

TOWARD PEOPLES' SPIRITUALITY CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE RISING FUNDAMENTALISM

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1. Human History on a Reverse Gear!

Bharath, the land of Mahatma Gandhi and Buddha, well renowned for her non-violence (*ahimsa*) and tolerance world over, has become "Bloody India" in the eyes of the world community (*Time* March 11, 2002). The horrendous torching of the *kar sevaks* (Hindu activists) in the train at Godhra while returning from the holy site at Ayodhya (Feb 27, 2002), and the following frenzy of slaughter of innocent Muslims and the destruction of their properties show how religious fundamentalism can acquire diabolic proportions beyond wild imaginations possible. The people who perpetrated the Gujarath violence wounded the very pride and identity of the nation in its own eyes and those of the civilized nations. The nation will go to shreds if the ongoing Hindu fundamentalist sweep on the multiculturalism of India is given political sanction by the present political governance. Now the whole nation is gasped in a fear psychosis apprehending that the country will go to communal fury and blood shed if the threatening scenario unfolding on the Mandir- Masjid issue is not amicably settled. However, India is not an exception in this regard. This fundamentalist trend is raising its ugly head world wide in different forms and shades. Al Qaeda, Talibans, Osama Bin Laden have become decisive factors by default in the future course of history. The fundamentalists' attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, the following Afghanistan war, the ongoing attempt by a 'nexus' of western powers to gather world consensus on the imperative of a military action on the 'axis of evil' (Iraq, Iran and North Korea), the recurring bloody ethnic clashes in Africa, Indonesia, and the growing silent legitimacy of terrorism and war in the name of religion - all these are either 'civilized' or barbaric expressions of the fundamentalist streaks in the dark alleys of the collective human unconscious.

Is the present history moving on a reverse gear to Middle Ages of ethnic rivalry, cultural bigotry and religious hatred? Is human history at the verge of a "Clash of Civilizations"? On the one hand there is a vibrant and

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vital movement towards collaboration and networking of nations in the context of the modern advancement in Information Technology and electronic media, the increased economic interdependence because of the globalization and market economy, but, on the other hand, world is broken and fragmented at the seams because of cultural and religious hatred and mistrust. Though the Third Millennium was welcomed with a bandwagon of grandiose visions and hopes we find ourselves in a 'culture' of crises on all fronts of our life, whether it is in the field of our religious faith or social and political life. One can point out countless reasons for this phenomenon namely cultural nationalism, religious fundamentalism, assertion of ethnic identities, globalization (seen as a neocolonialism in the eyes of the poor nations), cultural invasion into the developing countries through information technology and electronic media, genetic engineering so on and so forth.

2. On the Verge of an Inner Crisis?

Indeed, it is a time of paradigm shift or 'churning' process which brings about a silent and sure deconstruction of the settled foundations of one's identity. For example, in the case of Christian identity, various surveys worldwide indicate that there is an increasing inarticulate or rather a naive awareness that Christianity is no more an absolute religion, and consequently, its dogmas and teachings are not taken seriously enough by the silent majority in the present pluralistic culture. Christians show no spiritual or theological qualms when they go to Zen or Yoga centres for meditation. The situation of Church in India is not different. Owing to the present religious and cultural compulsions in the unfolding political scenario in India, Christians are unconsciously undergoing through a process of reconfiguration of its self-identity and its mission in India. Naturally the spin off sequence of this fluid situation is lack of certainty and focus in Christian theology, ethics, mission and even spirituality. In this total fluid and borderline situation every body feels dangerously free, and becomes the principle unto oneself! Consequently, an assertive fanaticism both at the individual and collective level acquires justification and sanction. One becomes one's own referent and sanction, and drifts into spiritual vacuum without constraints and commitments. In such a context, there is only one way - one's own way!

At the bottom line, the chaos created in this 'culture of crises' zeroes in on a spiritual crisis. In the thick of today's affluence and comfort what is

disturbing and frustrating the modern life is lack of an inner core, a centre which spontaneously and meaningfully configures the conflicting experiences and encounters in the present tightly scheduled fast-track life, both at individual and collective level. This is because we have a free market of conflicting and competing ideologies and values. Today, no system, no ideology, no religion has any monolithic hold over any individual because of the inflow of information through the cyber media unconstraint, and their consequent influence especially on the growing minds. The boundaries of religious, cultural and ethnic identities and entities are blurred and diffused, and are no more geographical. In every field and facet of life there is transculturality and multiculturalism which offer a virtual space of immense freedom of choice in the matters of values, faiths, ideologies and life styles without any constraints of conscience. It generates a culture of preferences, privileges, pleasures, and ever changing convenient choices without a lasting commitment to a specific principle as in the past. In the present era of globalization what we find are floating cultures, or rather diffusive cultures without circumferences as well as centres!

Strangely, what we find today is a fatal loneliness in the abundance of freedom and the affluence of modern life. As a result accomplishments often lead to alienation which in turn infects one's competitiveness and resourcefulness, and eventually the inner happiness and peace of life. Kerala (India) which is known as the 'God's-own-land' has become the land of suicides; the USA, the land of opportunities has the maximum number of suicides. People opt out their life when there is no mission in life, no centre which can configure varied events in their life in a meaningful frame.

Surprisingly enough, today, spirituality has become a key concept in the policy decisions of many giant corporations and multinational companies to increase efficiency and creativity of the executives and workers. SQ (spiritual quotient) is the new mantra after the IQ (intelligent quotient) and the EQ (emotional quotient). In big cities like Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore there is a mushroom growth of these centres of yoga, reiki meditation, pranic meditation, ancient wisdom, or holistic meditation. Thus 'spirituality' has become a policy matter even in the present market economy to increase efficiency and profit! The following discussion looks at the crisis of spirituality from the point of Christian tradition in the present cultural and religious fundamentalist context.

