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## **Editorial**

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The present volume brings out varieties of issues and concerns, along with challenging perspectives. Although it is difficult to integrate them all under a common theme, yet a subtle sense of re-reading the texts and contexts from the perspective of the marginalised is visible. The contributors deal with issues such as hospitality and loving surrender to concerns of land and architecture, to perspectives of mission in the prophetic books to exploring trinitarian paradigms amidst religious pluralism, altogether developing a paradigm of God of the margins.

Temjen Imchen gives us a glimpse into the lessons learnt from the prophet Jonah in the fascinating story pointing to a compassionate but righteous God. Interestingly the article explores the mission perspectives with respect to the 'others' in the interesting narrative of that O.T. book. Joel Joseph interestingly explores the issue of hospitality in secular India bringing in perspectives from the late exilic and post exilic times. He draws principles of hospitality from the Bible and traditions of other faiths to help us continue to be hospitable to others. V.J. John corresponds the well-known story of Naboth's vineyard with that of Jesus' parable of the Vineyard and reminds us of how land is significantly related to identity and livelihood. Shiju Matthew develops the concept of God of the margins with his interesting interpretation of 'horns' and 'craftsman' referring to Zechariah 1: 18-21 and explores the relationship between the nations as in the OT at the centre and God's presence in the margins. The God of the margins is affirmed to have the power to use any nation for God's sovereign purpose. From a very different angle Fr. J.A. Santhanam explores Gavin D' Costa's proposal of the trinitarian paradigm of a more suitable way to encounter religious pluralism

than the classical approaches of inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism of the theology of religions. Gifta Angline Kumar integrates loving surrender to God and social engagement in the various fields of women's concerns, ecology and liberation for a fuller humanity. Satvasheela Pandhare takes us into the world of Kautilya's *arthaśāstra* for a critical reading of *vāstu* (architecture) from the perspective of the marginalised.

Hope the above articles would sincerely enrich us towards further exploration and deeper theological discussion. This is the very first of the IJT issues that the present editor was offered to edit. It is hoped that any suggestions towards improvement of the editorial work will be greatly appreciated.

**Swarup Bar**  
Editor

## **The Story of a Compassionate but Righteous God Trajectory in the Prophetic Mission of Jonah**

*S. Temjen Imchen\**

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### **A. Introduction**

The book of Jonah is one among the twelve Minor Prophets. Ever since our Sunday School days, we as children loved “the Fish Story” of the Bible. Even when we have become adults, it continues to surprise us readers by this fishy tale. As this tiny narrative goes, it talks about a wayward Hebrew prophet called by God; tells him to go to Nineveh but Jonah goes into the opposite direction and lands up in the belly of a “great fish” for three days and three nights. Eventually, he is saved. Only then, he obeys God's command. But Jonah is still angry that God shows mercy to the Ninevites, the arch-enemy of Israel. Jonah believes that since God is both merciful and just, He would punish the wrongdoer-Ninevites.

Though it is a short Hebrew narrative, it is replete with theology, mission, irony, and so on. It arouses the curiosity in readers whether it is an historical account or a literature of a different variety in the Old Testament. If the Jonah narrative is understood as historical, then what could have been the message of Jonah to his audience? Are there lessons for us (*implied readers*) today? Jonah was called to preach the message of salvation to the Ninevites. In perspective, he carried out his prophetic mission

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first to the Israelites, then only to the people of Nineveh – Jonah’s mission-nemesis – and also to the Gentiles and the natural world.

### **B. The Prophetic Mission of Jonah**

In Rabbinic Judaism, there is a view that Jonah “was reluctant to go to Nineveh out of patriotic moves. He thought that the Ninevites were likely to repent, and this would show up the Israelites who would lose God’s favor.”<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, another rabbinic view on Jonah’s prophetic mission has it “that Jonah feared the future destruction of Israel by Assyria. Rather than obey God’s directive, Jonah elected to martyr himself on behalf of his people.”<sup>2</sup> Reading the prophetic mission of Jonah through the lens of a *midrash*<sup>3</sup> (rabbinic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures) provides an explanation that the Hebrew prophet was right to protest against God’s call, which is tied not only to his present responsibility as a Hebrew prophet but also for his future life and the fate of his own people. Following this perspective, the Hebrew messenger’s concern was with Israel – God’s covenant people.

The *midrash* in *Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer*, a work dating from the eight to ninth century CE, talks favorably about Jonah. Rabbi Eliezer stresses the point that Jonah was an extraordinarily successful prophet. As Jonah embarks on a journey chosen by him which begins from Joppa to Tarshish, very soon he finds himself surrounded with very strange situations beginning with the stormy sea, including the non-Jews. Such a scenario in Jonah’s sea voyage is vividly described in Rabbi Eliezer’s *midrashic* text:

The sailors saw all the signs, the miracles, and the great wonders which the Holy One, blessed be He, did unto Jonah, and they stood and they cast away everyone his God, as it is said, “They that regard lying vanities forsake their own shame”... They returned to Joppa and went up to Jerusalem and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins, as it is said, “And the men feared the Lord exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis made by Rabbi Eliezer points to a situation when they made vows to God of Jonah during the storm in the mid-sea and even after that event. Every time he brought the word of God to his audience – Jews and non-Jews alike – they were persuaded by his words of reproof and repented.<sup>5</sup> But then, why did Jonah try to hide? To such a question, it is commonly interpreted that Jonah truly desired the people of Nineveh to be punished rather than repent. It appears that Jonah had a strong dislike for Israel’s oppressors, particularly the Assyrians. So, Jonah as a devout Israelite refused to go to Nineveh in order to preach repentance. Therefore, Jonah would shrink his prophetic mission that was entrusted to him by Yahweh and embarked on his own style of mission journey even if it meant going to the opposite direction. In his alternative mission expedition that began from Joppa to Tarshish, Jonah projected that he had a leadership role to play before the fellow-Israelites of his time. Emphasizing that the prophet Jonah is about “leadership and responsibility,” Einat Ramon – the first Israeli-born woman to be ordained as a rabbi and also from a Rabbinical school – states:

The Book of Jonah, like the Book of Deuteronomy, which deals with the leadership struggles of Moses, reflects the leader’s pain. In general, the Jewish sources set a high threshold for responsible leadership for the nation of Israel and for humanity to encourage us to assume positions of leadership despite the inevitable price exacted by these jobs.<sup>6</sup>

The job assigned to Jonah was tough and challenging and that meant going and preaching repentance to the Ninevites, who were crooked and corrupt according to Jonah. He thought that he would better quit this mission than going and sharing the news of repentance to Israel’s oppressors. Characteristically, Jonah appears to be a soul inspired for his fellow-Israelites but a character livid to their enemy. As a loyal Israelite, there is one thing that he could not do which was about preaching the message of salvation to

the arc-enemy of Israel. Jonah was a hardcore Israelite and so he would do anything, even if that meant declining Yahweh's command to go to Israel's archenemy.

Jonah's refusal to go to the dreaded city of Nineveh and embarking on a journey just the opposite had displayed a sign of leadership and loyalty to his people. This is presented succinctly by Rosemary A. Nixon in her commentary, *The Message of Jonah: Presence in the Storm*.<sup>7</sup> Echoing Jonah's view, Nixon states thus:

God should be focusing his chief concerns on his own people and not on the ungodly Ninevites. In refusing to go to Nineveh Jonah was challenging God to show his care for his own people, Israel. By sailing to Tarshish he showed that he was not afraid of undertaking a long and dangerous journey. Indeed, his flight to the sea, a place of chaos and threat for the ancients, shows Jonah being ready even to die for his beliefs, a readiness soon to be tested.<sup>8</sup>

Jonah was tested and tried as it can be seen in this short but dramatic narrative. The fundamental problem with the Yahweh's envoy was that he harbored 'a belief that God's call to Jonah was unethical.' At all times, the people of Israel kept the teachings and laws of God and devoted themselves to the divine service. Hence in Jonah's mind, God's people deserved better but God showing mercy to Israel's wrongdoers was an offence to the victims. In the annals of Jewish people, the person of Jonah is spoken of as a hero who stood for his people and projected as a harbinger of hope.

A recent book by Quinton B. Richmond, *Theories of Inerrancy and Inspiration of Biblical Scriptures*,<sup>9</sup> affirms that Jonah belongs to a group of Jewish historical leaders that influenced the coming Messiah and the founding of the Church. The book begins with the biblical themes such as the creation of the universe, man and woman, flood story, the ancestors of Israel, the birth of Nation of Jewish Israel, the prophets of Israel and Judah, the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE, the Second Temple, the

teaching of Jesus and the founding of the Church.<sup>10</sup> The author points to the circumstances that led to the capture of the northern kingdom Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. It is stated that "the prophets of Israel were Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea"<sup>11</sup> who prophesied in the ninth and eight century BCE.

Jonah knew that his prophetic mission was to preach to Nineveh, which according to Jonah was not only a city of corruption and wickedness but there was a constant reminder that Assyria posed a great threat to the people of Israel also. Such a picture is described in the prophecy of Hosea, one of the contemporaries of Jonah (cf. Hos 9:3; 11:3-5; 11, etc.).<sup>12</sup> Because the Ninevites were wicked, Jonah wanted a wicked people to be punished by Yahweh rather than expect a divine mercy. Jonah was inimical toward the populace of that wicked city and so Jonah must shrink his prophetic responsibility and provide the leadership for the Israelites. In doing so, Jonah decides against going to Nineveh proceeds toward Tarshish. From Jonah's point of view, Yahweh's plan to show mercy on the Ninevites rather than punishment is unbearable. Jonah feels that Yahweh's withholding of judgment upon Israel's oppressors is temporary and their doom is imminent.

At the backdrop of Jonah's compositional history, which is believed to have taken place after the historical destruction of Nineveh,<sup>13</sup> the name of Nineveh appearing in this short narrative as an object of divine mercy would have given rise to dissonant voice during and after the time of Jonah. As it is recorded in the book of Nahum, there are strong condemnations of Nineveh for its international crimes and its ultimate punishment at the hands of Yahweh (Nah 1:1-3:19). From a vantage historical and theological standpoint, the city of Nineveh doing a "turn back" for their sins and receiving the resultant divine grace in Jonah 3 only appears to be a short reprieve in the eight century BCE when it is compared with the turn of events in the seventh century BCE which culminated in the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BCE.

Central to the Jonah narrative is “the prophetic mission” which provides three mission dimensions to the readers of Jonah’s story. The first reading of mission theme in the Jonah narrative has it that Jonah, the Hebrew messenger, was successful in shouldering the prophetic responsibility by willfully disobeying Yahweh’s bidding for Nineveh’s mission by going to the opposite direction. Because Jonah loved his people more than the Ninevites, he must have done anything to scuttle the divine plan of showing the divine mercy to the wrongdoer-Ninevites. The second interpretation of mission in the Book of Jonah happens when Jonah is commissioned for a second time after he was spewed out by the great-fish in the open ground. Having received a second-call from Yahweh, the Hebrew prophet goes to that forbidden-city and preaches repentance. But, Jonah is greatly disappointed at Nineveh’s repentance. In his disappointment, Jonah goes out of the city and sits in a corner under a bush/castor oil plant (*qīqāyôn*) regretting for what he did and the divine caprice. There is a third mission dimension in Jonah’s tale which points to a mission as a dialogical function that begins from the beginning till the end of the narrative. Jonah – having shrunk his first God-given mission – proceeds from Joppa and embarks on his sea-adventure to Tarshish. The dialogical variety of mission in Jonah’s tale is spread throughout the book. It happens when the Hebrew voyager encounters the mariners in the stormy sea; his prayer and thanksgiving for surviving in the belly of the big fish; preaching penitence to the Ninevites who were Israel’s enemies; Jonah’s dialogue with Yahweh and also with the growth and quick disappearance of the “bush” as a likely sign for Nineveh’s punishment being suspended for a while and that their penalty is imminent.

