentrate on the sign, on the exterior gift, on the ceremonial, secluded from real life; it becomes sterile and irrelevant

9. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York, 1961), p. 11.

10. E. O. James, *The Beginnings of Religion* (London, 1958), p. 83.

11. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, vol. 2 (New York: 1963), p. 351.

for the people and it may be thrown out completely. (refer to the Brahmanic Sacrifice and the emergence of Carvaka system, Buddhism and Upaniṣads).

4. Sacrifice in different religions

i. Hinduism & Vedic Sacrifice

The constituent elements of sacrifice have been incorporated into particular religions and cultures of the world in various and often complex ways. We shall confine ourselves, in our discussion, to the consideration of vedic and Christian concepts of sacrifice.

Speaking about the vedic sacrifice V.S. Agrawala observes: *Yajña* forms a complete theoretical statement of the metaphysical view-points of the ṛṣis and their practical application to human life. If *Yajña* is properly understood, everything else in the veda may be comprehended as a matter of course.

In the vedic tradition, a sacrifice is conceived not only as the central act of religious belief, but also as the supreme principle of all things, as a reality which overpowers both spiritual and material creation. In the Vedic perspective sacrifice is elevated into a world principle. The whole world is conceived as being involved in a universal sacrifice. The creation on the cosmic plane is a universal sacrifice in which the Creator offers himself as the *āhuti*. This is called *Sarvāhūta Yajña* in the Ṛg-Veda. (X.90.9.)¹²

The sacrifice is regarded as the navel of the universe. In the vedic context sacrifice is conceived to be the fundamental principle of all things. Ṛg-Veda says: "The sacrifice is our father, ... our Manu. (Rv.X.100.5). According to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*: "...all beings are settled under sacrifice, it being the all sustaining principle. (S.B.IX.2.3.27). It is the principle par excellence that one ascribes to it not only origin of men, but even that of the gods.

There is a scene of sacrifice described in the 1 Book of Ṛg-Veda (chapt.164-33). When the sacrifice is in progress a *gijñāsu* stands up in the Sabhā and humbly asks certain questions to the Lord of sacrifice. The first question is: *Prchāmi twā paramantaṁ prthivyā?* (I ask you

12. V. S. Agrawala, "Sparks from the Vedic Fire" (Varanasi, 1962), p. 7.

what is the end of earth?). The second question is: *Pṛchami yatra bhuvanasya nabhi?* (I ask you where is navel of the universe?). These questions are raised by the sage in order to bring out the real nature of sacrifice. The important mantras of Ṛg-Veda can be interpreted in different ways. They can be interpreted mythologically, spiritually and mechanically. During the Brāhmaṇa period the priests emphasised the mechanical meaning neglecting the spiritual and mythological aspects of sacrifice. Consequently a perverted and unhealthy attitude towards sacrifice grew up, causing an erosion of the spiritual significance and inner meaning of sacrifice. For example take the mantra – *svarga kāmo yajetaḥ* – (if you want heaven offer sacrifice). What meaning is to be ascribed to sacrifice here? Does it mean to please a god or goddess by offering a sacrifice which would involve the cutting of trees and killing of animals? To a certain group of priests it meant just that. The retaliation came from the other groups. They started asking: If heaven is to be obtained by cutting trees, killing animals and causing bloodshed, how hell is to be obtained? In order to show that sacrifice has deeper meaning and wider significance the above mentioned questions were asked by the sages. The answer to the first question is given in the same chapter (I. 164) "*Iyaṁ Vedhiḥ paro antaḥ pṛthivyāḥ*" – (This altar, this sacrificial altar is the end of earth). The answer to the second question "*Ayaṁ yajño bhuvanasya nābhiḥ*" (this sacrifice is the end of the universe).

As Aguilar points out that *yajña* signifies two things: 1) The emergence of order from chaos, i.e., *satya*, which is the central point of *yajña* and stands for a fixed principle for the operation of the forces against the disorderly chaotic conditions in which energy darts at will and cancels itself.¹³ 2) In the second place *Yajna* signifies the emergence of dynamic activity out of the womb of stillness or rest. According to the Vedic outlook, water is the universal substratum which is always in the state of perfect equilibrium and in which all the forces have their rest. For the sake of creation this equilibrium is disturbed by time. As a consequence, the heat which was distributed evenly in waters becomes manifest at individual centers where this churning process is in operation. In response to this churning process, Agni or Suryah

13. V.S. Agrawala, *Vedic Lectures* (Varanasi 1962), p. 149. Life and cosmos are said to be the outcome of a struggle between the *devas* and the *asuras*. The *devas* represent truth, light and immortal life while the *asuras* represent untruth darkness and death. *Yajna* demonstrates the victory of *deva* principle by routing and expelling the powers of untruth, disorder and darkness.

takes birth out of the womb of waters. The birth of fire from the bosom of waters is regarded as the supreme *yajña*.