3. Christian Mission and Spirituality

Vitality and competitiveness of Christianity is correlated with its mission. Pope John Paul II is correct in saying: "In the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of crisis of faith." (*Redemptoris Missio*, #2). Spirituality is the inner strength and vibrancy of any religious faith. Chinks in our spirituality makes the steam of our mission run out because there is no Christian spirituality without a mission; Church is missionary by its very nature. Church is the community which is ek-klesia - 'called out' of the world and sent back to the world. The church is not the sender but the one being sent. Hence its mission ('being-sent') is not secondary to its being. The church exists in being-sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission. Ecclesiology does not precede missiology. It is one and the same reality. That is to say it is in and through the Christian witness the very Christian self-understanding is achieved. The moment we fail in our mission we are heading toward a crisis in our theology, spirituality, and Christian life as a whole.

Somehow we cannot 'sell' our values, and mediate our vision in the present context of religious fundamentalism. It is a plain fact that there exists an 'undeniable negative tendency' (*Redemptoris Missio* #5) in our missionary commitment because of a crisis of conviction in theory and so a crisis of praxis. There is an increasing feeling among Christians in India that we have reached a 'limit-situation' in the Christian mission in the present context of anti-Christian vendetta and vandalism prevailing in India.

Soren Kierkegaard the great existential philosopher, explains the crisis in theology through an analogy. It is quite worth mentioning it in the present context. A traveling circus caught fire. The manager sent out their clown to seek help from the neighbouring village. The clown forgot to remove his clownish outfit and make-up in a rush. When the clown explained the mishap and sought help, every one thought that it was either a fun or stunt to attract people to the circus and did not take him seriously. We can very well imagine the frustration of the clown. He is misunderstood and is taken as a laughingstock though he is communicating a very serious and urgent matter in his total sincerity.

I am afraid, we find the same frustration in our Christian witness in the present situation. We are not taken seriously by our Hindu brethren; our

message doesn't reach out to the people. Sometimes the clown is stoned, raped and killed and tortured. Moreover, such heinous acts are justified in terms of religious nationalism.

Vishwa Hindu parishat justified the rape and murder of Christian missionaries by branding them as anti-national elements. The youth raped these anti-national sisters out of their patriotism thundered the VHP top brass!

Hindus think that the Christians are betrayers of the nation by accepting Christianity. When Christian 'clowns', are tortured in the name cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism we have to ask serious questions in the unfolding political scenario of this land. Where is the flaw? Is it with the 'clown' or the people or the message? Or is it with clownish outfit? We have yet to reinterpret Christian message responsive to the cultural and religious sensibilities of India.

4. Meaning of Indian Cultural Fundamentalism

Over the past few years we see a rising tide of anti-Christian activities and, indeed, this phenomenon has a subtle sanction of the present political dispensation. The largest ever RSS congregation, over 75000 of its cadres, gathered on 13th October 2000 in Agra for a week long convention to deliberate on sensitive issues of national security, which prominently included the anti-national activities of "foreign Christian missionaries."¹

The space and time do not permit me to dwell long upon the anti-Christian surge sweeping across the country today. The following data is only the tip of an iceberg of Hindu resentment toward Christians. *Dharma Raksha Samiti* at the *Vishal Hindu Sammelan* held on January 5, 1999 at Peth had given commanding order to the Christian missionaries in Peth, Nasik district to abandon their activities by March 31, 1999.² In an atmosphere which was charged with anti-Christian sentiments, the Shankaracharya of Karveer Peeth, Vidyashankar Bharati gave the ultimatum: "Request them

¹The three-day 'Rashtriya Raksha Mahashivir' (national security camp) is organized by Braj region unit of the RSS to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the organization. ("Massive RSS Camp to Discuss ISI," *Deccan Herald* (October 7, 2000):7

²*The Hindu* (Jan 17, 1999):11

(missionaries) once, twice, thrice and then take the next-step... Retaliation against injustice is perfectly justified".³

See the VHP's future plans which would be an eye-opener for the Christians who are engaged in *Evangelisaion 2000*. The VHP literature *Parichay Mala* series of booklets which were circulated during nine-day meet of VHP in Jaipur (Dec. 1998), listed the outlines of the future course of VHP. i. Drive of reconverting people back to Hinduism in which the VHP targeted 200 sensitive districts in the country. ii. According to the part six of series of Booklets, a corpus fund of Rs. 5 crore was being set up for carrying out the plan. iii. The VHP workers had already contacted 10,000 villages of the country for the purpose. iv. The VHP claimed to have already reconverted 1.8 lakh people to Hinduism. v. The plan for the next year envisaged 'Jan Jagran' (public awareness) campaigns for 'reconversion' in 50,000 villages of the 200 districts. vi. A thousand workers would be trained for carrying out the drive and a 'Shakti Kendra' (power centre) would be set up for every 25 villages in these districts. vii. How to achieve these targets: the booklet 5 mentioned forcible occupation of places of worship and schools run by missionaries of other religions, physically assaulting them at times and 'demoralising' them if needed.⁴

The BJP's main plank is Hindu nationalism, *Hindutva*. Borrowing from a recent Supreme Court judgement, the BJP leadership conveniently defines *Hindutva* in terms of Brahmanical Hinduism. In an essay on *Hindutva* that figured prominently on one of the BJP's websites on the Internet, Kamal Darshan, proclaimed that "the future of Bharat is set. *Hindutva* is here to stay. It is up to the Muslims whether they will be included in the new nationalistic spirit of Bharat. . . The era of one-way compromise of Hindus is over." Inaugurating the first conference of the Rashtriya Sevika Samity (women's wing of RSS) in 1936: Hedgewar asserted, "The nation belongs to those people who have the same culture and tradition and are in a majority."⁵

³*The New Indian express*. (Jan. 6.1999):1

⁴"VHP issues barbaric Commandments," *The New Indian Express* (Jan 1. 1999):9

⁵*The Hindu* (Feb 2, 1998):12.