### **i. A Lesson on Strict Justice Vs. Mercy from Jonah Narrative**

Jonah wants a *strict justice* meted out to the people of Nineveh instead of showing *mercy (raham)*, because their ‘wickedness’ (*ra’tam*, Jonah 1:2) was so big. Strict justice or retributive justice

is a tit-for-tat action. Jonah detests Yahweh’s divine mercy when it is extended to the wrongdoers such as the Ninevites. Yahweh commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh, the flourishing capital of the Assyrian empire, yet Yahweh’s messenger refused to obey because of Assyrians’ wickedness and atrocities on Israel. Jonah rejected because Nineveh was a “great city” teeming with wicked people and therefore he demands nothing less than Yahweh’s punishment that fits the crime of the Assyrians living in that city. This feeling of retributive justice on the part of Jonah appears to be the main rationale for the refusal of his prophetic mission. While reading the Book of Jonah, it is easy for readers to criticize Jonah merely as a rebellious Israelite prophet who disobeyed Yahweh in his prophetic mission but they seldom think of the reasons for Jonah’s reluctance. At the core of Jonah’s attempt to escape from Yahweh’s commission to preach repentance to Nineveh lies a fervent desire for retributive justice.

Jonah was angry when he was told to go to Nineveh. The historical records of ancient Israel show that Jonah prophesied a long time after Assyria militarily assaulted the Northern Kingdom Israel and the Aramean’s allied forces at the Battle of Qargar, near the Orontes River, in 853 BCE.<sup>14</sup> Though Jonah prophesied only in the eight century, the Israelite prophet must have remembered the past history of his people, particularly the campaign by Shalmaneser III against King Ahab and the Aramean coalition. The prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Jonah, talks of Assyria as a war-monger (Isa 10:5-19). More than this, Jonah knew that he had to preach repentance to the people in “the wicked city of Nineveh.” Not only that they were wicked, but the Ninevites were hostile and sinful people. These were reasons enough for Jonah to have dragged his feet from going there and proclaim the message. Reasonably, then Jonah must have thought of shrinking the responsibility of his prophetic mission because of Ninevites’ wickedness and provide a sensible leadership during his lifetime. His idea of Assyria had always been that of evil, violence, rape and

idolatrous disregard for Israel's God. Unmistakably, Jonah must have remembered these terrible acts and disliked the Ninevites. As recompense, Jonah is convinced that these people were fully deserving of only the wrath, judgment that God would send to them.

Knowing fully well that the Assyrians were wrongdoers to Israel for so long, Jonah is hard-pressed to divert from Yahweh's mission to a prophetic mission journey of his choice that would begin from Joppa to Tarshish. Deep inside, Jonah seems to be bitter and therefore angry with Yahweh that he will show mercy to the Ninevites. Put differently, Jonah loathed the people of Nineveh. The case for Jonah's anger builds up in Jonah 1:2b: "for their wickedness has come up before me." The historical and biblical records show that the Israelites suffered so much of atrocities rendered by the word 'wickedness' under the Assyrian kings (2 Kings 15:19; cf. 1 Chr. 5:26; Isa.10:5-10; Nahum 3:1-3, 18-19). Understood this way, it is important for readers of the Book of Jonah in the Hebrew Bible to investigate the reasons for Jonah's shrinking of his responsibility from a prophetic mission in the present exploration.

As seen above, Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh resulted from a deep-rooted problem which could only be known by looking retrospectively at their histories. Jonah feels that the people of Nineveh deserve not Yahweh's 'compassion' but his 'judgment.' If so, what could be the reasons for Jonah's unwillingness to go to on his prophetic mission? Why was he protesting against Yahweh's command to go to Nineveh? The historical facts show that the Assyrians had been a people with which the nation of Israel had been subjugated for so long.

The Book of Jonah does not refer to any king, but a brief record found in 2 Kings 14:25 preserves his Israelite background. In the early years of King Jeroboam II (around 790-780 BCE), Jonah predicted that Jeroboam II would expand Israel's territories.<sup>15</sup> In the annals of Israel as a social and political

entity, the Assyrian power was the greatest both in Judah and Israel beginning from 800 to 600 B.C.E. Jonah the prophet was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom Israel. Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom Israel under Shalmaneser IV who besieged Samaria and then died during the siege leaving Sargon II to finish the task and drag Israel into captivity. After defeating the northern Kingdom Israel in 722 B.C.E., the Assyrians carried away thousands of Israelites and resettled them in other parts of the Assyrian Empire.<sup>16</sup> Hence, Jonah remembered the atrocities of the Assyrians during his lifetime and did not want to share the economy of God's mercy to the Israelite enemy. Other than Jonah's waywardness and his constant questions on the divine nature which led him to disobey God, this tiny book – having only four chapters and 48 verses in length – is a beautiful Hebrew narrative.

### **C. The Book of Jonah & Narrative Criticism**

Jonah is unique among the prophetic books but with a difference. Some of the prophetic books<sup>17</sup> are introduced by a title sentence, and others<sup>18</sup> have a general introduction. But the book of Jonah has neither a title sentence nor an introduction into chronological setting of the book itself or its first episode.<sup>19</sup> The book contains neither biographical/chronological details about its author, nor collections of oracles in verses against Israel and foreign nations. But it presents a prose narrative about the prophet himself. It is almost entirely narrative with the exception of the psalm in chapter 2. The actual prophetic word against Nineveh is given only in passing through the narrative. As with any good narrative, the story of Jonah has a setting, characters, a plot, and themes. It also relies heavily on such literary devices such as irony.

Narrative criticism is a close-reading of the text. It is literary method that tends "to focus on the final form of the text, not what preceded it or what stands outside it, but the text and what is in it: what it reports and how it reports it. The text is assumed to have a message that is neither external to the text nor extractable

from the text, but inherent within the text as something that can be discerned only by actually reading the narrative itself.”<sup>20</sup> In the Old Testament studies, Robert Alter’s work in 1981 is considered as marking the beginning of a new stage on Hebrew narrative.<sup>21</sup> Put it differently, as much as the historical criticism was to get to “the world behind the text,”<sup>22</sup> the narrative criticism operates as a subfield of the contemporary literary theory, which can help readers apprehend the “world in front of the text.”<sup>23</sup> Narrative critics are primarily concerned with the qualities – its content, rhetoric and structure – of biblical narratives that make them literature.

As such, narrative criticism is a shift away from traditional historical-critical methods to the way a text communicates meaning as a self-contained unit, a literary artifact, an undivided whole. Whereas the historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches to the Bible seek to uncover the meaning of a text in its original context and for original audience,<sup>24</sup> a biblical narrative critic also considers the cultural, linguistic and historical assumptions important – at least *the setting* of the story, yet the primary focus of a literary critic is on the formal features of a text in its finished form.<sup>25</sup> There are merits and demerits with narrative criticism. One of the major benefits of narrative criticism is that it “focuses on the text of Scripture itself.”<sup>26</sup> However, a demerit in this approach is that it ignores the historical questions. But narrative critics also feel that narrative criticism is complementary to historical-critical method. The *setting/life-setting* is present in both approaches. For instance, the *Sitz im Leben* for Jonah is the “belly of the fish” in the Jonah narrative.

Narrative critics generally speak of an *implied reader* who is presupposed by the narrative itself. In other words, the *implied reader* is a term used by Wolfgang Iser and some other theorists of reader-response criticism to denote the hypothetical figure of the reader to whom a given work is designed to address itself. Any text may be said to presuppose an ‘ideal’ reader who has the

particular attitudes (moral, cultural, etc.) appropriate to that text in order for it to achieve its full effect.<sup>27</sup> In this way, a narrative critic focuses on the latter understanding of a narrative and thus regards the real author and the real reader as intrinsic to the text and therefore this concept makes the narrative analysis a more text-centered approach.

Finally, the *genre* of the book of Jonah is important. Many scholars in the past said that Jonah is a historical book.<sup>28</sup> But because the book is different from other prophetic books and lacks historical setting, a majority of scholars labeled the Jonah narrative as an allegory, parable, novella, tale, parody, satire, a prophetic story.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, from such a wealth of genre classifications for the Jonah narrative, scholars like James Limburg have proposed that the Book of Jonah is “a didactic story.”<sup>30</sup> The term “story” is a synonym for narrative. Properly, a didactic story is “a short piece of story” that offers something to the reader which is educational, instructive, moralizing and so on.

As shown above, the literary qualities, content and rhetorical devices play an important role in the whole story of Jonah. All its components such as: *plot*, *character*, *setting* and *point of view* relate to each other in a narrative.<sup>31</sup> There is a chain of events in this narrative. The plot in the tale sets in motion with the main character-God commanding Jonah (*a character*) to go to Tarshish and Jonah disobeying it. This act constitutes the plot. But his voyage is interrupted (*plot/suspense*) by “a great wind upon the sea” (1:4). But upon Jonah’s request, he is thrown “into the sea” (1:15) by the “mariners” (*characters*) only to be swallowed by “a large fish” Remaining in the “belly of the whale” is not the “climax” but a “midpoint,” also called the “plot twist” in the plot structure. The belly of the fish forms the setting of the story (1:17). Jonah drags his feet at first, but he obeys Yahweh at the second time (3:1). Jonah goes to Nineveh, “that great city” and persuades the people to repent. The king calls on everybody to fast, including

the cattle, and repent from their wicked ways. Jonah's mission is successful, and he prevents them from being destroyed. This is the ending part of the plot.

Now, *the point of view* is a crucial narrative trait which is closely related to the presence of a narrative voice in the story. The narrator is the one who controls the story. So, the narrator's point of view include: "Jonah's near-death experience in the sea" (practical lesson), a rhetorical "question by Yahweh to Jonah" expressing "Yahweh's compassion" for Ninevites because they were "hopeless" all constitute the moral/theme of the story. These are the perspectives through which we observe and evaluate everything connected with the story.<sup>32</sup> The narrative point of view seeks to determine the main theme of the story. Thus, a narrative requires a story and a story-teller.<sup>33</sup> We may now look into the narrator's view point in Jonah's account.

### **i. The Narrative Point of View in Jonah vis-à-vis Open-ended Questions**

Point of view "signifies the way a story gets told."<sup>34</sup> There is a point of view in the last verse of the Book of Jonah (4:11). This is a rhetorical question which is interpreted in a number of ways. Some interpret it as wisdom. Others understand it "open-ended question" leaving a room for further interpretations. So, besides the rhetorical question, narrative critics and reader-oriented approaches also take a keen interest in this verse. Narrative criticism and reader-response theory gain from each other. If the 'point of view' is important in the narrative analytical method, then a literary feature called an 'open-ended question' in reader-response theory – as propounded by Wolfgang Iser – is very essential in any Hebrew narrative. This is the case in the Jonah narrative. Narrative critics always speak of the *implied author* who is pre-supposed by the narrative itself. This is also the first step in the storytelling. The actions of the characters, their dialogue, their rhetoric, and the setting are presented through the narrator's viewpoint. The influence of point of view is seen in the

events a narrator selects for the story, what the characters say or do, what settings are elaborated, what comments and evaluations are made, and so forth.<sup>35</sup> Then, there comes the narration and the role of the narrator. The role of the *implied reader* is to provide answers to questions, even to a rhetorical question from Yahweh to Jonah (Jonah 4:11).<sup>36</sup> Utilizing the rhetorical question in Jonah as an "open-ended question" provides meaningful answers. The designation "open-ended" is a literary form "which includes a major unresolved conflict with the intent of displaying the unresolvedness."<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, if there is more than one way of reading the Jonah narrative, it leads the implied reader to the 'filling of gaps',<sup>38</sup> a reading strategy in biblical narratives, which postulates that Nineveh's salvation was short-lived because of their long history of atrocities on the weaker nations like Israel. In his complaint to Yahweh, Jonah poured out that Yahweh is a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry (4:2). Similarly, the Pentateuchal (Exodus 34:6; Deut. 32:35) and prophetic injunctions (Jer. 23:6; Isa. 33:2) have it that Yahweh the God of Israel is merciful and gracious but in due course of time, Yahweh exercises justice and righteousness.