Though sages like swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo have given emphasis to the spiritual significance of sacrifice ordinary interpreters do not enter into such levels of meaning of sacrifice. The power which provides foundation to the universe, which guides its destiny from within, that invisible, ultimate ineffable Reality is regarded here as the foundation of sacrifice. It is easy to understand this meaning of sacrifice in the light of the opening hymn of *Īśa Upaniṣad*.

“*īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiṁ ca jagatyāṁ jagat tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā, mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam.*”

(Know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others.

All the things of the world are impermanent. Only the Absolute Reality which guides them from within is eternal, imperishable and true. Therefore discriminating the eternal from non-eternal and renouncing the non-eternal one should try to realize the Absolute Reality. All the objects that are offered in sacrifice are the external manifestation of this *tyāga* or renunciation. It is this renunciation which sustains the universe. All the plants and animals, though they do not possess the power of thinking, offer this sacrifice in their own way.

a) *The Puruṣa Sūkta*

The *Puruṣa Sūkta* presents the creation of the universe as the sacrifice of the primeval *Puruṣa*. The sacrificial activity cannot be regarded as a single definite act. On the contrary it is an ever proceeding activity and the year which is the symbol of time, takes its part in that sacrifice, its three seasons: spring, summer and autumn forming the ghee, kindling sticks and oblations (Rv.X.90.6).

These speculations may be regarded as forming the foundation on which the theory of sacrifice, as propounded in the *Brāhmaṇas*, has been constructed.¹⁴ By offering his own self in sacrifice, *Prajāpati* becomes dismembered; all his separated limbs and faculties come to form the

14. Eggeling, *Sacred Books of the East*, XLIII, p. XV.

universe – all that exists, from the gods to a blade of grass. Now it requires a new and ever new sacrifice to build the dismembered Lord up again, to restore him so as to enable him to offer himself again and again, to renew the universe and thus to keep up the uninterrupted revolution of time and matter. Man who is a child of this process has to do his part in the reconstruction of Prajāpati by his periodic performance of sacrifice.¹⁵

b) *Sacrifice in the Upaniṣads*

The dramatic setting of the *kaṭhōpaniṣad* presents the change of spirit regarding sacrifice that occurred during the upaniṣadic period. More than forsaking objects here one has to offer one's own self. All the *mahāvākyas* proclaim this aspect of sacrifice. *Aham Brahma asmi, tatvam asi, ayam ātma Brahman, sarvam khalvidem Brahman* etc. show that one has to realize that one is nothing apart from Brahman – i.e. he has to realize the center of his existence in Brahman – not in himself. It involves absolute self-sacrifice which is greater than the sacrifice of any object.

ii. *Sacrifice in the Judeo-Christian Traditions*

From the perspective of Old Testament practice, Christian soteriology and sacramental theology, a sacrifice could be described as an act whereby an authorized person representing a group of worshippers, changes a material offering in such a way as to withdraw it from profane use, place it within the sacred sphere and thus dedicate it to God, to make it when accepted and sanctified by God, a sign in the community's sacrificial meal, of God's gracious will to enter into communion with man. For the New Testament in particular, the whole procedure of worship, wherever it may occur, can only be the symbol of man's adoring self-surrender and God's gracious acceptance of it.¹⁶

The sacrifice was the most important cultural act among the Israelites. The cultic Decalogue (Exodus 34), the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22–23:33), Deuteronomy (12–26), the final part of the Book of Ezekiel (chs. 40–48) and the so-called priestly code (especially Exod. 24; Num. 10) furnish us with an idea of the Old Testament concept of sacrifice.

15. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. 2, part 2 (Poona, 1968), p. 1246.

16. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Concise Theological Dictionary* (London; 1965), p. 418.

