

# The Meaning of “Mystery” in Saint Paul

Varghese Malpan

Jnanadeepa Vidya-Peeth (JDV), Pune, Maharashtra, India

---

## *Abstract*

The article begins with a few biographical details of Paul of Tarsus and moves on to an explanation of the word “Mystery” in general. It then focuses on “Mystery” in Paul with some of its related themes and perspectives. Subsequently, the question: “How is this “mystery” inexorably linked to the self-manifestation of God in the person of Christ for the salvation of the human race?” is taken up for reflection. In dealing with this question the article makes an attempt at contextualizing it in the backdrop of 21st century Christian experience with a special reference to the situation in Asia. The article concludes with the affirmation that the mystery of God in Christ is very much alive and active in the very heart of the world and the challenging mission of hope given to each and every one of us to transform the world.

## **Introduction**

Scripture offers precious primary historical sources for Paul’s life: his Letters and the Acts of the Apostles. In addition, we have several early traditions about him outside of Scripture. Paul was probably born between the years A.D. 5 and 10. His parents were strictly observant Jews living in the city of Tarsus, the prosperous capital of Cilicia, a province of the Roman Empire in what is now Turkey. In one of his letters Paul recalls: “I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal 1:14). It was apparently this religious fanaticism that led the young man to persecute Christians, whom he must have viewed as a new and dangerous cult, threatening the Pharisaic traditions he so passionately embraced. But God had other plans for Paul. On the road

to Damascus, the Risen Christ himself showed up in an appearance so powerful that it knocked Paul to the ground and blinded him. Saul of Tarsus was indeed face to face with the mystery of Christ.

Paul was confronted with the reality that the Man of Nazareth who had been crucified truly was raised from the dead, as His followers claimed. This Man, he came to realize, was in fact the divine Son of God in the flesh, the Christ: the Messiah, long promised to His people. In opposing the Church, Paul had been opposing the God he had wanted to serve. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord told him. Then He gave the trembling man instructions about how he was to begin the totally new life that lay ahead of him. Paul had become a follower of Christ, called to a new mission to preach the Gospel of his new Lord to the world: a movement from zealotry to discipleship of Christ.

### *"Mystērion"*

In spite of the complicated appearance of its dogmatic and moral theology, Christian theology deals with something simple and profound. What is it then that catholic theology proclaims?

Nothing else, after all, than that the great Mystery remains eternally a mystery, but that this mystery wishes to communicate Himself in absolute self-communication – as the infinite, incomprehensible and inexpressible Being whose name is God, as self-giving nearness – to the human soul in the midst of its experience of its own finite emptiness (Rahner 1966).

The Source-Mystery is God: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is as simple as it is profound. Everything else descends from It and ascends to It. There will arise problems when we start analyzing this Mystery. But when we live this Mystery in ourselves, in our community, It gives us an experience of unity and harmony.

The Greek word *mystērion* refers to something ineffable and inaccessible to discursive reason and so beyond rational-cognitive level. It refers to deeper level of spiritual experience (Balz & Schneider 1981). The word is found in the Greek Bible only in a few late books like Daniel, Wisdom, and Deutero Isaiah. The actual background of this word is the Aramaic *rāz*, which means a secret thing and thus corresponds to the classical Hebrew word *sōd*. In the Old Testament, the idea of God's secrets was well-known to Israel from the era of the prophets. These secrets were primarily concerned with the plan of salvation which God realizes in human history and which consists of the object of revelation. The historic destiny of Israel corresponds to a divine plan previously

revealed through the prophetic word, and it is this which assures the coming of salvation at the end of time (Is 41: 21-28). These notions form the background of the scientific and sacred concept of the mystery which is found in both Daniel and the book of Wisdom. The book of Daniel is apocalyptic, that is to say, a revelation of divine "secrets" (*rāz*) (Léon-Dufour 1967). The secrets concern things which will be realized in time. They are the mysteries of the plan of salvation. God is the revealer of mysteries (Dan 2:28, 47). The book of Wisdom, in accord with the book of Daniel, applies the term "mystery" to transcendent realities which are the object of revelation (Wis 2: 22; 6: 22).