Instead of condemning bluntly the present anti-Christian vendetta as a mere political ploy of the BJP, and outrightly rejecting it as a fundamentalism the Christians have to 'understand' the communal outbursts of Hindutvavadis in the scenario of new global politics of ethnicity. Samuel P. Huntington⁶ proposes a celebrated thesis that world community is stepping into a multi-civilizational global politics. Though there is much talk in currency about the emergence of a universal culture owing to globalization, modern electronic media and IT, in reality what we find worldwide is the assertion of locality, ethnicity, indigenous cultures. Societies sharing cultural affinities cooperate and group together around the lead state of their civilization. Today, the West's universalist claims are challenged and the West is brought into conflict with Asian civilizations of Islam, China, India, North Eastern Countries especially at the backdrop of the vibrant Asian economies and increasing military self-reliance.

During the Cold War, global politics was bipolar and the world was mainly divided into two blocs - the Capitalist and the Communist, though there was Non-Aligned Nations. But today, in the post-Cold War world, global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational. In this era, the most important distinctions among people are not ideological, political or economic; they are cultural. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations and at the broadest level, civilizations. People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. Many of the wars in the present post-Cold-War context have been between clans, not classes. Look at the bloody clashes in Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Caucasus, Central Asia, Turkey, Fiji, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir, caste wars in India. The core question inherent in these conflicts is *who we are*. The author argues that the future conflicts will be sparked by cultural factors rather than economics or ideology. Revitalization of religion world wide is reinforcing these cultural differences. In sum, the post-Cold War world is a world of seven or eight major civilizations. Cultural commonalities and differences shape the interests, antagonisms and association of states.⁷

⁶*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1997)

⁷*Ibid.*, 20-40

The rising Hindu fundamentalism in the country, even though it is negative and blunt in itself, implies an assertion of Hindu civilization after centuries of suffocation and suppression of foreign powers. India has a history of over five thousand years of human habitation. In her long history, she had never been a trans-territorial political power; hers is a history of invasions which started with Aryan tribes in the second millennium BCE. They were followed by Persians (521-485 B.C.E), Greeks (321-325 B.C.E). Then in the Christian era Huns (454) Arabs (712), Munghols (1230), Turks (1398), Portuguese, French, British (17th c), made military forays into our country. India was under the foreign yoke till the middle of the 20th century. This long period of subjugation, exploitation and humiliation could not destroy Indian spirit. It shows the resilience of Indian civilization

I think that the present assertion of Hindutva has to be seen in terms of the present multipolar and multicivilizational global politics. If so, the antipathy of Hindus towards Christianity is quite natural and spontaneous because Christianity is the core component of Western civilization and above all the Church in India has not become church of India; it is still western both in its form and content. In the recent past (Oct. 10. 00), the RSS leader K.S. Sudarsan at Nagpur exhorts Christians that they have yet to become *swedeshi*!

Notions of conversions and evangelization, our mammoth institutions and the flow of funds from the West for our mission, absolutist sentiments of recent teachings (e.g. *Dominus Iesus* in which it is written that other religions are "erroneous or ambiguous opinions") all these are seen as follow up of Western civilizational imperialism in the eyes of Hindus, as the attempts of the West to perpetuate western hegemony over the Hindu culture whatever may be the theological justification of our activities of conversion at our intra-religious discussions. Assertion of Hinduvada should be therefore assessed in our historical pedigree of western colonialism and its cultural and religious infiltration into the Indian social and political psyche. Then the implied meaning of the ongoing aggressive Hindutva can be interpreted as a clash of civilizations, western and eastern.

Here the pertinent question is the form and content of a spirituality in the thick of a clash of civilizations, the ongoing conflict between Western and Indian perspectives and world views. Traditionally we think of our spirituality within the confines of a particular religious tradition, that is to say we should become 'a-hundred-percent' Christian! It implies subtly the

rejection of other religious pursuits. Today an authentic spirituality should contain the contours of the clash of cultures. What should then be the spiritual vision which gives meaning as well as harmony in our life in the present culture of crises and clashes? It should be a spirituality which conceives the present crisis context as an opportunity of an organic growth towards greater human maturity and a liberative experience. Here one has to address two questions: a vision of an inclusive spirituality and a corresponding praxis of spirituality.

5. Meaning of Spirituality

Basically spirituality is a 'vision-thing' in virtue of which we understand our life, its mission and message. Today we speak of a cybernetic spirituality of the inner-structures of psyche or the inner designs and paradigms through which we 'see' the world, in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting. Spirituality as vision or paradigm is a map. Map is not territory but an explanation of the territory. We need a map to move around the city. If there are mistakes in the life-map we will be lost in the lanes of life. Spirituality as vision or inner map should be all-encompassing and pervasive. It is more than a conscious code. It reaches even into our unconscious depths. We dwell in our spirituality much more than we are conscious of it, and we practice it in our sundry life more than we consciously profess it. It is the warp and woof of our life, the ambience and texture in which we see, reflect on, interpret, and ultimately respond to the depth questions of our existence. It colours our seeing, hearing, speaking, praying, beliefs, intellectual positions, life choices, moral options; it is present in what we support and affirm, what we protest and deny and in our moral options. In other words spirituality is our deepest myth that energizes our actions even without our conscious knowledge of it and informs us of our world perspectives and our values.⁸

If we approach spirituality in this comprehensive way it is the 'vision-thing' which harmonizes and synthesizes various facets and facts of life, our theology, our social and cultural life, our human relationships and duties. It is the fundamental ambience, perspective and horizon which give unity, focus and meaning to our entire life, every bit and byte of it, every second of it

⁸See, Joann Wolski Conn, ed., *Women Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), p.49 ff.

whether we are awake or asleep. Even it gives clarity to the life before birth, and assurance in the life after death.