### **ii. The Prophetic Message to Nineveh: Jonah and Nahum**

Both Nahum and Jonah have some commonalities in more than one way. Both these two prophets preached to the Ninevites; sought to answer questions about the nature of God. Whereas Jonah prophesied to the Ninevites for repentance in the eight century BCE,<sup>39</sup> Nahum prophesied for the destruction of Nineveh in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>40</sup> At the core of Jonah's heart, he called for punishment, while Nahum prophesied the fall of Nineveh as context. In each context, the concept that God is a God who is merciful and just is evident. Nahum emphasizes God's justice as God acts against his enemies, whereas in Jonah, God's mercy appears to be the focus. But only that Jonah was angry with Yahweh till the last moment because Yahweh was gracious to the

wicked citizens of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. As Jonah complained and Nahum warned, Nineveh fell to a coalition of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians in 612 BCE.<sup>41</sup> Jonah wanted punishment in his time but was held back. Yet it came to pass after about one century later with Nineveh's destruction in the later part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. We may now look at some of the main lessons from the Jonah narrative.

#### **D. Main Implications from the Book of Jonah**

##### *a. The Book of Jonah is "a Prophetic Historical Narrative"*

As a new insight pertaining to genre labeling, the view of the Book of Jonah as fiction or non-historical has been deconstructed. This is possible through an intertextual reading of 2 Kings 14:25. Here, Jonah is attested as a real figure in this Old Testament text, "Jonah, son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher."

##### *b. Strict Justice Vs. Mercy*

Two increasingly dominant theological concepts in the Jonah narrative are strict justice vs. divine mercy. The protagonist prefers the former and not the latter category to be actualized to his mission-adversary. Because the Assyrians were Israel's oppressors for over a period of three centuries, Jonah wholeheartedly protests against the divine mercy on Israel's adversary.

##### *c. Jonah as a Jewish Historical Leader*

What is increasingly becoming important and fresh in Jonah studies is project Jonah as a "Jewish historical leader" and not to reject Jonah as non-historical or anti-type of an Israelite prophet. No doubt, Jonah is an Israelite prophet with a difference. Such a critical leadership role is demonstrated by his refusal to go to Nineveh at first that is seen in his own confession [i, "I am a Hebrew" (1:9). Jonah is ever ready to sacrifice his life for his country at any given moment due to his deep national loyalty but not to Nineveh, which was Jonah's mission-nemesis.

##### *d. Conversion of the Sailors and Ninevites as Jonah's Prophetic Mission Trajectories*

There are two types of conversion in the Jonah narrative. The first conversion is an encounter with the Gentile sailors comes about quite unexpectedly in the mid-sea, often called as "Christian-type of conversion." In this mid-sea conversion event, both the Gentile sailors and Jonah confess that Yahweh, the in the mid-sea. Both the parties confess that the God of Israel is their Savior. The second type of conversion comes about in the "great city" of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Kingdom. No sooner than Jonah began declaring his prophetic message of doom saying "Yet, forty days and Nineveh and will be overthrown!," the conversion of the whole of Nineveh occurred. This type may be understood as a type of the distinctively Islamic form of conversion to the God of Abraham. But the agent of conversion there was Jonah, the prophet of Israel. Both the sailors and Ninevites constitute the "other" in the prophetic mission trajectories of Jonah.

##### *e. Role of the Church in India toward the 'Other'*

In the Indian sub-continent, the minority Christian and Muslim communities on the one hand, and the majority Hindu society on the other are diametrically opposed to each other. To the dominant religious group, the Christians happen to be the "other." In a similar fashion, the Christians also call the dominant group as the "other." They encounter each other for political and religious reasons which often lead social disharmony. Another area of social and economic alienation take place under the social categories such as the lower castes, tribals, differently-abled people, people living with HIV/AIDS, Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender (LGBT), Hijra or eunuchs. They are frequently categorized as the "other." As per the Constitutional provisions of India, they got to have their rights in the society, particularly the women and children and LGBT community. At such a juncture, will the Church disown or own them? One example may be cited from the Bible. Some

interpreters use Genesis 19 as a pretext for the rights of LGBT community.

#### f. *Ecology as Jonah's Dialogical Partner*

The sea-wind, water, fish, dry land, sun, bush, worm, and east-wind are elements found in the Mediterranean ecosystem. All these elements play a crucial part in the Jonah narrative. In this sense, the natural world turns out to be Jonah's living and dialogical partners. He encounters them in his mission expedition from Joppa to Tarshish; in his rejuvenated prophetic mission from the Mediterranean coast to Nineveh; and his exit from the city to the eastern part of the city where he engages in a dialogue with Yahweh. Jonah confesses about it (1:9). Just as Jonah is controlled by the Creator God, so also Jonah is dependent on the natural world.

#### g. *"Filling of Gaps" by the Implied Reader in relation to the Historical Anecdote of Nineveh:*

One more fresh insight that can be seen from the Jonah narrative is on the "filling of gaps" by the implied reader, who is different from the historical reader. As the prophetic history has it, Nahum prophesied the destruction of Nineveh long after the days of Jonah. In perspective, the final question from YHWH to Jonah (4:11) is significant. It seems to have been directed both to Jonah, its readers and the Ninevites as well. The practical lesson to be learnt from the last question from YHWH and the whole book of Jonah is that YHWH is never far away for the ultimate destruction of northern Israel and Nineveh. As history has it, the political doom for Israel came from Assyria in 722 BCE. So also, the Assyrian Empire came to an end when the combined forces of Medes and Babylonians attacked Assyria which eventually led to the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE. The collapse of Nineveh shows that their salvation was short-lived because Yahweh, the God of Israel brought the divine justice on Nineveh. It is the oft-repeated teaching in the Old Testament that God is gracious but righteous.

## E. Conclusion

A close-reading of the book of Jonah proves that it is not only an inspiring book in the Old Testament but a great sourcebook for doing the mission of God in the Old Testament. The Book of Jonah is increasingly understood as a historical book in the current Old Testament interpretation. As a historical person, Jonah's prophetic mission was first to his fellow-Israelites. He loved his people more than he loved the people of Nineveh. The prophetic mission of Jonah to the Ninevites was secondary and an after-thought mission trajectory as presented in this short but stimulating Old Testament narrative. What also comes as other mission trajectories from the Old Testament Book of Jonah encompasses Jonah's encounter with the Gentile-sailors, the Mediterranean ecosystem, the natural world. The Israelite prophet comes in close encounters with the human as well as ecological elements which constitute as Jonah's prophetic mission or dialogical partners in the mission of God as presented in the Old Testament book of Jonah. The Book of Jonah is a short prophetic historical narrative that skillfully brings out the divine grace as well as divine justice.

## End Notes

- 1 Hyam Maccoby, *Philosophy of the Talmud* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 79.
- 2 Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel quoted by Associate Rabbi Hayyim Angel, "I am a Hebrew! Jonah's Conflict with God's Mercy toward Even the Most Worthy of Pagans" in *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* (JBQ), Vol. 34, No. 1, (2006), 3-11 [3].
- 3 *Midrashic* is the adjective of the Hebrew root, *darash*, 'to resort to, seek, seek with care.' *Midrash* is the rabbinic interpretation of Holy Writ. Cf. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 48. The phrase "Holy Writ" is an alternative for Holy Scriptures in church and/or synagogue. See Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture" in *Harvard Theological Review* (HTR) 70 (1977), 1-37.
- 4 Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna*. Translated and annotated with Introduction and Indices

- by Gerald Friedlander (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1916), 72.
- 5 Einat Ramon, "The Prophet Jonah: leadership and responsibility" in *The Jerusalem Post*, Sep. 20, (2007), an Online Edition, <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-Features/The-Prophet-Jonah-leadership-and-responsibility> (accessed on July 25, 2015), 1. Ramon, "The Prophet Jonah: leadership and responsibility," 1.
  - 6 Ramon, "The Prophet Jonah: leadership and responsibility," 1.
  - 7 Rosemary A. Nixon, *The Message of Jonah: Presence in the Storm* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
  - 8 Nixon, *The Message of Jonah*, 79-80.
  - 9 Quinton B. Richmond, *Theories of Inerrancy and Inspiration of Biblical Scriptures* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2014), 163.
  - 10 Richmond, *Theories of Inerrancy and Inspiration of Biblical Scriptures*, 163-166.
  - 11 Richmond, *Theories of Inerrancy and Inspiration of Biblical Scriptures*, 166.
  - 12 Cf. Charles L. Aaron Jr., *Preaching Hosea, Amos, & Micah* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 2005), 40.
  - 13 The book of Jonah was probably composed sometime during the fifth century BCE when the people of Judah were recovering from the Babylonian exile. See Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-critical Reading* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), 121. On the basis of linguistic evidences, for instance, Jon 3:3, 6, it is suggested that the time of composition of the book of Jonah took place well after the fall Nineveh in 612 BCE. One major clue is found 3:3 which uses a past tense "Now Nineveh was a very important city." The following verses 7-8 make a reference to animals in mourning and to a decree sent from "the king and his nobles" in 3:7-8 reflecting Persian rather than Assyrian customs. See Billy K. Smith, Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, Vol. 19B (Nashville, MN: B & H Publishing Group, 1995), 208. The book of Jonah records historical events that occurred before the great city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was destroyed (about 612 BCE; see Jon 3:3). Cf. *The Woman's Study Bible, NIV* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2012), 1188.
  - 14 Qargar is a place near Orontes River, located in the present day al-Asi River, northwest of Hamath in Syria. Qargar was the place where the fierce battle was fought between Assyria and the Aramean alliance, including King Ahab of Israel. See Avner Falk, *A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1996), 136.
  - 15 Cf. Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 88.
  - 16 The reconstructed chronology of the Divided Kingdom puts Shalmaneser IV of Assyria in 781-772 BCE. His predecessor was Tiglath-Pileser III (known as *Pul* in biblical accounts, 747-727 BCE). During the reign of Shalmaneser IV, king Menahem ruled over Israel from 780-769 BCE. It is recorded that Shalmaneser went to Damascus in his ninth year, i.e., 773 BCE. Shalmaneser IV was succeeded by Sargon II (722-705 BCE). For more see M. Christine Tetley, *The Reconstructed Chronology of the Divided Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 178-179.
  - 17 Cf. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Malachi, Habakkuk.
  - 18 Cf. Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah.
  - 19 In the first episode, Jonah ran away and hid in the "womb," the hold of the ship. Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster press, 1996), 268.
  - 20 Narrative criticism is a method under the "new literary criticism," which came into being in the 1970 and 1980s. Carl R. Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I, Editor: Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 142.
  - 21 R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Basic Books Inc, Publishers, 1982), 2-22. Then, Alter turned his attention to *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). The claim that Robert Alter is the pioneer of *narrative criticism* is supported by Holladay, Miscall, Gale Yee, Longman and Satterthwaite. See for example, Carl R. Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I, edited by Leander E. Keck., et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 142; Peter D. Miscall, "Introduction to Narrative Literature," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. II, edited by Leander E. Keck, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 540; Gale A. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 43.
  - 22 Over the past century, historical criticism has been refined into various sub disciplines or methodologies including Source criticism, Form criticism, Redaction criticism and Tradition criticism. See Richard N. Soulen, R. Kendall Soulen, "Hebrew Bible," *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001 ), 79.
  - 23 D. Andrew Kille, *Psychological Biblical Criticism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 25.

- 24 The diachronic interpretations look into the text/literature that happens = “through time.” For example, questions like “What really happened in Israel’s history?” is important to the historical-critic. Cf. Daniel J. Harrington, *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Practical Guide* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 27.
- 25 A synchronic interpretation is concerned “in a given time.” Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 19.
- 26 Besides this, it also provides some insight into biblical texts for which the historical background is uncertain; checks and balances on traditional methods; bring scholars and non-professional Bible readers closer together; stands in a close relationship to the believing community; and others. For a detailed study see Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* p. 85-91.
- 27 Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach.” *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), 274-294. Cf. Further, Powell points out that the real author and the real reader are projected as lying outside the parameters of the text. The three middle components Implied Author – Narrative – Implied Reader now take place of the text. See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 19-21.
- 28 Some scholars like William Harper, Clay Trumbull, Hart Davies, Rosemary Nixon dating from 1883 up to 21st century maintained that Jonah was a historical account. See William R. Harper, “Is the Book of Jonah Historical?” *The Old Testament Student*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Oct., 1883): 33-39; H. Clay Trumbull, “Jonah in Nineveh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1892): 53-60; etc. Particularly, Davies supported the historicity of Jonah’s book by referring Jonah of II Kings 14:25; exercised his prophetic ministry during the time of Jeroboam II (823-782 B.C.). Hart Davies, *Jonah: Prophet and Patriot* (London: Chas. J. Thynne & Jarvis, Ltd, 1925), 6-7.
- 29 Phyllis Trible, “The Book of Jonah,” *NIB*, 466-7.
- 30 Scholars like James Limburg prefer to use “story” as a synonym for narrative. Thus he labels Jonah as “Didactic Story.” James Limburg, *Jonah*, 22. Others who support James Limburg are Janet Howe Gaines, Steven L. McKenzie. McKenzie, Steven L. *How to Read the Bible: History, Prophecy, Literature – Why Modern Readers Need to Know the Difference, and What It means for Faith Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.
- 31 For more see Tremper Longman III, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol.1, General Editor, Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 115-18.
- 32 Longman III, *NIDOTTE*, 118.