"In the 28 NT passages in which *μυστήριον* is found it has neither a cultic nor a purely secular meaning" (Balz & Schneider 1981). In order to understand the term the gradual development of the range of meanings has to be taken into account. Both the Greek concept of mystery as a strictly esoteric experience that is inaccessible to human reason and the Jewish sense of humanly inaccessible mystery of God, set in motion by God himself in his acts of salvation and judgment in the past, present and future are determining elements in this regard. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke the word *mystērion* is found only once; in the Gospel of John, never. "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables..." (Mk 4:11). Here the "secret of the kingdom" refers to those doctrines and truths pertaining to the Kingdom or reign of God which Christ made clear to his disciples, but which to others were scarcely intelligible and remained obscure, taught only in parables. In terms of content, the term 'mystery' in the NT refers primarily to the saving acts of God in Christ (Balz & Schneider 1981).

### **"Mystērion" According to Paul**

Paul uses the word *mystērion* in the same perspective of the Jewish apocalyptic literature exemplified in Daniel 2: 18-19, 27-30; 4:6 and in Wisdom 2:22. There the "secrets" or "mysteries" of God refer to God's saving plan which is to be realized in the "last times" (the *eschaton*) (Cusson 1988). More specifically, the word "*mystery*" for Paul denotes a profound and ineffable reality. It does reveal a glimpse of the infinite. In 1Cor 2:1 Paul designates his proclamation of the crucified Christ as the mystery of God. This saving event is inaccessible to human reason precisely because it appears to human reason to be foolishness. Its object is the *gospel*: the realization of salvation by the death and resurrection of Christ. "*Mystērion*" points to the divine secret, incomprehensible to human intellect without revelation (1Cor 14: 2) and thus preserves its eschatological overtones. At the same time this "*mystērion*" of the

wisdom of God is apocalyptically described as an element of salvation, hidden by God in heaven before the ages, kept ready for our glory to come, and now revealed through his Spirit (1 Cor 2:7, 10) (Balz & Schneider 1981). The foretold salvation is realized through the successive stages. In this sense, the “mystery of God” encompasses all of sacred history in the Old and the New Testaments. We have here the complete plan of God’s self revelation in the biblical history. The ideal of Christian life consists in the knowledge, contemplation and experience of this mystery (Col 2:2; Eph 1:15f; 3:18f).

### **“Mystery” in Colossians and Ephesians**

It is in Paul’s letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians that the “mystery of Christ” is opened to its full significance. In these letters the fully developed plan of revelation is made known. In Col 1: 26 the “mystery” encompasses the context of the whole saving activity of God directed towards the entire world, “hidden for ages and generations”, as the plan of salvation, but now revealed to Christians and realized through their proclamation of Christ among the nations. The “mystery” is thus nothing but the Christ proclaimed among the nations. “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27) (Balz & Schneider 1981). Here the mystery of the indwelling Christ - “Christ in you” is very significant and the movement from Israel to the Gentiles corresponds to Paul’s own personal vocation and mission. While this movement expresses the historical development of the mystery in concrete terms, it does not at all exhaust the content of the mystery.

It is striking that in Col 1:3 believers’ lives are said to be hidden “with Christ in God”. They are really “in God”, because they are bound up with Christ, who is himself in God. “Hiddenness” is not just a spiritual concept. It is vitally related to God’s salvific plan for the history of the human race. That which is hidden in heaven is yet to be revealed in history. Even though the mystery of God’s plan for salvation has been revealed in Christ, part of it still remains hidden including the true nature of believers’ relationship with the glorified Christ. It awaits full revelation at the consummation (Keck 2000).