5.1. Crisis of Spirituality—Crisis in Vision.

Till now, we have been very complacent and at ease with our spirituality enshrined in the western and occidental framework of conceptual absolutism and certainty. However in the western absolutist theological statements we sense an incompetency of our 'spirituality' in the present cultural and religious pluralism. The number of 'doubting-Thomases' are rapidly increasing among us. When we are also influenced by the pluralistic values we silently raise questions like: Is Jesus only one of the religious founders; Is Christianity one of the religions along with other religions? Is it preposterous and idiotic to think that Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims have no God experience, no salvation if they are not baptized? No dogma, no magisterium can constrain this free flow of questions in a pluralistic culture.

Often we evaluate our faith in the logistics of comparison in the emerging pluralistic culture. Comparative dialectics is disastrous in one's faith life for comparative statement cannot embody a confessional faith; it will be an intellectual articulation for engaging equally valid but contradicting concepts. For example, the oft repeated utterance in interreligious dialogues 'Jesus Christ is one of the saviours' is a comparative statement to respect the prophets of other religions and to revere the sentiments of the dialogue partner. Commitment coming from such a comparative confession is always divisive and diffusive. Our witness consequently becomes very professional, academic and matter of fact; it will lack the *touch* of the 'conviction of the heart'. When comparison infiltrates into our faith consciousness then enemy is very much in our camp. We are on drifting ground. The axe has fallen on the very roots! We have to watch out!

Because of the subtle influence of the comparative pluralistic thinking, our Christian vision becomes blurred and hazy in the general Christian self-awareness. Consequently our Christian commitment apparently lacks the fire, focus and clarity compared to the earlier times. This is a very disturbing knowledge at the root of our Christian being, and a frustrating experience in our societal life, especially when Christian antagonism is on rise in the political horizon of India. Somehow we find ourselves in a 'no-where' situation or in a border-line dilemma where we cannot go either way.

This critical state of affairs can be seen as a significant crisis of paradigm shift, a shift from the habitual way of thinking and doing. The hitherto available paradigm is no longer valid but a new convincing paradigm is not yet arrived. No doubt, the solution to this present crisis is not a blind return to the past.

What we require now is a new vision to break out the present stalemate; otherwise we, as a Christian community, may become introverted and exclusive, and eventually we will be estranged from the main stream of the society. We are warned in the Book of Proverb: 'Where there is no vision people perish' (29:18).

Here we have no soft options nor an easy exit. The enemy is verily within us. To address this disillusionment of our Christian faith and commitment we Christians have to address first our 'spirituality' i.e., our very vision. All authentic changes in our lives must grow out of a change in our vision of reality. That is to say we have to urgently engage in a perception shift with regard to our faith and witness.

In the following discussion I would like to highlight certain horizons and paths which may help Christians to reconfigure their vision to reinvigorate their commitment in the present cultural and social scenario of India.. What matters is a competent vision and a living into that vision.

5.2. Towards an Inclusive Spirituality

I am quite uncomfortable with the word spirituality because we usually understand it as a spiritualism which implies a dualism between spirit and body, or heaven and earth, sin and virtue . But at the same time we know that dualism is the cornerstone of the Christian thought for millennia whose systematic articulation can be traced back to Greek idealism and Greco-Roman world view, though Descartes is considered as the father of western rationalism since Enlightenment era. From Augustine and Augustinianism through Anselm and medieval scholasticism dualistic metaphysics became the hallmark of Western theology and spirituality.

Dualistic spirituality which permeates our lives, liturgy, prayers, ecclesial structures, etc., holds a hierarchical and patriarchal view of the sacred. In dualistic spirituality there is an inbuilt sense of "better than", "higher than" or "holier than" in opposition to the other half. We entertain

still this 'hierarchical-dualism' in our missiology, ecclesiology and even in spirituality. Our vision of reality revolves around the following opposites: the Christians and pagans; the holy church and the profane world; Christians and non-Christians; Christian world and non-Christian world. We see reality in grades, hierarchies, degrees, strata while we, as Christians, are on the top of this hierarchical structure as the sole privileged recipients of revelation.

Moreover, in a dualistic spirituality, what matters is only 'my soul' and its redemption. This body, this world and its things are evil and hence to be avoided. For this one has to engage in stringent spiritual exercises in which "I endeavour to 'save' my soul". I do charity or engage in service for the sake of 'my soul'; here community is only a pragmatic means, not an end in itself. Spirituality is an individual and private affair for 'my salvation' and is conceived of a one-to-one vertical relationship with God because 'My soul is restless until it rests in God' (St. Augustine).

The question is how long we can hold this dualistic 'Christian' vision of reality when the present emergent pluralistic culture, world politics and globalization trend to leave no space for religious isolationism or authoritarian absolutism. It is high time that we explore the possibility of a radical re-grounding of our spirituality, or a 'revolution of consciousness'. Here we have to engage collectively in an earnest search for a genuine "gestalt shift in the whole way of seeing our relations to one another so that our behaviour patterns are reformed from the inside out."⁹ It is no easy task. It demands a rethinking of everything that perpetuates dualism in its divisiveness, elitism, isolationism and exclusivity.