- 33 Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 25-27.
- 34 M. H. Abrams cited by James Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 167.
- 35 Resseguie also says that a narrative critic is alert to rhetorical devices that may thicken and deepen the nuances of a text. Does the narrator use irony to emphasize a particular point of view? What images, symbols, paradoxes or metaphors are present in the text? For a detailed discussion see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 167, 20, 17-40.
- 36 Scholars are almost unanimous in reading this as a rhetorical question. A prominent exception is Alan Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice: The Significance of the Book of Jonah,” P. R. Davies and D. J. A. Clines [eds.], *Among the Prophets: Language, Image, and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* [JSOTSup, 144; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993], 144–63 [158]; P. Guillaume, “The End of Jonah is the Beginning of Wisdom,” *Bib* 87 (2006), 243–50; E. Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* [JSOTSup, 367; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], 14, n. 1.
- 37 It means that no central issue has been resolved, that the action is not really terminated, and that the story is not really over. See Robert M. Adams, *Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958), p. 13.
- 38 The phrase “filling of gaps” is a reading strategy in the narrative structure of a story. See for e.g., Barbara Green, *Jonah’s Journey* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), 85.
- 39 Although Jonah prophesied in the eight century BCE, but it was written only after the Babylonian Exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.
- 40 Lee Wallace, *In the Clouds of Glory* (Alabama: Wallace Enterprises, 2012), 71.
- 41 Ed Hinson, Gary Yates (eds.), *The Essence of the Old Testament: A Survey* (London: SPCK, 2002), 11.  
Cf. Gerard Gertoux, *Jonah vs King of Nineveh: Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Evidence* (2015), 3.

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## Hospitality in Secular India An Intercultural Juxtaposed Reading of the Persians and Yehuds During the Late Exilic and Early Postexilic Times

*Joel Joseph\**

For years, the Indian culture has reinforced the importance of hospitality and care for family, friends and strangers. It is considered a duty, and even a status symbol, to be generously hospitable and humble within the social circle. Multiple religions across India instill this humility in every aspect of life and extend the same to their guests as well. The meaning of the word Hospitality has a wide range of connotations, one among them is the friendly, generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. There are many synonyms like friendliness, hospitableness, welcome, warm reception, helpfulness, neighborliness, warmth, warm-heartedness, kindness, kind-heartedness, congeniality, geniality, sociability, conviviality, cordiality, amicability, amenability, generosity, liberality, bountifulness, open-handedness. This is well said about the Indian culture, because it emphasizes The “Incredible India” and “athithi devo bhava”- a visitor is like god. The constitution of India, also lays emphasis on the importance of Hospitality. This concept is well emphasized in the Bible too. Hospitality when one hears, the first thing that comes in the mind is to the outsider but it is very important how hospitality is extended to the down trodden and the people in the periphery. Hence, in this paper, an attempt will

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be made to see how the constitution gives importance, the second section will try to see, how the different religious traditions gives prominence or their understanding. The next part of the paper will see the Biblical understanding and especially the early postexilic literature lay emphasis and then see how the aspect of hospitality has its importance to the theology and mission of the theologians and church at large.

Firstly, the constitution of India also provides some important facilities for the visitors or *Athithis* under the Central Government Act, the Sarais Act, 1867. SARAI means any building used for the shelter and accommodation of travelers or Athithis.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, what the Indian culture has to say about hospitality and since Indian culture is comprised of various religions and due to limitation of space the researcher will delve only into few religions like Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and in the end look from the biblical perspective limiting it to a narrower perspective, of seeing from early Postexilic perspective.

**Hinduism:** Offering hospitality is fundamental to Hindu culture and providing food and shelter to a needy stranger was a traditional duty of the householder. The unexpected guest is called the atithi, literally meaning “without a set time.” The different scriptures enjoins that the atithi has to be treated as God. “Even an enemy must be offered appropriate hospitality if he comes to your home. A tree does not deny its shade even to the one who comes to cut it down.” Mahabharata 12.374.

A popular proverb, “The uninvited guest should be treated as good as God.”<sup>2</sup> According to scriptures, a devout Hindu is enjoined to perform five daily duties and one among them is, Atithi (or Nara) Yajna: Reverence and hospitality to guests, invited or not.<sup>3</sup> Hospitality could be seen as intrinsically related to Dharm, which envelops in itself the obligation towards other humans.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, there is one more in this set of guiding principles from the Taittiriya Upanishad of the Yajur Veda: Athidhi devo bhava – “Revere guest as God.” This affirmation of guest as Divine

is a core concept of the Hindu tradition. Today, the government of India – a country which is home to the majority of Hindus in the world – uses the concept of “Guest is God” in their Ministry of Tourism campaign.<sup>5</sup>

**Islam:** Prophet Muhammad reminded, of the high status of one who treats his guest well when he said, “...Let the believer in God and the Day of Judgment honor his guest.”<sup>6</sup> Honoring, or treating a guest well is coupled with two of the most important beliefs in Islam, belief in God and belief in the Day of Judgment.<sup>7</sup> In Islam, the hospitality relationship is triangular; it consists of host, guest, and God. There are excellent admonitions in the Koran reminiscent of the Old Testament: Show kindness to parents and to orphans, to the poor and to fellow workers, to strangers and to the slaves<sup>8</sup> Hospitality is done with a strong desire to help and it is the giver’s responsibility to give and by doing so, one feels lucky.<sup>9</sup> Hospitality in Islam is a triangle that links God, the guest and the host.<sup>10</sup>

**Sikhism:** One of the Teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, summarized by Kahan Sing explaining the essentials of Sikh dharma in his encyclopedia, Gurusabad ratnakar mahankos is to view all people as brothers and sisters without concern for caste or race, bestowing love to all and performing services without expectation of rewards. This really helps them to show hospitality to all. This is very well seen during summer season, supplying chilled water and drinks to all and showing hospitality to all.<sup>11</sup>

Langar: The Sikh emphasis on giving is seen in the institution of ‘langar’, a free communal eating area attached to every temple or gurdwara. Guru Nanak started the practice of langar against the background of a caste system in which the food of a higher caste was considered polluted by even the shadow of someone from a lower caste passing by. The Guru insisted that all people, rich and poor, beggar and king, sit together on the same level, to eat food prepared and served by those of an equally varied social background. At one gurdwara in Punjab, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, 3,000 free meals are served to visitors every half hour.

The practice of langar is also carried to other areas of social need. At the time of severe flooding in Orissa in India; was given relieve the suffering and distress in earthquake-torn Gujarat on India’s west coast. Khalsa Aid was also involved in relief work in Bosnia and Kosovo. Last year, in 2018, when there was a devastating flood in Kerala, the Sikh community from Dehradun, sent a group of people with things loaded to help the needy and torned.<sup>12</sup> Three aspects of positive living: Sikh teachings remind us that there are three aspects to positive living: meditating on God, earning by one’s own effort and sharing with others.<sup>13</sup>

This hospitality is not just a gesture; it is foundational to the Sikh faith. Sikhs remind us that eating together is one of the important liturgies of the human community, for people of every faith and none.<sup>14</sup>

**Buddhism:** One of the Noble Eightfold path is “Right Effort” making all effort to improve,<sup>15</sup> hence, hospitality can be seen blending in this effort. Hospitality (sakkàra) is the act of being welcoming and helpful to guests, strangers and travellers. For the Buddha, hospitality should be shown to all, whatever their caste, religious affiliation or status. When Sāha, a leading citizen of Vesālā and a generous supporter of Jainism, became a Buddhist, the Buddha asked him to continue offering his hospitality to Jain monks who might come to his door (A.IV,185). The Tipiñaka often says that the Buddha<sup>16</sup> was ‘welcoming, friendly, polite, genial, and engaging’ towards everyone who came to see him (D.I,116). One of the duties of a lay person was to make the Fivefold Offering, one of which was providing food, accommodation and help to guests (A.II,68). A type of indirect hospitality common in the Buddhist world until recently was making provisions for travellers and pilgrims. Last week, the researcher was blessed to see the Tibetan Buddhist helping giving drink and eatables to the people who were travelling on the road in Dehradun.

In his *Suhçllekha Nàgàrjuna* urged his royal correspondent to ‘establish rest houses in temples, towns and cities and set up water pots along lonely roads.’ This last practice remains very

popular in Burma. Groups of friends form what are called water-donating societies (*wainay ya thukha*) and undertake to place water pots along roads for the convenience of the passerby. Water halls (*pānāyasālā*) are mentioned in the scriptures (Vin.II,153).<sup>17</sup> Having mentioned about the different religious traditions in India, it would be good to see what the Bible has to say.

### **Biblical Understanding of Hospitality and Especially During the Early Post Exilic Period**

The sixth and fifth centuries B.C. were great time of atrocities by the Babylonian and Persian Empires. This period led the people of Judah to exile. Edward Said rightly said that the, “Exile is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land and their past.”<sup>18</sup> This paper will focus on the hospitality given by the people who remained in the land facing the scorn and humiliation but still ready to be hospitable to the returnees and also the empire who was brought into the forefront by the returning elites.

### **The People Left Behind Witnessed Loss of Their Freedom**

There is thus some reason to associate the deportation of an additional 745 Judeans in the year 582 (Jer. 52:30) with the murder of Gedaliah.<sup>19</sup> Although the Babylonians refrained from settling foreign ethnic groups in Judah, the real threat facing the Judean people came from without. It emerged from the minor states surrounding Judah, who took advantage of the diminished population and the weak Babylonian military presence to invade the territory of Judah from all sides and advance their own political and economic interests. When this process began is uncertain. By the middle of the sixth century at the latest, the Negev (Amos 1:11–12; Obad. 29; Ezek. 35:10; 36:5) and possibly also the southern portion of the Judean hill country (cf. Jer. 32:44) had been lost to the Edomites, the Shephelah to the expansionistic Phoenicians and Philistines (Obad. 19; Ezek. 25:15; 26:2), and Gilead to the Ammonites (Jer. 49:1). There were also attacks on the

civilian population (Lam. 5:9) and slave raids by the Phoenicians (Amos 1:9), from which there was no protection since almost all the fortifications and strongholds had been razed. In this period even Jerusalem was an open city; in the early postexilic period, the Samaritans were still trying to prevent its refortification (Ezra 4:7–16). Thus it is not surprising that during these years the Samaritan Sanballat, the Ammonite Tobiah, and the Arab Geshem should have their say in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:10, 19). The military weakness and uncertain legal status of Judah in the exilic period thus led to the shrinkage and fragmentation of the area of Judean settlement and to constant confrontations with foreigners from the surrounding states. Without any effective means of resistance, the population could only gnash their teeth and learn to live with the political and economic influence of these foreigners. Although they were dwelling in their own land, those who remained in Judah had largely lost their territorial social integrity.<sup>20</sup> Ezek. 11:15; 33:24 shows that the majority of those who remained in the land were positive about the division of property and even justified it theologically.