In Ephesians (Keck 2000, 351), the word ‘mystery’ lacks the eschatological element in the sense it refers to that which God has already accomplished, therefore to a present reality. In Eph 1: 9 the ‘mystery’ is the realization of God’s creative and saving will on a cosmic scale in the bringing together of all things in Christ. In Eph

3:3-4 the mystery of Christ refers to the incorporation of Gentiles into the body of Christ, the Church: "When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

In the Pauline letters there is a twin pattern that is often discernible. First there is a *doctrinal* component in which the author recalls the Christ-mystery: the one great happening which has ushered them into a new life. Then there is a *moral* element, which takes the form of an exhortation to respond to the gift and a practical teaching on how to do it. At the end of the doctrinal section of the letter to the Ephesians, the author shifts from the objective Christ mystery to its fulfillment within the individual person. It is for this that he prays: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you may be rooted and grounded in love..." (Eph 3: 14-17). Paul's practical teaching connected with the mystery of Christ comes out forcefully in the following passage: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4: 1-3).

The Pauline refrain, "in Christ", ("in him") is very much present in the letter to the Colossians. The mystery of Christ appears here as the *recapitulation* of all things in him. Everything, in Christ, is brought together in the Oneness which is God. There is a reconciliation of creatures with God and a reconciliation of creatures - alienated from each other - in God.

### **Mystery of the Cross and Ministry**

In the life of Paul, there is an undeniable reality: While at the beginning he had been a persecutor of the Christians, from the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus, he came over to the side of Christ crucified, making him the reason for his life, his ministry and the object for his preaching. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up

for me" (Gal 2:20). In the encounter with Jesus, he had understood the central meaning of the cross of Christ. He had understood that Jesus had died and risen for all. It was on the cross; therefore, the gratuitous and merciful love of God had been manifested. Paul experienced this gracious and redeeming love above all in his own life: from being a sinner, he was transformed to being a believer, from persecutor to apostle. Day after day, in his new life, he experienced that salvation is "grace" that everything descended from the love of Christ. The "gospel of grace" thus became the only way to be aware of the cross, the criterion not only for his new being, but also the response for those Jews and gentiles who questioned him. Among these were, above all, the Jews who pinned their hope on works and expected to gain salvation from these. The Greeks as well, who were proud of their human wisdom could not come to any rational understanding of the cross.

For St. Paul, the cross has a fundamental priority in the history of humanity; it represents the principal point of his theology, because to say cross means to say salvation as grace given to every creature. The theme of the cross of Christ becomes an essential and primary element in the preaching of the Apostle. The clearest example of this is the community of Corinth where disorders, disunion and scandals were present in a disturbing way, Paul presented himself not with sublime words or wisdom, but with the proclamation of Christ crucified. On his own admission Paul's strength did not consist in persuasive language, but rather in the scandal of the cross. "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ... and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1Cor 2:1-5).

There is an inevitable relationship between mystery of God in Christ and ministry. In 1Cor 4: 1 Paul has in mind the content of his proclamation of Christ when he refers to himself as the servant of Christ, i.e., one entrusted with mysteries of God: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." When we look into the background of the letter to Colossians we realize that Paul was in prison in Rome and his imprisonment was inextricably linked to the ministry. Because of his message, because of his preaching, because of his proclamation of the truth of Jesus Christ, Paul became a prisoner in Rome. The source of Paul's ministry was God. "... , the Church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was

given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known..." (Col 1: 24-25). It was God who called him on his way to Damascus. It was God who granted Paul His Spirit. It was God who directed the least of the apostles into the ministry. Paul was deeply aware that it was God who gave him the gifts of the Spirit in order that he might be a minister of the Word.

Paul beyond doubt felt the sense of 'emptiness' in his ministry of preaching the Word of God. In the Bible whenever a person is called and given a mission by God, the person concerned feels a sense of emptiness or unworthiness. Face to face with the living and all sufficing God, the person comes to realize that he or she is empty. For example, at the burning bush, Moses could only see his imperfections. Moses complained of his lack of eloquence. But God replied, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak" (Ex. 4:11-12). When Isaiah saw the glory of God in the Temple, he said: "Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is 6:5a). Then, after an angel took a live coal off the altar and touched his tongue (the symbol of purification), we read in verse 8: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." In response to a miraculous display of the Lord's power as He directed Peter in catching an incredible huge number of fish, Peter "fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord'" (Lk. 5: 8b). Peter saw that he didn't even deserve to be in the Lord's presence. Well, Jesus looked at Peter and said, "...Fear not; from henceforward you will be catching men." (Lk 5: 10b).