If we bracket out all our theological presumptions and articulations of our spirituality for the time being, our common sense knowledge whispers to us that spirituality should primarily be the blossoming of life. Or, rather an experiment with *truth* of life as Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, has approached life. Here truth is not understood as a static concept but a dynamic 'process' and ever unfolding reality. The Greek word for truth is *alatheia* which means 'un-fold' or "manifest".

⁹Beatrice Bruteau, "Neo-Feminism and the Next Revolution of Consciousness," *Anima* 3/2(Spring 1977):1

Life is an ever-unfolding process towards greater unity and wholeness in which both the spirit and body, individual and community, heaven and earth are two integral poles vibrantly and vitally interfaced. Spirituality as a life process is a constant pilgrimage of probing, not proving, and of discovering not concluding. Life is on move for it is 'not-yet' till 'God may be all in all (1Cor 15:28). In this movement there is no room for dualism between matter and spirit, death and life, earth and heaven because the mystery of reality is unveiled in the process of integration in the integrity and unicity of Reality. To phrase it differently, spirituality is to be seen as a total reconciliation and harmony of reality, in which not a speck nor a shred of this manifested world, the history and cultures and the religious pursuits of humankind, and achievements and failures is excluded. That is to say spirituality means fullness of life and its blossoming in day to day life in the given socio-cultural context.

5.3. Inclusive Spirituality as Holistic Vision

Responsive to the present trends and developments, re-grounding our spirituality within the ecological and holistic perspective will be the right step to build up a Christian spirituality to take on the challenges and signs of the time. In today's historical moment, I think, Christian spirituality in its dualistic construct has reached a cultural as well as theological limit-situation. As Heidegger tells us, our future, paradoxically, comes towards us out of our past. It seems that the present call to wholeness is a radical return to roots of our Biblical faith.

Inclusive wholeness has been the texture of Jesus' *basileia* vision and the praxis of his Kingdom ministry. Jesus' vision and ministry has been a thorough prophetic critique on the prevalent remnant theology of God's holy people, which defined holiness in cultic terms. Jesus has redefined holiness in terms of wholeness intended in creation. In his mission there is no division between the sacred and the profane, the saint and sinners, the rich and the poor, woman and man, the chosen and non-elect'. To make his all-inclusiveness forthright and explicit he allowed a methodology of a preferential association with the victimized and the poor. Thus he consistently challenged the contemporary attitudes, practices and structures which restricted or excluded potential members of the Israelite community. The poignancy of his message has become provoking, when tax-collectors and

prostitutes are praised by him as models to emulate, since they heed his call to the Kingdom vision. (Lk.17: 1-5; Mt.9.9).

The call is an act of grace, restoration of fellowship, the beginning of a new life in a new dispensation of love and reconciliation for all. The amazing aspect of Jesus' inclusive ministry is that it embraces both the poor and the rich, the oppressed and the oppressor, the sinners and the devout. Through and through Jesus' mission has been one of dissolving alienation and breaking down the walls of hostility, of crossing boundaries between individuals and groups. As God forgives us gratuitously, we are to forgive those who wrong us up to seventy times seven times—limitlessly. Thus we can say that actualization of Jesus' basileia vision is not the cultic meal but the festive table of a royal banquet or wedding feast. For him 'holiness' of the Temple and Torah is not the locus of God's power and presence¹⁰ but the new order of God's reign anchored in love and justice, in which "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all." (Col 3:11).

But this God's reign is simultaneously a present and future reality (Mk.1:15; Mt.4:17). It is in fact "upon" his listeners (Mt 12:28) and "within you" (Lk 17:21) but at the same time it is not consummated. Through and through the New Testament, there underlies an unresolved tension between the 'already' and 'not-yet' of God's reign. This tension is that of growth. The collection of parables, entitled "growth parables" in Mt 13 and Mk 4 point to the organic nature of Kingdom¹¹.

The Kingdom of God as wholeness (*Pleroma*), therefore, is not a static concept but an ever transpiring event here and now, which extends to the eschatological era. The Christian understanding of wholeness (*Pleroma*) is thus an organic process in which God and humans are covenantal partners, and have to endeavour for it hand in hand. The zenith of the process of realization of the Kingdom is when Jesus finally delivers the Kingdom to God the Father who becomes *all in all*. (1Cor 15:28).

¹⁰Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 113.

¹¹They are 'the sower', 'the growing corn', 'the double parable of mustard seed and the leaven', 'weeds among the wheat' and 'the net full of fish'.

Undoubtedly, the vision permeating the Bible is of wholeness. The whole economy of salvation is a movement towards greater reconciliation and deeper communion of beings. This momentum is initiated in the mystery of incarnation and it will continue till it consummates in God. It means that the totality of reality, the world and its joys and sorrows, hopes and despairs are the very arena as well as medium of God's redemptive activity (*Gaudium et Spes* #4). Here there is no space for dualism because in this holistic paradigm reality is a web of relation and an interdependent existence.

The *Pleroma* as the final blossoming of the Kingdom of God is the communion of beings in love and fellowship which is rooted in "righteousness"—right relations, the bedrock of peace and the realm of joy (Rom. 14:17). It is a milieu of total reconciliation and restoration of all relationship in justice and peace. In Isaiah there is a beautiful portrayal of *Pleroma* as total communion of beings in a fellowship of harmony and happiness. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den" (Is. 11:6-8).