In Jeremiah 41:4-7 we hear of worshipers coming to the temple area in order to offer grain offerings and incense. That the destruction was severe is indicated by their mournful posture and attitude at the time; even with extensive destruction, though, worship continued at the temple site.<sup>21</sup>

### **Transition from the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire**

#### **A Brief History**

Babylonians are attributed to taking the people of Judah into exile but the imperial strength did not last for long. Babylonian’s power quickly waned after the Jerusalem’s destruction. Babylon under Nabopolassar (626-605) and his son Nebuchadnezzar (605-552) was a formidable empire. After the latter's death, however, he was succeeded in relatively quick succession by his son Amel-Marduk,

his son-in-law Neriglissar, and his grandson Labashi-Marduk. We are not certain what brought to the throne the final king of Babylon, Nabonidus (555-539 B.C.), but his idiosyncrasies help explain what led to the final demise of an independent Babylonian empire. Nabonidus was from Harran, which was the worship center for Sin, the moon god. We know from a quasi-autobiographical account of his mother that his devotion to the lunar deity was a family matter.<sup>22</sup> In any case, his privileging of the cult of the moon god led to the alienation of the powerful Marduk priesthood and eventually the loss of the people's affection. Indeed, though we are uncertain of his motives,<sup>23</sup> Nabonidus moved to Tema in what is today Saudi Arabia and left his son and coregent, Bel-shar-usur (Belshazzar) on the throne in Babylon.<sup>24</sup> Sources indicate that he returned to Babylon in 543 B.C. in the light of threats from over the Zagros mountains.

In the meantime, on the other side of those mountains, Cyrus was on the rise. He was the son of a Persian king (Cambyses I) who had married a daughter of the Median king Astyages.

From c.a. 555 to 550 B.C., this alliance was effective in expanding Babylonian and Persian territory at Media's expense. In c.a. 550 B.C., Cyrus' Persian<sup>25</sup> forces took Ecbatana and effectively controlled the earlier Median Empire. From this position of power, Cyrus attacked the Median Empire's western holdings, surrounding Babylonia by 547 B.C.E. Despite Nabonidus' strategic retreat southward into Arabia, Cyrus succeeded in defeating the whole Babylonia by late 539 B.C.E. The near decade of Persian threat to Babylonia created a slow, gradual war, often noted for its use of propaganda and internal dissent. With the defeat of Babylonia, the Persian Empire, a number of changes took place in imperial administration. The time of exile soon ended, and the character of Judah's existence changed once more.<sup>26</sup> Daniel 5 reflects the eve of the empire, with Belshazzar throwing a banquet where the writing on the wall indicated his almost immediate defeat. Before reaching the

city of Babylon, Cyrus had defeated a major Babylonian army at Opis. Ancient tradition explains that the alienated elements within Babylon assisted Cyrus so that he did not have to shed blood as he entered the city.<sup>27</sup> The year was 539 B.C.—a date that marks the transition, because of what followed Cyrus's victory, to the postexilic period.

The Persians, a royal dynasty derived from Achaemenes (thus Achaemenian and Achaemenid) and at this point led by Cyrus II, better known as Cyrus the Great, or just "Cyrus," found themselves *de facto* rulers of Mesopotamia and all the eastern Mediterranean—including Palestine.<sup>28</sup>

The return of the exiles from Babylon afforded a chance to build up Jerusalem again and try to recapture national glory. But it could never be the same. Not only were the Persians firmly in control, but the Hebrews—now the Jews—had also undergone the pedagogy of the Exile.<sup>29</sup>

Many did return, and a priestly commonwealth in and around Jerusalem was established under the Aramaic name Yehud. It was not a large community but by 522 B.C. it may have reached a population of 20,000, when Zerubbabel ("offspring of Babylon") succeeded Shesh-bazzar (Ezra 1:5-2:2). Of course, there was a mixture of motives. The religious zealots returned to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute the sacrificial services of Judaism: their attitude was shared by the Chronicler. But there is sufficient evidence to indicate that not all the returning exiles were so enthusiastic, and thereby we come upon one of the chief difficulties in understanding the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Voices were raised in protest against the delay because, it was assumed, God could not begin his messianic age until the sacrifices were in order.<sup>30</sup>

This paper after dealing with exile now will seek to concentrate on the time of Persian domain and their influence on God's people and in their outlook. The Babylonian imperial influence has come to an end by this time and the effect sent to the

people in exile. Now, this section will deal with the scholars view on the Persian influence.<sup>31</sup>

## **Hospitable to the Returnees and also the Persian Empire**

### **A. The Initial Years of the Returnees: A Time of Hardship**

The time of the returnees was not an easy time. The political scenario of the world changed (538-522 BC). The prophecy of Isaiah did not come to be as real as people expected. There was no sudden and universal triumph of Yahweh's rule; no flocking of Jews to Zion; no turning of Cyrus and the nations flocking to worship. On the contrary, Cyrus was more interested in extending his campaigns. All the western Asia was under his flag, no one could compete with his strength. He created absolute peace and no nation dared to revolt against him. Soon after his death, after one of his campaigns his eldest son Cambyses (530-522) took the lead. His greatest achievement was including Egypt in his territory which he achieved by 525 BC. Many other nations like the Greeks of Libya and others submitted to him. Elephantine text of a century later mentions of Cambyses as one who destroyed the Egyptian temples,<sup>32</sup> but it is unlikely that he brought any changes to his father's religious policy regarding the Jews.

## **The Hospitality Could be Seen from four Different Angles**

### **Political Angle**

#### **The Cyrus Decree or The Edict:<sup>33</sup>**

In the first year of his reign in Babylon (538),<sup>34</sup> In three places,<sup>35</sup> we hear that Cyrus issued a decree that the exiles from Judah be allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. We quote the version found in Ezra 1:2-4 (see also 2 Chr. 36:23 and, in Aramaic, Ezra 6:3-5):

“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:”

“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and

build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.” (Niv).

This decree triggered a return to Judah that probably took place in waves, most of which we do not hear about. The text is selective, and we only read about those groups that returned under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel with the intention of rebuilding the temple. On the surface, this gesture seems remarkably magnanimous hand of God in it and expressed gratitude toward Cyrus.

Unsurprisingly in a document with a focus on Babylon, no mention of Yahweh or Judah is made here. However, this text confirms what looks like a widespread Persian foreign policy of allowing at least certain people who had been subjugated by the Babylonians to return to their homelands and rebuild their cults. Because of the idiosyncratic religious views of Nabonidus described above, the Babylonian people, including the powerful Marduk priesthood, also benefited from Cyrus's policy of restoring certain native cults.

The Persians desired satisfied vassals, particularly those on the fringes of the empire like Judah, who could serve as a buffer toward their true enemies, whether Egypt or Greece or both.<sup>36</sup> Since Palestine lay near the Egyptian frontier, it would have been to the king's advantage to have a nucleus of loyal subjects there, and this may have influenced his decision. Yet even though he acted out of enlightened self-interest, and though he certainly did not acknowledge Yahweh as Second Isaiah had expected, the Jews had a reason to be grateful.<sup>37</sup>

Observers have long commented that the Cyrus edict in Chronicles and Ezra seems to reflect a Jewish perspective, which has raised doubts in some minds about its authenticity. Note, however, that the Cyrus Cylinder itself has a Babylonian perspective.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps Cyrus commissioned native scribes to

compose these decrees in a language that their recipients could understand and appreciate.

Alternatively, what we may have in Ezra 1-2-4 (as Halpem suggests) is a paraphrase and selective rendition of the original Cyrus decree.<sup>39</sup> No matter what the Persian motivation or the scope of its restoration, the Jewish community living in exile saw the hand of God in this decree.<sup>40</sup>

**Social Angle:** Though the returning was not a smooth the second part of Isaiah portrayed a magnificent vision of future return, the third part (56-66) confronts the harsh reality of conditions after the Restoration and seeks to explain why salvation has not yet come. The latter chapters of Isaiah reflect sharp, often bitter, inter-community polemic and conflict, apparently centred on the cult and priesthood; these prophecies clearly come from the losing group, those who feel they have been marginalized, cut off from their true role in the community. The early post-exilic Jewish community had to face a great many setbacks and disappointments before the people could rehabilitate themselves. However, the division within the Jewish community based on religious perception and sociological stratification hampered the peace, stability, and cohesion within the community.<sup>41</sup> In spite of all these facts, the people who came got settled and could find the space because the people who were living with all odds could be hospitable to them. The majority opinion is represented in the books of Ezra, Haggai and Zechariah which attest the prominent role played by those who returned. Zechariah makes clear that the major fund-raising efforts targeted donors were either the people in Babylon or who just returned (Zech. 6:9-15). The book of Ezra and Nehemiah make clear that the leadership of the community in Yehud was undertaken by those who returned from Babylon (Neh. 7:70). The true Israel, from this perspective, was the group who lived in Mesopotamian exile. The experience of the Babylonian exile became theologically and politically normative. There are no texts that give explicit voice to those who remained in

the land. This is not a surprising thing as it was only the politically and religiously influential people who went to Babylon.<sup>42</sup>

‘The theophany which Deutero-Isaiah had painted in such glowing colours failed to materialize. Cyrus was not converted. And in Jerusalem restoration measures soon came to a halt because of the uncertain political and economic situation.’<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to the earlier prophets who spoke to the entire people, now is the split community. There is a word of judgement for some, a word of salvation for other Isa. 65:13. Hope lies not in the present, but in the eschatological expectation. What is now is not the fulfilment of the promises; there are still to come “a new heavens and a new earth.”<sup>44</sup>

**Religious Angle:** The people of the land could be seen who could have brought directly or indirectly the aspect of Universalism. Though scholars like K. Koch<sup>45</sup> and D. W. Vanwinkle<sup>46</sup> suggest that Deutero-Isaiah speaks both nationalism and universalism.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the aspect of universalism is very much emphasized in Isa. 56:6, 7, which represents what is truly a remarkable alternative answer to the question of who belongs to the fold of God.<sup>48</sup> Here he tries to emphasise primarily the aspect of acknowledging the glory of Yahweh in worshipping Yahweh at his temple rather than participating in the paraphernalia of the sacrificial worship. By doing this indirectly criticises the Zadokite priests who demonstrated not only an exclusive view of the nations but also were in full control of the temple institution in the post-exilic times.<sup>49</sup> The author who is believed to have lived soon after the temple was rebuilt, addressed explicitly the situation of “foreigners” and “eunuchs”, given a full roll in Israelite worship. They were even more marginal than those who remained in the land, i.e., the foreigners. In Is. 56:1-7 and 66:18-23 the privilege of being chosen ones is extended to the people of the nations. Here election is no more community oriented or institutional oriented, but faith oriented.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, the doors to the temple are opened wider here than they were according

to Ezra and Nehemiah. In short, the choice of the nations as missionaries for Yahweh and priests in Yahweh community are the most important features in Is. 66:18-23 for which there is no parallel elsewhere in the O.T.<sup>51</sup> Similar sentiments surface in Zech. 14:16. This could be seen as what was promised to Abraham in Gen. 12:3.<sup>52</sup>

### **Rebuilding of the Temple**

Ezekiel and other prophets like Haggai and Zechariah are firmly rooted in this Temple-centred tradition. For Haggai in particular, the presence of the Lord with the restored community is inextricably tied to the rebuilding of the temple.<sup>53</sup> The Second Temple time saw a renaissance of sacrificial worship in Jerusalem. There was no monarchy to continue the Davidic lineage and therefore the temple no longer symbolized a nation-state as it was in the past. Therefore, the temple was mentioned as house of prayer (Isa. 56:7). Ezekiel's vision in chs. 40-48, offers the priestly responsibilities and prerogatives. There is no place for a king. He emphasized that Israel should be a hierocracy, a nation ruled by priests. Haggai seems to believe in the importance of the restoration of the Davidic Monarchy (Hag 2:23). Haggai seems to think that for Israel to be Israel, the people should have temple and also a king. Zechariah's vision offers a third strand, in 4:14, which identifies two trees. Many commentators identify with Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. He is advocating a diarchic model of leadership in which responsibilities are shared by both political and religious leaders. All three models—a temple community with a prince (Eze. 40-48), a reborn monarchy (Haggai), and a diarchy of high priest and king (Zechariah) – are presented with authority of a prophet. Hence, the people were facing a conflicting situation because of the theologically authorized diversity during the sixth century B.C.<sup>54</sup> Though, the priestly class along with the empire played a vital role but without the common people's help and hospitality it would have been a mammoth task.