And Paul, like the rest of these servants, saw that he did not deserve anything; so everything he received from God caused him to have joy. The recognition that he was unworthy to receive anything from God caused joy because of all that he received in Christ. Joy is a product of an unassuming nature. When Paul sincerely believes that he did not deserve anything, even the privilege of suffering for Christ made him rejoice. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..." (Col 1: 24).

### Jesus-Mystery Story as Saviour-story in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Dr. Harold C. Urey, one of the inventors of the atom bomb, wrote shortly after one of the early atomic explosions in the desert of New Mexico in 1945: "I am trying to frighten you. I am myself a frightened man. All the experts... also are frightened". It is reported that these experts

waited for this explosion with faces to the ground. What power has been placed into our hands to transform the world or to destroy it! Ever since that atomic event the world is in the threat of a nuclear holocaust. When we reflect on the mystery of Christ in the situation of the world in our century, such an impending danger becomes a stumbling block.

The other maladies that stand in the way of peace at the global level have a bearing on our reflection on the presence of the mystery of God's saving plan for the human race. They are: stress on the level of having rather than on the level of being, destructive use of atomic energy, mentality of profit making at all costs, arms race, international wars and terrorism, industrialization leading to ecological disasters, oppression of the "third world" countries, excessive use of natural resources, deforestation, atmospheric pollution and green gas emissions threatening the biosphere, domination by the superpowers, discrimination based on race, color, caste/tribe and religion, human right violation, preoccupation with the balance of power and the consequent manipulation and instigation of conflicts especially in the developing countries, every nation, every tribe becoming a threat to the other; multinational corporate companies ruling the global economy; killer diseases like AIDS and cancer, a tiny minority enjoying the majority of the resources of the earth, economic imperialism, deforestation, sexual abuse and traffic, drug traffic, concentration on material welfare at the risk of rejecting or ignoring God and moral values, oppressive economic embargoes, atheistic secularism, environmental pollution, manipulated assassinations, violation of human rights and ever so many other life-denying tendencies and experiences.

In such a scenario, if we were to review the panorama of Christian spirituality today, of course with no pretensions at being comprehensive or exhaustive, we would discover the mystery of saving power of God is operative in the renewed interest in traditional spiritual paths together with an almost baffling variety of new developments which augur well for the world and its inhabitants. These developments can be roughly sorted into the following clusters of life-affirming movements such as great interest in the experience of prayer, search for and rediscovery of authentic mystical experience, Catholic charismatic movement, fresh approaches to spiritualities like Carmelite, Benedictine and Ignatian which search for a contemporary relevance, revival of personal and communitarian retreats and of spiritual direction, ever-increasing thirst for justice that springs from the practice of faith in the mystery of God in Christ, realization of the obligation of having *inter and intra religious dialogue*, creation spirituality with its stress on the purpose and finality

of the mystery of creation by a mystery-God, Christian movement of ecology, new cosmologies, Native American, African, Asian, and Australian spiritualities, spiritualities derived from the peace and justice movements and theology of liberation. What we are able to recognize in all this widespread ferment is the emergence of what could become for this new century a dynamic Christian spirituality that would usher in a process of integral healing not only for the planet earth but also for the entire cosmic mystery.

To speak of the *mystery* of Jesus Christ in such a context, then, is to acknowledge, first of all, that human life itself is mystery. We are not made up of just minds and bodies; we are also spirits. God is the supreme Mystery and, as St. Paul remarks, it is only "in God that we move and live and have our being" (Acts 17: 28). Mystery, then, invades every dimension of our lives including our knowledge of ourselves, the others and our world. Mystery is at the heart of our relationships with others. The mystery of the person of Jesus is even more profound on account of the kinds of human faith-responses that he inspired in the disciples of his own day and in Christian believers throughout the centuries including this our 21st century. Of course, people touched by the Jesus-story, then as now, respond in different ways and at different levels. However, it remains true that the story of Jesus continues to capture the imagination of people, to inspire new vision and hope. These people feel that Jesus somehow enables them to be more authentically human and to live their lives with greater openness to the divine mystery. Jesus is Jesus because "he will save his people from their sins." (Mt 1:21). Drawing inspiration from this gospel verse we shall reflect on *Jesus-Mystery story as Saviour-story. Jesus is our Saviour-God.*