This holistic vision is quite profound in all religious traditions. For example in Hinduism, *Pūrnam* (Fullness) is understood as the Transcendent and Immanent Fullness of the Supreme Reality; it is 'one whole' (*paripūrna idam* and *adah*, here and beyond, it is simultaneously manifest and unmanifest.¹² In the Buddhist tradition, *Sūnya* (Void) the absoluteness is also the Absolute Fullness, the *Source* of all life and creativity; it is the fulcrum, 'the nave of the wheel' that holds the phenomenal world together in harmony and order. Especially Mahayana Buddhism insists on the interdependence of all life especially in Bodhisattva ideal and the doctrine of *parivarta* (the merit one attains while one accomplishes a good deed is shared by all sentient beings).

Even our tribal religions emphasise on the interdependence of humans and cosmos which together form the community consciousness. A tribal, right

¹²See *Īśa Upanishad* 'Peace Invocation'

from the birth, learns to believe that 'I am because I belong'¹³. Hence the core of tribal spirituality is corporate identity. Owing to this profound community consciousness theirs is a very egalitarian society without any hierarchy or dualism. The whole emphasis is on the wholeness of the community. Even in the Quantum physics reality is interpreted as a web of relations. The quantum out there is not existing in a neutral, 'no-where' situation but in an inherent "Implicate Order" or "Enfolded Order" (David Bohm) which is an "Intelligent Design" of interconnectivity of the whole world, of which both 'subject' and 'object' are the inviolable twin poles in their relationality. Hence Reality is ultimately Relation!¹⁴

What I am arguing for is that Jesus' vision as well as the core vision of world religions, including the Modern physics is very much holistic and inclusive, and emphasize the wholeness of reality in their inter-dependence or rather inter-independence. That is to say there is a passion for wholeness in the movement of reality. Christian vision of spirituality has to recover and revitalize its forgotten holistic vision to brace up the present challenge of fundamentalism. In this kairos of change rigidity and inflexibility will lead the church to ultimate crisis. According to the historian Toynbee, civilizations tend to lose their steam and begin to decline once they reach a peak of vitality. The loss of flexibility is the core reason of this cultural breakdown. Society can no longer adapt to changing situations if it is very rigid and absolute in its positions, and will, in the process, be alienated from the creative process of cultural evolution. It will break down and eventually disintegrate.¹⁵ Whereas the growing civilizations display endless variety and versatility, those in the process of disintegration show uniformity and lack of inventiveness. The western Church, both Catholic and Protestant has not yet shown emphatic signs of a departure from its dualistic vision. I think, we Indian Christians have an edge over our Christian brothers and sisters of the Western hemisphere to initiate a momentum toward a holistic vision because we are born and brought up in a pluralistic culture and our fidelity to Jesus and his vision demands us such a pioneering task in our cultural milieu. Here

¹³See Chidis Denis Isizoh, "Reflection on Tribal Values," *Indian Journal of Spirituality* 11/1(1998): 123-124.

¹⁴See Frithof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Shambhala: New Science Library, 1985).

¹⁵See Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 89ff.

the crucial question is the point of departure of such a new spirituality. It seems to me that joining with peoples' struggle for liberation will offer a veritable spectrum for the praxis of holistic spirituality.

6. Spirituality as Joining with Peoples' Struggles

The holistic vision of Christian spirituality becomes academics or meta-cosmic occult concept if it is not translated into a sociological process. A holistic spirituality becomes honest only in terms of peoples' issues and concerns which offer a common platform for all traditions to work together and strive together. Here there is no room for fundamentalism precisely because human sufferings have no religion, and there is harmony and unity of hearts and will in human agony and sorrow. In such a context, the very praxis becomes the hermeneutical principle in forming our spirituality and religiosity. Indeed the norm of this spirituality is the *Paschal* fidelity to and *praxis* of the *reality*.

The real reality of India is her teeming millions who are poor despised, excluded, oppressed in the name of religion, caste, creed, sex. About half of our people live under poverty line and more than half of our population are illiterate. Our women are the most oppressed and marginalized both at home and in the public life. Dowry murders are only too common. One sixth of the population are untouchable and denied of bare minimum human dignity. We have the most miserable slums in cities like Delhi Calcutta, and Bombay. Our labour forces are the most exploited, and Globalization has made India a trans-territorial colony of MNCs and TNCs. Amidst these deteriorating social, political and economic situation masses of the people are struggling to survive, to find work, to feed the children and to retain minimum dignity and freedom. In India the practice of and fidelity to *reality* should be an engagement in the 'paschal' journey of the poor, exclusive of which spirituality embodies no conviction and no authenticity.

The praxis of holistic spirituality, then, is by joining with peoples in their struggle for justice. In the past our spirituality was practiced in the models of "charity", "development" or "social work" but these have become incompetent to challenge the anti-Kingdom strategies of market economy which perpetuate poverty in invincible structures and dynamics. It is in this context that we have to find the meaning and relevance of the present counter cultural movements in our spirituality.

As sociologists would say, the present monolithic and oppressive economic-political systems can only be challenged by peoples' participation in the decision process and in the control of the system that governs their lives. This will contribute a human touch and a caring approach to the present profit oriented system. This strategy can be pioneered by small groups of people who challenge the policies and put forward alternatives. These are called parallel practices which intend to create a parallel social space within the domains of social life constantly contesting the existing dominant oppressive values in order to finally replace or reform them with new ones.