**Economic Dimension:** These priests and the governmental officials became the upper class. Xerxes refused to support the local temples and the Yehudite elite encouraged the laity to contribute more money and resources to the functioning of the temple, hence these all contradict about how the empire is presented in Ezra 6:4. This maintained the income of the priests, while it eroded the wealth of the local populace, resulting in the wide gap between the rich and poor. Thus indirectly the Persian Empire depleted the resources of the people of Yehud as they were the colonial power.<sup>55</sup> The people were burdened by various taxes *מִן־הַמֶּלֶךְ* for the king in Nehemiah 5:4; 14-18 and for the cultic personnel such as contributions, first fruits and tithes for the elite 13:10-13. Nehemiah 5:4 makes direct references to the 'tax of the king,' "we have borrowed silver for the royal tax (on pledge of) our fields." Vv.14-18 makes repeated mention of "the bread for the governors." The taxes were primarily in metal.<sup>56</sup>

**Political Angle:** The Temple which was a long desire of all Israelite community was brought into reality because all the people of God whether they were the people of the land who stayed back during exile or the returnees were hospitable to the Persian overlords. The temple was a civic center, providing the locus of government, fiscal administration and imperial presence. Note that the hospitality was well understood even by the emperor Darius, who understood that the Temple as a place for prayers for the emperor and the imperial family, according to Ezra 6:10.<sup>57</sup> Thus the people were very hospitable even though they knew who were the elites and also the Persian overlords. The empire always had their own agendas no matter how friendly they seem. The hospitality in relation to the dream of facilitating their long aspired dream of capturing the Egyptians were also catered, because they provided food for the Persian garrison which was stationed in Palestine.

## Conclusion

The paper throws light how the period of Exile could be seen as a period of great atrocity on the part of the great imperial expansionist of that time, i.e., Babylonian and the Persians during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The atrocity of the Babylonians was more obvious than the atrocity of the Persians but both had their part of the game. The people of God had lost their temple, kingship and the land which were the three strong pillars of the people of God. They were ransacked, traumatized, broken, and shattered as the land that God gave to them was devastated. They lost their dear ones, they became empty, humiliated as they were carried away as spoils. The Davidic throne that was to be for everlasting to everlasting suddenly was destroyed as it never existed. The temple without which they could never imagine their existence was shaken from the foundation. The list of the atrocity goes on, which cannot be compensated in any form. The trauma is well reflected in Psalms, Lamentation and other prophetic books. The Persian politics cannot be taken in its face value. Though, they were instrumental in the return of the vessels, the return of the exile under the various leaders and the rebuilding of the temple. The Persians did not always acted with an intention of helping the people of God but it was to promote their own vested interest. The Persians gave the silver spoon treatment to Yehud with fully fledged hidden agendas as part of their atrocity. This they very well did to promote the expansionism program and also for their own safety measures. Hence, they could attain two objectives: to safe guard their own vested interest as the colonist and on the other side carefully painted with glowing colours the benefits for the Yehud with well executed and planned projects, i.e., the return, rebuilding of the temple and the walls. On the other hand, God changed these atrocities as a time to experience the liberation of God and to shatter the false religiosity that the people were soaked into. The people could understand that one cannot have institutional claims on God. This topic has a good implication for

the people of God in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that God's people cannot take their relationship with God in an inconsistent manner. Exile made people to be vulnerable but at the same time they became the centre of attraction from God's perspective. This situation made them to realize that God's transforming power of His Spirit is readily available to heal their broken and depleted life situation and humanity. Thomas M. Raitt rightly says "Everything which is tragic and a source of self-pity in exile from a human point of view are a source of freedom and celebration from God's point of view."<sup>58</sup> This is imprinted firmly with an iron pen in the Isaiah's hymns. This is the time when God throne will be exalted among the nations because He will bring restoration of the people through another foreign king, i.e., Cyrus. This, God will do, for His name's sake and glory. He cannot be succumbed to the realpolitik but He decides the destiny of the all the nations. Exile and the Restoration on one side could be seen as a atrocity of the imperial nations during the sixth and fifth century but on the other hand could be seen as a 'cradle of theodicy and eschatology,'<sup>59</sup> an end to the existing structures and beliefs and also a creative age for new beginnings.

The following are four pillars or driving force to remain hospitable to the people of other faiths, in our theology and mission. The Bible and the different religions in the land of India are very hospitable in their religious outlook, how much more as people of the Bible Should we be?.

### 1. Imago Dei-the Image of God

God made all humans in His image (Genesis 1:26-28). One can understand the concept of the image of God in many ways. First is that the image of God concerns what humans are The concept of imago Dei and human dignity is rooted in Christian theology. The image of God can recast the conversation around a core belief in immigrants as people having value who can influence society positively. God's image compels God's children to love all people. In this broken world, we should do what we can do

to strive for living a life which is hospitable to all, irrespective of our regions, religions, denominations showing justice, dignity, liberty because every person bears the stamp of God matters to God and to us too.

## **2. Dei Verbum-the Word of God**

Dei Verbum means divine revelation. How does God communicate to us and how do we understand our God? Dei Verbum is the great migration of human history in which God moved in love to humanity, so that it makes it possible for humanity to move to Him. The movement of divinity to humanity is because of any human merit but God's gratuity. In migrating to the human race, God gets into a place of "otherness," the very migration that human beings are afraid of and find it difficult to make. In crossing boundaries of every kind for the sake of others, the Verbum Dei tells the mystery of God is a priori, self-sacrificing love. The Verbum Dei indicates that for God there are no boundaries that He cannot cross, not within himself nor in the created world. The Verbum Dei reveals that, even as human beings raise walls of every kind, God removes all walls so that no one is far from the divine embrace. Another paradoxical aspect of the secret of the incarnation is that, while human migration tends toward upward movability and the greater recognition of human dignity, divine migration tends toward downward mobility that is even willing to endure the worst human indignities (cf. Phil 2:5-11). The Bible portrays the journey of a people toward a promised land, but God's movement is just the contrary: it is an engagement into those territories of human life that needed life and prosperity. What we understand here is God migrating to a world that is characterized by poverty and division, not because God finds something good about poverty and estrangement, but because it is in history's darkest place that God can bring hope to all who undergo pain, rejection, and isolation. Karl Barth said something significant, "Christ reaches out to all those considered 'alien lives.'" Christ does not move away from alienation, difference, and otherness

but toward it, without stopping to be himself. He entered a strange land, but even there, and mainly there, He never became a stranger to Himself. Just like the Persians and the elite who left, were given a hospitable treatment, God seeks that because of His Word all things were created including human beings, God wants His people to be hospitable to the creation, because He created everything including human, through His Word. In Colossians 1:15-20, The whole universe is created by and for Christ, sustained by Christ, and redeemed by Christ and this is comparable with John 1 and Hebrew 1. We cannot separate our obedience to Christ as Lord from our use of creation. Environmental concern and action are legal dimensions of Christian mission, for Christ's sake. All creation is incorporated in God's plan of redemption through the cross and resurrection of Christ as referenced in Isa. 65:17-25, Ps. 96:10-13, Rom. 8:18-21, Col. 1:20, 2 Pet. 3:10-13, Rev. 21-22. Caring for Creation is rooted in the Biblical doctrines of creation, redemption, and eschatology. We cannot declare we love God while and at the same time abusing what belongs to Christ. As theologians in particular and Christians in general, we should take care of the earth and responsibly manage its abundant resources, not according to the hypothesis of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the creation, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act concerning the earth. To declare the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to declare the gospel that incorporates the earth, considering Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Our hospitality should be holistic i.e. to people and to the creation.

## **3. Missio Dei-the Mission of God**

God is a sending God, and he always sends us. God told Abraham to bless all the earth. To Moses, He said, "I AM sent me to you." Isaiah faced God's glory and cried "Here I am, send me." The story has always been about God and His glory known by all. So, His people have always been sent to share that glory. It is not our mission, but it is God's. He is the Missio Dei the sending

God. The work of the *Missio Dei* is to return the *imago Dei* in every individual through the redemptive act of the *Dei Verbum*. A central aspect of this mission is Jesus' ministry of reconciliation, and hospitality will bring reconciliation, which deals mostly to conquer human hindrances that divide the insider from the outsider.

#### 4. *Visio Dei*-the Face of God

*Visio Dei* is a Latin term that implies "face of God." The psalmist in Psalm 24:6 speaks of a "generation of those who seek Him... who seeks His face... the God of Jacob..." That is what we should pursue as a church. We need to be the people seeking and reflecting the face of God in our community and our world. The concept of *Visio Dei* has its basis on the large part of the beatitude authored by Matthew, as the NIV states "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Mt 5:8). The *Imago Dei*, *Verbum Dei*, and *Missio Dei* are all rooted in the *Visio Dei*. A theology of migration seeks to enunciate a transformed vision of God and human life.

#### (2) *Caring for Creation*

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus is Lord of all creation "heaven and earth" and can be compared with Deut. 4:39.

Cape Town Commitment 1.7.a. What relation this has to do with the refugees. It is about mobilizing the whole church for doing mission integrally. God's whole mission is for God's whole church. The whole church's mission includes every church member. Every church member's mission provides for the whole of life that is there is no sacred or secular divide. The church's mission concerning the refugees at the present-day time is to reach them holistically and contextually whatever the need is health care, education, economic development or environmental care. Jesus is Lord-of all! (Wright, 2017).

#### The Debate on Treating the Refugees

- (Ger) means to stay permanently or people who are in dire need and decided to assimilate to the new context but not building their Moab or Egypt or sticking to their old culture.
- Because of assimilation is given support not directly by the state in terms of free handouts. A refugee has the right to glean which means to go to the fields himself and glean what is left over there.
- The only thing that is given to him directly is the tithe, which is given not by the states but by individuals.

There is a difference between the Biblical situation and the present situation of dealing with the refugees. In the biblical setting, families hosted individuals, and they integrated automatically with the host. The present situation is about nations hosted mass immigrants of tens of thousands or millions. The bible deals with the issue of immigration at an individual level, but now it is dealt with in the frame of public policy. What is uncommonly wrong is to take biblical laws meant for individuals and use them for state laws. There is a big difference between cases of individual immigration and mass immigration in our current time of history (Zehnder, 2018).

#### *Principles to Manage Mass Immigration*

Did governments like Germany take wrong decisions to open borders wide and host millions of asylum seekers? If the answer is yes or no, one should not forget that every ruler's decision eventually is taken under the sovereignty of God. So now how can the situation be fairly handled? There are helpful principles to assist in the current mass immigration situation, but there is no one single recipe.<sup>60</sup>