How then do we enter into and personally appropriate the mystery of this Saviour-story in our times here and now? To begin, we need to situate ourselves within the living tradition of the followers of Jesus. For most, this means becoming part of an ecclesial community or Christian Church which celebrates the memory of Jesus in Word and Sacrament. In this way, the *Saviour-story* is brought to life again as people experience his reality at the centre of their lives and the world in which they live. From earliest times, this was expressed by saying that "Jesus is the Christ" (Peter) or, even more profoundly, Jesus is "Lord and God" (Thomas).

The continuation of the *Saviour-story* throughout human history has been expressed in many ways: some have retreated to the desert, or at least to a monastery, to contemplate the mystery of God in Christ in solitude and prayer; others, inspired by Jesus, have chosen to live

their Christianity in the market-place. They witness to Jesus who heals the sick, defends the poor and upholds the rights of people against all forms of injustice. In these multiple testimonies to the power of Jesus Christ at work in the world, we can discern different ways of telling, embracing and interpreting the Jesus story as *Saviour-story*.

From very early times in Christian history, it became evident that there are essentially two distinct approaches to the mystery and reality of Jesus Christ. One is called a *Christology "from below"* because the emphasis is on the events in the historical life of Jesus: the one who came among us as a great prophet to announce the kingdom of God and who, despite his untimely death, has been raised on high by God. The other approach is called a *Christology "from above"* because it begins by affirming the divine origins of Jesus who is "God made man". These two approaches, sometimes called "*ascending*" and "*descending*" *Christologies* are meant to be complementary. However, throughout the centuries, it has been the "high descending" Christology that has held the most sway. More recently, the "low ascending" Christology has had a return to favor. The important thing, however, is to realize that the mystery of Jesus Christ surpasses all our feeble attempts to speak and to understand. Moreover, it is only by entering into and living the story in word and deed, that is, by becoming followers of Jesus that we can hope to understand who he is and what he means for us today.

### **Mystery of God in Christ in Asia**

When we start reflecting on the mystery of God in the continent of Asia in our present century what comes to our minds and hearts is an existential question: "How do we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century relate the enormous problems that beset the Asian continent with the saving acts of Jesus Christ?" Face to face with the unfathomable saving mystery of God in Christ, there are ever so many events and experiences which baffle us in Asia. Let us look at some of them: There is first of all the question of genocide which is but a catastrophic consequence of criminalization of politics. There is the glaring reality of violence and arson erupting in many places as a result of the instigation of local and national leaders due to political opportunism. The unequal distribution of wealth and enormous natural resources that give rise to the obvious and dangerous divide between the rich and the poor is yet another fact that needs to be set right. The large scale unemployment and underemployment, the very poor and unhygienic housing conditions that pave the way to simmering discontent and apathy and such situations paralyze the onward movement of several countries in Asia. The misuse of religion, religious fundamentalism and innumerable sectarian churches are

counter productive experiences in the sense that the people at large are left without any proper orientation. There are of course ever so many other factors which prevent the Asian countries from becoming prosperous and self-reliant. This is the context in which we have to reflect on the mystery of God in Christ in Asia.

From the fact that Christian holiness is union with and in Christ, it is evident that it receives its specification from the same person of Christ, from whom the union proceeds and in whom the same ends. Thus, it is evident that the Christological conceptions and conceptions about holiness and sanctification are so intimately related that each false concept about the person and activity of Christ necessarily has immediate consequences on the whole spiritual life, and the spiritual life has immediate consequences for each concept about the person and activity of Christ. So it is absolutely necessary to have a clear and balanced vision of the person of the Word Incarnate. This interdependence between Christological conceptions and theology of holiness is amply confirmed in history.