Several prominent scholars¹⁷ are of opinion that many of the sacrificial rites in the Old Testament period developed as the Israelites came into contact with neighbouring heathen, particularly canaanite cults and thus they were products of a lengthy and complex development. The simplicity which characterized the cultic practices of the early Jews, who displayed their religious spirit by erecting altars, invoking divine name and offering animals and products of the soil where God manifested Himself, slowly gave way to more and more complicated rites. Different types of sacrifices such as holocaust (burnt-offerings), Peace offering, Atonement sacrifice, vegetable offering, showbread, and incense offering came into existence in course of time. In a true sacrifice, external offering should represent the internal self-surrender to the will of God. While the cultic elements stress on the external offering, the inner self-surrender is more reflected through the moral life. The authenticity of external performances could be, to a certain extent, verified from the moral life of the person concerned. In the historical books, as well as in Torah, though the cultic aspect has been treated elaborately, the question of moral life was not adequately considered. This might have been a reflection of the priorities of the time. The classical prophets¹⁸ and wisdom writers reacted against this attitude in their vehement zeal (Hos. 6:6). Though it would seem that they denounced sacrifice outright, in deeper analysis, we find that the object of their attack was not sacrifice as such, but sacrifice without, proper inner dispositions and several malpractices that had crept into the performance of sacrifices.¹⁹

While St. Paul emphasized the superiority of the New Testament over the Old, he still interpreted the one as the preparation for the other. St. Augustine says that in the Old the New is concealed, and in the New the Old is revealed. Several types which pre-figure the sacrifice of Christ can be seen in the Old Testament. The Covenant, the Passover, the *Ebed Yahweh*, the *Aqedah* and the Propitiation are a few among them. We see that Christ's entrance into history and the unique sacrifice that he offered were not at all by accident. The prophets were preparing the way for his coming and people were eagerly awaiting the same.

17. G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, 1965, p. 252.

18. Cf. Yeheskel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (London, 1960), p. 347.

19. R. D. Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions* (London; 1965), p. 454.

The disposition which Jesus Christ had on entering the world is presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews (10:5-7) as: "Sacrifices and offerings Thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings Thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O, God." Hereby, he abolishes the old forms of sacrifice and replaces them with a new type of sacrifice, in which he would offer himself as a victim. From the reading of the Gospels, we understand how he was fulfilling this promise through a life of obedience to the will of God and self-surrender extending even to the death of the cross.

From a deep study of the Bible we find that there is an undeniable continuity between the Old Testament sacrifice and the sacrifice of the New Testament. The numerous allusions, which the Gospels and Epistles make to the ritual vocabulary of the Old Testament, reveal the profound meaning of the ancient liturgy. In spite of their cultic predominance, they prefigured and prepared the way for the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But the perfection of the New Testament sacrifice, on the basis of the personality of the offerer (Son of God), the uniqueness of the offering (He himself) and its universal efficacy, surpasses the many and varied sacrifices of the Old Testament. The reality of Christ's self-offering transcends the sacrificial categories of thought furnished by the Old Testament.

Christ, the high priest and the victim, makes a covenant between God and His people, just as Moses did on Sinai. But this covenant, unlike the covenants of the Old Testament, is perfect and permanent. (Heb 8:6-13; 9:15-10:18). Again, Christ as the high priest, on the day of atonement, accomplishes a purifying action; but here he abolishes sin by pouring his own blood, which is much more efficacious than that of the temple victims.

This bloody sacrifice, which Jesus Christ offered on the Cross once for all, is rendered present by virtue of the holy Eucharist. The Council of Trent sees this relationship of the sacrifice of the Cross to lie, above all, in the fact that there is in both the same high priest and the same sacrificial victim. When the Christians offer the sacrifice with Christ, then His mental disposition, His resignation and readiness to suffer, and His will for the cross and sorrow and death must take hold of them too, so that they do not merely take part in the external ceremonies, but also in his interior dispositions which animate the sacrifice.

St. Paul exhorts his people: "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. II:5), and goes on to sketch for them the picture of the Son of God who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant becoming obedient even unto the death of the cross.