**End Notes**

- 1 <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/73871485/> accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 at 7:30 pm. Essential Duties under Sarai Act, The keeper of a Sarai is bound to take care and also update the police if any mishap happens with the Athithis as a gesture of hospitality towards them. If any person in Sarai is ill of any infectious or contagious disease, or dies of such disease, to give immediate notice thereof to the nearest police station; to thoroughly cleanse the rooms and verandahs, and drains of the Sarai and the wells, tanks or other sources from which the water is obtained for the persons or animals using the Sarai; to remove all noxious vegetation on or near the Sarai and all the trees and branches of trees capable of affording to thieves means of entering of leaving the Sarai; to keep the gates, walls, fences, roofs and drains of the Sarai in repair; to provide watchmen for the safety and protection of persons and animals or vehicles lodging in, halting at or placed in the Sarai. This act was enacted to see that the hospitality of the athithis are taken care.
- 2 <https://iskconeducationalservices.org/HoH/lifestyle/expressions-of-faith/hospitality/> accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 at 2:45 pm.
- 3 <http://dharmyog.com/honouring-guests-a-religious-duty-for-hindus/> accessed on 13th June, 2019 at 2:50 pm.
- 4 G. S. Bhatt, "Hinduism" in *Sociology of Religion*, Book 2 (New Delhi: Prabhat Offset Press, 2007), 76-89. (p. 84).
- 5 <https://thehospitalityinitiative.wordpress.com/traditions/hinduism/> accessed on 13th June, 2019 at 2:54 pm.
- 6 For more clarity read, Israel Selvanayagam, *Religion and Religions: An Interfaith Perspective* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018), 124.
- 7 Parvez A. Abbasi, "Islam" in *Sociology of Religion*, Book 2 (New Delhi: Prabhat Offset Press, 2007), 67-75. (p. 73).
- 8 Richard Wolff, *The Popular Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Hyderabad/London/Colorado Springs; Authentic, 2008), 29.
- 9 Josh McDowell, Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (California: Here's life Publishers, 1991), 391.
- 10 Aisha Stacey, "The rights of guests and the responsibilities of the guests towards their hosts". (© 2014 IslamReligion.com), Published on 25 Aug 2014 Last modified on 27 Jan 2015. [https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/10662/treating-guests-islamic-way/#\\_ftnref26854](https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/10662/treating-guests-islamic-way/#_ftnref26854), accessed on 13th June, 2019 at 3 pm.
- 11 A. Chauhan, "Sikhism" in *Sociology of Religion*, Book 2 (New Delhi: Prabhat Offset Press, 2007), 35-41. (p. 36).
- 12 This information was given to the researcher by one of the businessman in Dehradun, who narrated the helping mentality of the Sikh community.
- 13 <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/analysis/traditions-of-giving-in-sikhism/> accessed on 13th June, 2019, at 3:10 pm. A. Chauhan, "Sikhism" in *Sociology of Religion*, Book 2 (New Delhi: Prabhat Offset Press, 2007), 35-41. (p. 37).
- 14 [https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/In\\_Sikhi\\_there\\_is\\_no\\_stranger/](https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/In_Sikhi_there_is_no_stranger/) accessed on 13th June, 2019, at 3:10 pm.
- 15 Shailey Basanjali, "Jainism and Buddhism" in *Sociology of Religion*, Book 2 (New Delhi: Prabhat Offset Press, 2007), 42-54. (p. 48).
- 16 For more clarity read, Israel Selvanayagam, *Religion and Religions: An Interfaith Perspective*, 112-115.
- 17 <https://www.buddhisma2z.com/content.php?id=178/> accessed on 13th June, 2019, at 3:25 pm.
- 18 Edward Said, "The Mind of Winter", *Harpers* (September 1984), p. 51. Refer also Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 105.
- 19 This connection is gaining increasing acceptance, possibly Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in Coele-Syria, Moab, and Ammon mentioned by Josephus (Ant.10.181) for the year 582 has at least something to do with the murder, since the murderer Ishmael was supported by Baalis, the Ammonite king (Jer 40:14; 41:15). But the historicity of this campaign is not beyond doubt. Also refer Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, p. 94.
- 20 Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, pp. 90-96.
- 21 Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Pres, 2003), p. 281.
- 22 Eliya Mohol, "Prophetic and Popular Responses to Religious Pluralism in Jeremiah 44", p. 50. See T. Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991), pp. 97-103.
- 23 Perhaps Tema was built as a shrine to the moon god and/or as a way to develop commercial and military connections. More likely, however, is the explanation that Nabonidus moved there in the light of a developing power struggle with the Marduk priesthood. Refer also Daniel Jones Muthunayagam, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations in the book of Isaiah* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), p. 28.

- 24 For Nabonidus and Belshazzar, see Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon (556-539B.C.)*, Yale Near Eastern Researches 10 (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 25 Refer also David Janzen, "Politics, Settlement, and Temple Community in Persian-Period Yehud" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 3 (July, 2002), pp. 490-510; Joel Wienberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community*, JSOTSup 151 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Charles Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic study* JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1999), pp. 294-307.
- 26 Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 18.
- 27 Herodotus provides an alternative tradition where Cyrus stopped the flow of water through a city river gate, allowing him to forcibly breach the city. Refer Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 285ff.
- 28 John W. Betlyon, "A people transformed: Palestine in the Persian period Source" in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 68, no. 1-2 (Mr-Je 2005), pp. 5, 6.
- 29 Harry M. Buck, *The People of the Lord: The History, Scriptures, and Faith of Ancient Israel* (New York, London: The MacMillan Company & Collier-MacMillan Limited, 1966), p. 379.
- 30 Harry M. Buck, *The People of the Lord: The history, Scriptures, and Faith of Ancient Israel*, pp. 380-381.
- 31 Bruce C. Birch, Walter Bruggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 425. The author clearly makes a very interesting distinction, the era about which we will comment is often called the post-exilic period, a phrase that is both useful and problematic. The phrase is useful because it points to a time in the mid-sixth century when some Yahwists were able to return from exile. However, the phrase is problematic because the "post-exilic period" has no end. From the time of the Babylonian exile, there were Jewish communities outside the land. One could say that the post-exilic period continues down to our own time. Hence, some scholars prefer to speak about "the Persian Period", which commences with the imperium forged by Cyrus and concludes with the next empire to include Syria-Palestine that created by Alexander the Great. (The next era may be called the Greco-Roman period).
- 32 Pritchard, ANET, p. 492.

- 33 Alexander Rofe, Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible, ed. Andrew A. Macintosh (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd, 2009), p. 85. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah begins where the Chronicles ends, with Cyrus' edict.
- 34 Harry M. Buck, *The People of the Lord: The history, Scriptures, and Faith of Ancient Israel*, p. 379. He says that, despite the literary problems of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah there is no reason to doubt the substantial historicity of either of these two accounts. Duplication will be found in II Chronicles 36:22-23 and I Esdras 1:1-58. 'The first year' is not the first year of Cyrus' reign, but the first year that Cyrus had contact with the exiles, 538 B.C., when Yahweh stirred his spirit. The Exile was concluded before the seventy years prophesied in the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). Martin Noth also opines, after witnessing Cyrus' restoration of ancient religions and peoples in Mesopotamia, some deported Jews in Babylonia drew the attention of the Persian court to the fact that a Neo-Babylonian ruler had destroyed a sanctuary in Jerusalem, *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 306-15.
- 35 Cyrus issued a decree ordering the restoration of the Jewish community and cult in Palestine. The Bible gives two reports of this: in Ezra 1:2-4 and ch. 6: 3-5. The latter is part of a collection of Aramaic documents (Ezra 4:8 to 6: 18) presumably preserved in the Temple and incorporated by the Chronicler in his work, the authenticity of which need not to be questioned (R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Harper & Brothers, 1941), pp. 823 ff. Also read, John Bright, *History of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 361.
- It is in the form of a diakroma (Ezra 6:2), (Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 366.) i.e., a memorandum of an oral decision of the king filed in the royal archives. It provides that the Temple be rebuilt and the expenses taken care of by the royal treasury, lays down certain general specifications for the building, and directs that the vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar be restored to their rightful place. The other report (Ezra 1:2-4) is in Hebrew and in the language of the Chronicler; its authenticity is widely questioned, even by many who accept the Aramaic version (John Bright, *History of Israel*, pp. 361-362). It takes the form of a royal proclamation as announced to subjects by heralds (E. J. Bickerman, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1" in *JBL* LXV (1946), pp. 244-275). It states that Cyrus not only ordered the rebuilding of the Temple, but also permitted Jews who wished to return to their homeland; and those Jews who were remaining in the land were asked to assist in this venture. The Chronicler also reports the return of the sacred vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:7-11), and tells us that the project was placed

- in the charge of Shesh-bazzar "prince of Judah"—i.e., a member of the royal house. In all probability, Shesh-bazzar was the same as the Shenazzar who is listed in I Chron. 3:18 as a son of Jehoiachin (The name appears as "Sanabassar" in I Esdras and in Josephus. For further reference John Bright, *History of Israel*, p. 362. He quotes Albright, *JBL*, XL (1921), pp.108-110).
- 36 Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, p. 287.
- 37 John Bright, *History of Israel*, pp. 362-363.
- 38 A. Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *JSOT* 25 (1983), pp. 83-97, refers to the "Babylo-centricity of the text."
- 39 B. Halpern, "A Historiographic Commentary on Ezra 1-6: Achronological Narrative and Dual Chronology in Israelite Historiography," in W. H. Propp, B. Halpern, and D. N. Freedman (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, Biblical and Judaic Studies 1 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 93.
- 40 Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, pp. 286-288.
- 41 P. D. Hanson, who has developed Ploger's view that in post-exilic Judaism there were two divergent streams. The Theocratic (priestly writer, chronicler) and the more strongly eschatological (Joel, Isaiah 24-27), argues that these two tendencies originated and were active earlier, in exilic prophecy. He identifies the two opposing parties in the post-exilic period as the returning Zadokite priesthood (Theocracy) and the Levitical groups who had remained in the homeland and who were deposed by the Zadokite group from the mainstream of the cultic life of the community. He calls the latter the eschatological prophetic visionaries and the former the hierocratic Zadokite priests. P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of the Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia:, 1975), pp. 36-44, 209ff, 225 ff. Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations*, p. 340.
- 42 Bruce C. Birch, Walter Bruggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 429, 430.
- 43 Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Babylonian and Persian Periods*, p. 152.
- 44 Eileen Schuller, *Post-Exilic Prophets* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), pp. 57, 58.
- 45 K. Koch, *Die Profeten II*, Stuttgart (1980), pp. 124-151. Refer also Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations in the book of Isaiah*, p. 14.
- 46 D. W. Vanwinkle, "The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and Israel in Is XI-LV", *VT* 35 (1985), pp. 446-458.

- 47 Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations in the book of Isaiah*, p. 14.
- 48 Bruce C. Birch, Walter Bruggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 430, 431.
- 49 Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations in the book of Isaiah*, p. 360.
- 50 Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations in the book of Isaiah*, p. 361.
- 51 Daniel Jones Muthunayagom, *The Relationship between Election and Israel's attitude towards the nations in the book of Isaiah*, p. 360.
- 52 Bruce C. Birch, Walter Bruggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 430, 431.
- 53 Eileen Schuller, *Post-Exilic Prophets*, p. 174.
- 54 Bruce C. Birch, Walter Bruggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 426, 432, 433.
- 55 Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in the Persian Shadow: A Social and Historical approach*, 113.
- 56 Peter Altmann, "Tithes for the Clergy and Taxes for the King: State and Temple contributions in Nehemiah" in *CBQ* 76.2 (April, 2014), 215, 216.
- 57 Richard A. Horsely, *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 51.
- 58 Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 229.
- 59 Theodicy is human's effort to rationalize or accommodate elements in the existing faith structure and which thereby threatens to invalidate it. Thus, eschatology is the first chapter in a new era; theodicy is the difficult last chapter of an old era by Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel*,
- 60 Michael Ghaly, "The Biblical, Missional Concept of Refugee Ministry" pp. 1-50.

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## A Trinitarian Paradigm Meets the Challenges of Religious Pluralism

Gavin D'Costa

*J. A. Santhanam, Ph.D.\**

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“The Christian Faith collapses if the definitive claim for Christ is denied.”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Karl Rahner, a well-known Catholic theologian, had stated more than 45 years back that the diversity of religions is the greatest challenge for Christianity. He argued that religious pluralism:

is a greater threat and a reason for greater unrest for Christianity than for any other religion. For no other religion—not even Islam—maintains so absolutely that it is *the* religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living God, as does the Christian religion. The fact of the pluralism of religions, which endures and still from time to time becomes virulent ... even after a history of 2000 years, must therefore be the greatest scandal and the greatest vexation for Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

The enormity of this challenge has not diminished even today. This is because Christianity's faith in Jesus Christ as the unique and universal saviour is indisputable. Although the reality of the plurality of religions is not a new phenomenon, in the

present context of what we know today about the followers of other religious traditions and of the traditions themselves, the most dominating question for us today is whether we can continue to claim Jesus Christ as the *only* universal saviour while being totally open to the *truth claims* of other religions expressed in their particularities. The contemporary awareness of religious plurality, particularly in India, has certainly forced a renewed fervour of questions concerning this “key” tenet of the Christian faith in relation to the claims of other religions.

### The Problem and the Search for a Viable Answer

#### The Indian Context

Though the history of Christianity in India dates back to the very first century, it is still a minority religion. Christians form less than 3 percent of the total population of 1,210,193,422 as per the census of 2011.<sup>3</sup> From the time of the entry of Christianity into India, Indian Christians have been living in an existential encounter with the other great religions of the country while upholding and witnessing to their core faith in Jesus Christ as the unique and universal saviour of all mankind and portraying their religion as the only religion possessing the fullness of the truth in contrast to the other religious traditions.<sup>4</sup> But the positive approaches of Vatican II and World Council of Churches towards world religions and religious dialogue slowly becoming part of the Churches' mission;<sup>5</sup> the rise of various theological approaches, particularly a pluralistic approach to other religions; the phenomenon of numerous Christians from the West seeking the fullness of life through the spiritual experience offered by other religions in India; the conscious abandoning of the postulate of unity by Western postmodern thought in favour of the fundamental option for pluralism;<sup>6</sup> and the phenomenon of globalization and the revival of traditional religions along with the birth of certain Hindu militant movements with a hostile attitude towards Christianity, in particular, to its task of evangelization, have qualitatively changed

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the pluralistic context of the various Churches in India and raised several important theological questions for Indian theologians.