The continent of Asia is huge and its ethnic, cultural and religious beliefs are so diverse and wide-ranging. It is not easy to verbalize the "Asian experience of the mystery of God in Christ". Moreover, it is important to emphasize that Asia had a complex history and culture long before the colonization started. The Triune God of the Christians has been present in the Asian continent much before the Western Christian missionaries entered this continent which has been greatly neglected, despised, exploited and ignored by the so-called "civilized" countries of the world. This marginalization or pushing the continent out of the centre of gravity of powers that be is perhaps the very first existential enigma that one has to face in contextualizing the mystery of God in Christ in Asia.

"I am very dark, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem..." (Song 1:5). It was Origen, the first Christian theologian and writing on African soil, who insisted on "black *and* beautiful" instead of "black *but* beautiful" since "he saw in the bride the Church among the Gentiles, of equal birthright as the synagogue..." (Baur 1994). The black bride of the *Song of Songs* sings her joy of life in all its human forms, but she also cries out in grief when she has lost her bridegroom. It seems that in the present years the joyful face of the Asian Bride has become the sorrowful face of the Asian Mother, who cries over so many of her children that languish in misery – victims of injustice, exploitation and oppression – who mourns those who died in famine and fraternal wars. But the last chapter of the *Song of Songs* we have the distinctive expression of the

bride's resolute faith: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." (Song 8:6-7)

Origen has some appealing observations which would be of some help to us in our search for understanding the mystery of God in Christ in the Asian context. The following points are adaptations/enlargements of the observations of Origen (Halton 1990):

- a) To draw from the literal, historical meaning of the scriptural text the spiritual understanding that would build up the faith of the believers. "If therefore both the Lord and God are 'spirit', we ought to hear spiritually those things which the Spirit says."
- b) We have to understand the Law in the letter and in the spirit. The salvific nature of the 'law' will then be opened up for the believer. In God, law, life and love are all inter-related and coalesce into the mystery of the Triune God.
- c) A Christian must be able to communicate what she/he knows. For it is not sufficient for the priest to have wisdom and to perceive all reason. Communication nourished by one's faith leads the listeners to an experience of communion of life and love.
- d) Even though a rational understanding of the mystery is essential, we must be aware that unaided by the grace of faith reason cannot have any access to the mystery of God.
- e) Enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is required if we were to move from physical to spiritual understanding. This enlightenment helps us to draw on the language of interiority of the inner person at the level of the heart. It is an experience of being rooted and grounded in love.
- f) Spiritual understanding and appropriation always take place in the context of prayer. Here 'prayer' has to be understood in the sense of being fully alive and fully present to the 'mystery' of God in faith, hope and love.
- g) The ability to discern the various spirits goes a long way in interiorizing and experiencing the mystery of Christ: "...since Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light and deceive souls under a semblance of good, it is necessary to distinguish the inspirations that come from him from those which come from God... God respects the consciousness and freedom of men, only the devil clouds it and 'possesses' it. Consequently, peace and clear-mindedness will be the sign that an inspiration truly comes from God" (Crouzel 1989).

Christianity in Asia is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it a spin-off of colonialism. It was sown and took its first roots in the fertile soil of Asia. The Church has been flourishing on this continent for six hundred years before Islam was born. In our attempts at understanding the mystery of God in Christ in Asia we have to clearly point out two significant details that have emerged over the centuries. First, the Asian Christians are able to differentiate between the substance of Christianity and its European clothing. The second fact is that though Christianity is well present in Asia it has its serious troubles linked to the seemingly unending process of fragmentation. This process is fostered by a constant influx of new sects. The numerous Christian denominations are but manifestations of this development.