5. Conclusion

The law of sacrifice is the common divine action that was thrown into the world in the beginning as a symbol of solidarity of the universe. It is by attraction of this law that a divinizing, a saving power descends to limit and correct and gradually to eliminate the errors of an egoistic, and self-divided creation. This descent, this sacrifice of the *Purusa*, the divine soul submitting itself to force and matter, so that it may inform and illuminate them, is the seed of redemption of this world of inconscience and ignorance. The acceptance of the law of sacrifice is a practical recognition by the ego that it is neither alone nor chief in the world. It is an admission that even in this much fragmented existence, there is beyond itself and behind that which is not its own egoistic person, something greater and complete, which demands from it subordination and service.

To put it briefly, this is the demand made on one, that he should turn his whole life into a conscious sacrifice. All his thoughts, words and actions of everyday life are to be resolved into a continuous and devoted self-giving to the Eternal. Believers are called upon to perform all their actions as consecrated acts. One's individualized nature must live in the single consciousness of an inner and outer movement, dedicated to God, who is beyond the individual, and on whom he depends for everything including existence. Thus, the sacrifice one offers in the Church or *yajñasālā*, has to inspire a believer to live a sacrificial life in the world.

A Response to the Paper

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The sacrifice, in our context, should include an emphasis on the attempt of man to go from the unconscious to the conscious. What is meant here is that man is a part of the visible universe; but he is unconscious of the hidden forces that rule the universe. The mysterious *ṛta* of the universe is present there, even though he is unconscious of it. Sacrifice is then a means of his entering into the consciousness of this *ṛta* or hidden rhythm of the universe. His joy and wholeness consists

in discovering this *ṛta* and surrendering himself to it and thus celebrating his own oneness with reality. Vedic sacrifices and the various rituals in course of time, seem to be a manifestation of this urge within. No doubt that at some stage this was forgotten and sacrifice was dissociated from its purpose to become a manipulative instrument in the hands of a few for their own selfish ends. It was seen more as a magical ceremonial to acquire control over the hidden powers of nature for one's own benefit. It also gave great powers to the few and Buddhism was a natural reaction to it. But Buddhism itself seems to have acted as a ferment to make sacrifices much more spiritual and symbolical.

Coming to the Judeo-Christian sacrifices, they seem to be acts of acknowledging God's supremacy in one's life, a means of establishing a relationship with God, a sealing of a covenant and a continued renewal of a covenant by further sacrifices. This relational aspect of Judeo-Christian sacrifice needs to be emphasized. Here too, there was a justified danger, borne out by subsequent history. The danger consists in purely performing the act exteriorly while forgetting what it really signified. The relation becomes formal and not really lived and celebrated in all its consequences. We have the ample reaction of the prophets to such a situation.

In the New Testament we have the interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection as a salvific sacrifice which fulfils and transcends the Old Testament sacrifices. Here, too, one must pay attention to the historical adjuncts that go to develop such a theology. It is remarkable that the Jewish Christians continued to offer sacrifices at the temple even after they had embraced the Christian faith. Thus for them it had not lost its validity totally since it was essentially a relational sacrifice and expressed their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. I feel, that it was only when they were thrown out of the Jewish circles, the temple and the synagogue (as it seems to be implied in the letter to the Hebrews) that they began to see the death and resurrection of Jesus as the sacrifice of the new covenant, a celebration of a newer relationship with God in Jesus Christ. In this context, we can understand better the sacrifice - theology of the letter to the Hebrews.

It is to be conceded at the same time that we find Paul's letters, which are earlier to this, and which represent a time when Palestinian Christians attended temple worship (the Apostles, including Paul, seem to have

done so), seem to interpret Jesus' death as a sacrifice and the Eucharist itself as proclaiming the death of Jesus and the sacred meal participated in as a celebration of the new covenant, a new fellowship with God and with one another (I Cor. II: 23-33) wherein the break of fellowship by divisions, as it occurred in the Corinthian Church, is seen as a desecration.

I consider that the point of convergence between sacrifices in the Indian context and Judeo-Christian context is this aspect of relationship. On the other hand, we have the expression of this relationship in celebrating our oneness with the hidden *rita* of the universe (which includes everything) and on the other hand, it is a celebration of the relationship with God in Jesus Christ, the head of the cosmos, the head of the Church, the head of all peoples and at the same time a celebration of our human togetherness, loving one another in Christ Jesus. The apex of such a celebration is the Eucharist and every sharing among human beings in love is part of the Eucharist in the broadest meaning possible and a genuine sacrifice at the same time.