Social movements, peoples' movement, popular culture, and everyday resistance are considered as parallel practices in the social science. These movements are non-institutional collective response to an oppressed situation for establishing a new order of life through a collective mobilization based on an ideology¹⁶. These various movements outside the main-stream conventional struggles for social justice, eco-justice etc. are collectively known as Subaltern Movements or Peoples' Movement. Perhaps the only hope in today's India is that forces for social transformation will spring from below ...from the enlightened and committed individuals, action groups, new social movements and class organizations...The main or only hope of reshaping India lies in locating power among the people themselves.¹⁷

There are many such peoples' movement in India in various fields like, peasant struggles, agrarian rebellions, industrial workers' struggles, tribal unrest, fish workers' resistance, Dalit revolts, student rebellions, women upsurge. In general they are the uprising of the poor and the environmental battles. To name some very vibrant movements: "Farmers' Resistance movements", "Indian National Farmers' Movement", "Fisher-folk Movement", "Labours' Resistance Movements", "New Social Movements", "Dalit Movements", "Chipko Movement", "Tribal Movement".

To counter the fundamentalist trends in all religions, including Christianity we have to develop a spirituality of peoples' struggles. In this

¹⁶See J. Desrochers, *Social Movements: Towards a Perspective* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1991); G.Shah, "The Human Rights Movement in India: A Critical Overview," *Social Action* 40(1990): 2ff.

¹⁷Rajni Kothari, *In Search of Human Governance* (Delhi: Ajanta Publishers, 1998), 49 -53.

spirituality there is no 'religion' but a faith in the creative energy of Dabar present in all liberative endeavours.

A religion becomes fundamentalist when it is devoid of spirituality. A spirituality which is not concerned with the suffering lot is fake. Today, many of liberative movements like "Fisher-Folk Movement", "Dalit revolts" are pioneered by priests and sisters who work at the grass root level without any "conversion" intent. They are simply with these suffering poor because of their faith in the Gospel. A perceptive mind can infer that behind every movement for liberation of the oppressed in India is some Christian instigator.¹⁸ What we find here is a spirituality of *Christian life* lived out through the struggles and sufferings of the poor.

If a spirituality is fashioned in a faith response to the concerns and challenges of the society it is sufficient unto itself; it doesn't need any sanction or mandate from outside; it is justified in virtue of itself. Above all it should not have any aims of covert or overt "conversion." In this praxis of spirituality we are verily participating in the mission of Jesus and our presence among people is like salt or light. Salt becomes really "salt" only when it gives taste to the meal, when we do not notice its presence or absence. Salt is irritatingly noticeable only when it makes its presence felt. When our spirituality overwhelms its presence through its massive social projects, it fails to live up to the call of Jesus: You are the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13). Jesus has also said that You are light of the world (Mt 5:14). Light makes us see the world, the people; it gives orientation; it does not push and force; it gives us freedom, assurance and grace. These symbols which Jesus has himself given us should be the dynamic of the liberative spirituality by the "little flock" in India.

7. Peoples' Spirituality, Journeying with the *Religious Other*

The Spectrum of Indian reality is an elliptic circle having two centers- *the religious other* and *the suffering other*. Competitiveness of our spirituality depends on how we engage with the challenge of the *many poor*

¹⁸Roger E. Hedlund, Indian Christians of Indigenous Origin and Their Solidarity with Original Groups, in *Religion and Politics from Subaltern Perspective*, ed. Thomas Kadankavil (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999), 26.

and the *many religions* simultaneously and together because of their hermeneutical link.

That is to say, the liberative spirituality will not work for India's poor unless it is couched in and inspired by the symbols and beliefs of their own religious world. Often our inculturation theology ignores the soteriological nucleus or the prophetic-political resources of other religions. In the name of inculturation the symbols of other religions are emptied of their soteriological content and employed in our theology and prayer. Interreligious dialogue that does not come out of an experience of human suffering, and does not explore liberative message of all religions, is a betrayal of religions. *Redemptoris Missio* proclaims that dialogue should help us to "build a society which is just and fraternal" (no.57); hence it is Apart of the Church's evangelizing mission (no. 55).

Since the core of Indian culture is religious there will not be social revolutions unless the liberative potentials of religiosity of the masses are not explored and applied. The *Bhakti* movement and freedom movement steered by Gandhi are clear examples of the liberative dimension of Indian religiosity.¹⁹ However liberation theology in India cannot be Christian or Buddhist or Hindu for the Sacred Scriptures are often used to sustain class-caste discrimination. Then it would have to be interreligious option; adherents of different religious traditions have to search together the prophetic resources of their respective Scriptures and a net-working is an imperative for sustained liberative struggles. "Dialogue is not authentic unless it leads to reinterpretation or rejection of all oppressive aspects of the religious heritage of both partners."²⁰ Therefore in a liberative dialogue the 'hermeneutical priority of the oppressed' has to be constitutive.²¹ As Wilfred Felix observes "any liberating dialogue has to settle score with the religious experience of the marginalized... Liberating dialogue is possible only among the victims in the various religious traditions of India..... The victims themselves are the

¹⁹Xavier Irudayaraj, ed. *Liberation and Dialogue* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1989), 120.

²⁰Samuel Rayan, "Spirituality for Inter-Faith Social Action", in Xavier Irudayaraj, ed. *Liberation and Dialogue* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1989), 70.

²¹Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth and Many Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996); 163.

active subjects of liberating dialogue."²² For inculturation of theology and spirituality, what we need, are primarily "base human communities" in which Christians and Hindus and Muslim collaborate in the praxis of liberation. In that way they can build up a new understanding and mutual approval ever more deeply and engagingly.