The theologians in Asia have an immense and momentous role to play in giving birth to a *tongue* that proclaims *Christic liberation* to its peoples. This *tongue* has to be rooted and grounded in the biblical revelation of the "*Mystērion*" as proclaimed by Apostle Paul. The catastrophic divide between the rich and the poor has to be bridged in order to stem the tide of violence in its various manifestations. We have to be shocked into the realization that a theology that does not come out of an authentic encounter with the *Saviour-God* can never be fruitful. *Orthodoxy* has to embrace *orthopraxis*. Only such theological practice will mobilize the entire continent of Asia to go with Jesus, labour with him, follow him in pain and follow him in glory. As we listen to, read and witness to the increasing violence in several countries in Asian Continent we must humbly confess that something more than political conflict is happening here. Is it not a deeply spiritual crisis that involves, shall we say, all the Continents? It is a crisis that reveals the failure of Christianity to bring unity, reconciliation and healing. We have to be attentive to the clarion call to wake up and listen with our hearts. If we do that there is a justifiable hope that Asia will be a great spiritual influence on the Christianity of the East and the West. The mystery of God in Christ is very much alive and active in Asia and knocking at our hearts. Shall we open ourselves to that ineffable "*Mystērion*"?

## Conclusion

The mystery and the meaning of human life can only be discovered in the double act of *remembering* and *hoping*. Just as Israel lived in the tension of *anamnesis* of the *Exodus* and the expectation of the "*Day of the Lord*", so too the community of Jesus Christ has been living in the *anamnesis* of the mystery of his death and resurrection, "*till he comes*", in the hope of the *parousia*. It, then, means that we can personally encounter this Christian mystery in our own times only to the extent

of constantly bearing in mind what has happened and of discerning what we are called upon to accomplish in the here and now of our history. Keeping this in mind we, in this article, have made an attempt at providing the necessary historical background to enter into the process of 'faith seeking understanding' the source *mystery* with the *hope* of living our Christian heritage in our own times more fruitfully, effectively and lovingly.

We began with a few biographical details of Paul of Tarsus and moved on to an explanation of the word "Mystery" in general. We then focused on "Mystery" in Paul with some of its related facets and perspectives. Subsequently, the question: "How is this 'mystery' inexorably linked to the self-manifestation of God in the person of Christ for the salvation of the human race?" was taken up for reflection. In dealing with this question the article made an attempt at contextualizing it in the backdrop of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian experience with a special reference to the situation in Asia. By way of conclusion we would like to state that, looking at the situation of the world, we are passing through the "dark night" of injustice of every kind, misery, war and genocide. The biblical verse that spontaneously comes out from the depth of our hearts is: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk 15: 34). We cannot sweeten or falsify painful realities such as poverty that is inhuman, anti-evangelical, forced displacement of peoples, manipulated and instigated violence between peoples, structural injustice and genocide which are not compatible with the mystery of *Saviour-God*. Selfish individualism and spirituality turned in itself band together to impoverish and even distort the meaning of the discipleship of Christ. Is not Christ crucified again? His divinity is hidden as it were. It would seem that the experience of a hidden God cannot always be avoided. Our faith in the crucified and risen Lord tells us that even in the depths of darkness when God seems hidden away, the transforming light of God is active and is able to shine. To find the *mystery* of divine life burning at the depths of the world and to let ourselves be purified by that burning love is the challenging mission of hope given to us here and now.

Glory be to the Father, the Creator and Source,  
to the nursing Mother,  
to Jesus, the Healer and Eldest Brother  
And to the Unsurpassed Great Spirit. Amen (Orobator 2008).

## Reference

Balz, Horst and Gerhard Schneider (1981) (Ed) *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

- Barnhart, Bruno. "The Mystery of Christ and of the Cross." Internet Article.
- Baur, John (1994) *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa.
- Crouzel, Henry (1989) *Origen*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark.
- Cusson, Gilles (1988) *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, Anand, India, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.
- Halton, Thomas P. (1990) (Ed) *The Fathers of the Church. Vol 83, Origen*, Washington,
- Karl Rahner, (1966) "Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today", *Theological Investigations, Vol.5*, tran. Karl-H. Kruger, Baltimore, Helicon Press,
- Leander Keck (2000) (Ed) *The New Interpreters' Bible (NIB)*, Nashville, Abington Press, Vol. XI.
- Léon-Dufour, Xavier (1967) *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, New York: Desclee Company.
- Orobator, Agbonkhanmeghe E. (2008) *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, Nairobi, Paulines.
- Pope Benedict XVI *Address* delivered during the general audience of October 29, 2008 in St. Peter's Square. Rome: <http://www.zenit.org/article-24102?l=english>.