Throughout India, there are now numerous interreligious fellowship in a liberative vision and action plan, and these have silently become forums of real inculturation of Gospel values and vision in real life situations. These fellowships are variously called: 'Action Groups', 'Liberation Groups', 'Grass-root Communities', 'Basic (Christian) Communities', 'Counter Cultural Communities', 'Village Ashrams', 'Khadi Ashrams', 'Rural Centers', 'Inter-Faith Centers', 'Tribal Ashram', 'Basic Gandhian Communities' and so on. These groups basically seek to liberate people from exploitation and bring about socio-economic changes in the society among the ordinary people incorporating their religiousness.

Look at the objectives of BGC, for example: i. Foster Fraternity among people of different faiths and understanding of each other. ii. Celebrate all religious and national festivals jointly by people of all communities and faiths. iii. Prevent events that tend to disturb religious tolerance and take active steps to avert communal clashes. iv. Achieve social justice by actively devising constructive approaches to social problems.²³

These base communities of 'commoners', through the Gandhian vision, show a veritable "way of bringing interreligious and inter-ideological dialogue down from arm chair experts to people at the grass roots."²⁴ Like

²²Wilfred Felix, *Liberating Dialogue in India*, The German translation in *Befreiender Dialog-Befreite Gesellschaft: Politische Theologie und Begegnung der Religionen in Indien und Europa*. Ed. Sybille Frish-Oppermann (Loccum: Evangelische Akademie, 1994), 37.

²³A. Tibursius, "Fifth Annual Report of the Interreligious Fellowship Society", Manavalakurichi, Kanyakumari, 1991, 1. Non-published document; quoted in Knitter, *One Earth and Many Religions*, 171.

²⁴N. Palerasu, *Gandhian Grass-root Communities*, 1991. Non-published project description formulated in October, 1991. Quoted in Knitter, 171

the BGC there are a number Grass-root groups pioneered by priests, nuns and lay person throughout India.²⁵

A grass-root community is a living, real, concrete human community brought together in the perspective of God's Kingdom. They are symbolized in the very 'foundational' act of the church according to the tradition. There the Spirit may not speak one uniform 'sacred' language or a liturgical text, but does speak the innumerable dialects of the people! In the past (today as well) Christian witness has been circumscribed by a kind of "compound mentality of the organization". Now a paradigm shift in Christian witness is taking place from the "ecclesiocentric mission" to "the marketplace of the struggle of the peoples", a "congregation" to "pilgrims in dialogue". The Unity of the Churches represented by the enormous diversity of the grass-root communities is neither cultural nor linguistic nor jurisdictional one (*dictio unius juris*); it is the unity of the Spirit whom we should not grieve by not trusting.²⁶ In these basic communities which are on the periphery of official Church, authentically 'local' church and valid theologies of liberation are conceived as twins in the same womb of praxis²⁷ offering a peoples' spirituality that is liberative as well as inculturational of the Gospel.

²⁵To name some: a set of liberation groups who are called "Programme for Community Organization" (PCO) and another "Beach Blossoms" (BB) *Ayalkattam* (Neighbourhood-Fellowship) are quite involved among these exploited fisher-folk in Kerala coast, South India, See D. Pankajakshan, *Puthiyalokam, Puthiyavazhi* [Malayalam langugaure, it means New Word and New Way] (Kanjippadam, Kerala: 1989). *Deena Seva Dal*, a group of priests and nuns among the Santal tribals in Hazaribagh, Bihar. See A. Felce c.s.s.t., The Role of Liberation Groups with the Church, in D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *A New Society* (Bangalore: NBCLC), 469-281. G. Prove s.c.m.m., Small Communities in Kerala, *Sedos* no.4(1981):74-76. The theme of *Religion and Society* vol.31, no. 2(1984) is Social Action Groups and the Churches in India.; K.Naeke, Evangelization among the Santals in Hazaribagh, *Sevarthan* (Ranchi: St. Albert's College Bangalore, 1972) 117-121. See Joseph Prasad Pinto o.f.m Cap., *Inculturation through Basic Communities, An Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: ATC, 1985), 223-226.

²⁶R. Panikkar, *The Dream of an Indian Ecclesiology* in Gewin van Leeuwen, ed., *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology* (Bangalore: ATC, 1984), 50

²⁷Aloysius Pieris, *A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?*, 18. See also, A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," *Vidyajyoti* 43(1979):261-284. The entire gamut of the areas of inculturation is succinctly summed up in the 1974 Statement of the Asian Bishops: The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a

Conclusion

A holistic spirituality implies the wholeness of reality. This wholeness is not an impersonal mass but a web of inter-dependent or inter-independent relations. Then there is unicity and diversity in the wholeness. It is unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Unity and diversity are not in opposition but in ever vibrant interface of creativity. Unity 'breaks into' (*incarnates into*) diversity, and diversity 'returns' (*resurrects to*) into unity. It is the Christic mystery ("Jesus comes from the Father and goes to the Father"). That is to say, wholeness is not a static datum or concept but a creative ever evolving and unfolding reality. Holistic spirituality is the participation of our being and having in the movement of reality towards its total reconciliation and harmony. Jesus has given momentum to this movement through his Kingdom ministry of righteousness, peace and joy (Rom 14:17). This process of reconciliation is a verily liberative struggle of the poor and the marginalised for there is no holiness in wholeness where there is oppression and exploitation. The present crisis of spirituality can be overcome through our joining with the poor in their struggles of justice. This was Jesus' way. This was his spirituality. We Christians have to rediscover Jesus' people oriented spirituality centred on their concerns and dreams. This is how Jesus took on fundamentalism of his day by horns. Neither do we have any other but this way of Jesus!

Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions- in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. [*Statement of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference* (April 1974), 20-21.]