Could religious pluralism be affirmed *de jure* in God's plan of creation and salvation? Is not religious pluralism the cultural expression of the infinite riches of the absolute which cannot be adequately contained in any one historical event, person or tradition? Where do the other religions stand in relation to God's universal salvific will as revealed in Jesus Christ or is he only one of the ways in which God offers his salvation to mankind? Is not a pluralistic paradigm in theology as advocated by John Hick, Paul Knitter and others,<sup>7</sup> with or without certain qualifications, a new way forward in a changing world situation and particularly in a multi-religious context in India, the cradle of many religions where Christian traditional claims have always been difficult to sustain?

The attempts by Indian theologians to deal with the problem from their existential encounter with other religions in India have often been looked upon with suspicion and as a tendency towards relativism, and towards separating the activity of the Spirit from that of Christ. They are often accused of being influenced by the pluralistic paradigm and downplaying Christ as the only saviour.<sup>8</sup> But the fact is that this problem is not unique to Indian theologians alone. In general, the question of the relation between the salvific universality of Christ and the pluralism of religions, particularly the salvific value of other religions, remained a problematic for many theologians of the world. But the attempts to classify and restrict various approaches to this problem under the typology of exclusivism (salvation can be found only in Christianity), pluralism (all religions are salvific) and inclusivism (Christianity is the fulfilment of all other religions), pluralism and inclusivism has often been found very inadequate and inconsistent.<sup>9</sup> For some Indian theologians like Felix Wilfred the entire debate under the threefold typology betrays Western categories and makes little sense in the context of India.<sup>10</sup> To overcome such an impasse a

number of theologians such as Raimon (Raimundo) Panikkar, Jacques Dupuis, Gavin D'Costa, Wolfart Pannenberg, Mark Heim, and others have suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity may provide the key to an authentic Christian theology of religions in meeting the challenges of religious pluralism.<sup>11</sup> Though their interpretations differ, they have tried to show that a Trinitarian approach based on the Christian doctrine of Trinity will not only safeguard and reaffirm the basic tenet of Christian faith but will also accept the "otherness" of various religions with great openness.

### **Trinity as the "Key"**

According to Karl Barth, "The doctrine of Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation."<sup>12</sup> Peter Hodgson argues:

God has something to do with the fact that a diversity of independent ways of salvation appears in the history of the world. This diversity reflects the diversity or plurality within the divine life itself, of which the Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides an account. The mystery of the Trinity is for Christians the ultimate foundation for pluralism.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Mark Heim considers, "It is impossible to believe in the Trinity *instead* of the distinctive claims of all other religions. If Trinity is real, then many of these *specific* religious claims and ends must be real also. ... The Trinity is a map that finds room for, indeed requires, concrete truth in other religions."<sup>14</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer points out that "the doctrine of the Trinity, with its dual emphasis on oneness and *threeness* as equally ultimate, contains unexpected and hitherto unexplored resources for dealing with the problems, and possibilities, of contemporary pluralism."<sup>15</sup> Gavin D'Costa affirms that the Trinitarian orientation or the doctrine of

the Trinity of the Christian tradition provides ample parameters to be rigorously open to the challenge of the religious pluralism without compromising Christian faith in the salvific universality of Jesus Christ and without “smothering” the other religions.<sup>16</sup> What emerges from these convictions is that their insight into the doctrine of the Trinity seems to offer a strong foundation for locating the reality of religious diversity within a Trinitarian perspective which might resolve or at least throw light on major theological issues involved in the theology of religions. It is in the context of that insight that we seek a viable theological approach to the above problematic in the writings of Gavin D’Costa.

### **Gavin D’Costa’s Proposal**

Gavin D’Costa, a contemporary British Catholic theologian of Indian origin having a good knowledge of Hinduism and other religions, has been struggling with the fact of religious pluralism and its theological implications for Christianity for more than twenty years.<sup>17</sup> Almost all his writings have been dedicated to the search for a viable solution to the problem by going beyond the inadequate classical threefold typology which he considers as having created an impasse in the theology of religions. He tries to offer a solution to the problem by proposing a Trinitarian approach based on his own Catholic Tradition. He believes that the “Trinitarian doctrine of God facilitates an authentically Christian response to the world religions because it takes the *particularities* of history seriously as well as the *universality* of God’s action.”<sup>18</sup> He asserts that belief in the Trinitarian doctrine of God implies that, while God has disclosed himself unreservedly and irreversibly in the contingencies and particularity of the person of Jesus Christ, he has also been constantly revealing himself through the action of the Holy Spirit throughout the entire course of human history, including through the world religions. This presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions serves to deepen and universalize our understanding of God in Christ, a process that is incomplete until

the *parousia*. For, the God who redeems is always and everywhere the Triune God revealed in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The question, however, is: how does he come to such an affirmation? What are its implications for Christian theology and for the Churches in their mission and practice? Can other religions be considered salvific *per se* through such a paradigm and if not, what is their place in the salvific plan of God? Can Indian theologians find in it the answers to the various questions arising out of their existential encounter with the followers of other religions? One of the important reasons that we choose his writings is that he enters into a critical dialogue with many theologians such as John Hick, Paul Knitter, Karl Rahner, Raimon Panikkar, Jacques Dupuis and Hans Urs von Balthasar among others in his writings. Besides, as a theologian he appears to be totally open to the new ideas and new trends not only in Christian theology but also in other domains in the modern world.

### **Appeal to the Trinity: The Rationale**

#### **The Impasse of the Threefold Typology**

For, D’Costa the threefold typology of Exclusivism, Pluralism and Inclusivism has created an impasse either in the form of destroying the “Otherness” through assimilation or total/partial rejection, or of limiting the entire debate in the theology of religions to the typology. His principal argument to reject the logical impossibility of the typology is that it conceals the exclusive approach of pluralism and inclusivism. In other words, the typology conceals the Tradition-Specific Starting Point of the three positions. The pluralists and the inclusivists always use exclusivist logic, for “all positions, religious or otherwise, are historically contingent tradition-specific forms of inquiry and practice.”<sup>20</sup> His critique of pluralism and of the typology as impossible is greatly dependent,

on the critique of modernity as developed by Alasdair MacIntyre and John Milbank.<sup>21</sup> Pluralism is the product of the Enlightenment project and represents a tradition-specific approach, which is the western liberal modernity, having all the same features as exclusivism.<sup>22</sup> This is because the pluralists are committed to holding some form of truth criteria and anything that does not fall under such criteria is excluded from counting as truth. It indicates that they operate within the same logical structure of exclusivism. With regard to inclusivism, D'Costa asserts that it is logically collapsing into exclusivism because, for inclusivists, only their tradition contained the ultimate truth.<sup>23</sup> By arguing that inclusivists also try to fit the *Other* into their own truth criteria, he rejects typology as logically untenable.

Second, the typology fails to solve the question of the salvation of the followers of other religions in an unambiguous manner.<sup>24</sup> It flows from the ambiguity in the classification of the three positions of the typology with regard to the salvation of others. He argues that the typology has traditionally classified Hick, Barth and Rahner as pluralist, exclusivist and inclusivist respectively. But all the three invariably hold similar views concerning the outcome of salvation for the world - all will finally be saved - betraying a certain universalism in their approach which may not be reflected in the classification of the threefold typology. For example, inclusivists, like Rahner, though argue that a person can find salvation through a provisionally lawful religion, their writings often consider salvation as the explicit beatific vision which requires explicit faith, in other words, *fides ex auditu*, a face-to-face relationship with Christ.<sup>25</sup> This not only weakens the effects of their argument that a person finds salvation through a provisionally lawful religion, but also makes the distinction between inclusivist and exclusivist positions very vague.<sup>26</sup> For example, D'Costa points out the dilemma seen in Dupuis' calling himself an inclusivist-pluralist while trying to hold on to "Christ's salvific efficacy in all cases, but allowing other religions to be

substitutive salvific means."<sup>27</sup> Therefore the dividing line between the strong forms of inclusivism and the weak forms of exclusivism and likewise with the weak forms of inclusivism and certain forms of pluralism is very thin.

### **The Question of "Difference" and "Otherness"**

One of the major problems in the theology of religions is the question of "difference" and "otherness" that various religions present before Christianity. In the interreligious relationship there is always a danger of either trying to fit the 'Other' into one's own religious, cultural and intellectual system by assimilation or destruction, or trying to reject the Other by demonization or by the principle of incommensurability.<sup>28</sup> It is from the point of this twofold problem that one can consider that the doctrine of the Trinity is especially very relevant. The pluralist paradigm which assigns equal salvific validity to all religions, in fact, is known for 'smothering' the differences between other religions and Christianity. For, it either destroys or reduces the 'otherness' of a particular religion in terms of 'sameness.'<sup>29</sup> On the contrary the exclusivists overemphasize the "difference" between religious traditions in such a way as to make the 'other' unbridgeable (incommensurable). The inclusivists, though, acknowledge truth elsewhere, they mitigate it in some form or other and hold that their tradition finally contains the ultimate truth. D'Costa believes that the Trinitarian doctrine of God has in itself the necessary parameters (difference and unity) that can affirm the particularities represented in the 'Other' of other religions without compromising the universality of the saving action of God revealed in Jesus Christ through the dialectics of "Yes" and "No."<sup>30</sup>

### **The Question of the Closure of Truth**

The proponents of the classical paradigms claim to have provided comprehensive theological frameworks that answer all the questions concerning the relationship between Christianity and various religions. In other words, they claim to possess the

fullness of truth about God or the ultimate “Reality” thereby ruling out any possibility of openness and positive appreciation of the “differences” found in other religions. Such an attitude, for example, is found in those approaches which through an “*exclusive identification* of God with Jesus” (Christomonism) or through a “*non-identification* of God and Jesus” (theocentrism) claim to totally possess the truth within their own parameters.<sup>31</sup> To avoid such closure of truth one needs to have recourse to the Trinity, for it is only in the Son and through the Spirit that the fullness of the mystery of God is revealed and hence through the Trinity that the particularity of Christ can be related to the universal activity of God in the history of humankind. Therefore, a Trinitarian approach is necessary to allow us to ask the question about God without this being a closed question and without it predefining the other person *a priori* as is the case with the typology of exclusivism, pluralism and inclusivism.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Question of One’s Tradition-Specific Starting Point**

D’Costa is firmly convinced, following Alasdair MacIntyre, that “all positions, religious or otherwise, are historically contingent tradition-specific forms of enquiry and practice that are therefore irreducibly different.”<sup>33</sup> He believes that “no non-tradition-specific approach can exist,”<sup>34</sup> for example, the claim by pluralists that their approach centred on neutrality is actually based on “the tradition-specific starting point of liberal modernity.”<sup>35</sup> Since his project of the theology of religions is basically a Christian response to the problem of religious pluralism, its starting point, he affirms, flows invariably from the Christian doctrine of God as expressed in the Christian tradition, which is Trinitarian.<sup>36</sup> So, from the perspective of a Christian tradition-specific starting point, the Trinity is the key to unlocking an authentic Christian response to the reality of religious plurality. If the strategies or parameters employed by theologians to meet the challenges of religious pluralism ignore, abandon, or under-utilize this most central Christian doctrine of God, their attempt cannot be called

an authentic Christian response to the problem of religious plurality. For, there is no such thing as *theistic discourse* in Christianity, rather only *Trinitarian discourse*, as Christianity is irredeemably Christocentric, theocentric and Ecclesiocentric in its Trinitarianism. D’Costa believes that, by acknowledging his own tradition-specific starting point, Roman Catholicism, he will be able to facilitate a sincere engagement with other religions in which the self-understanding of the “Other” is taken seriously.

### **The Trinitarian Christocentrism of the Trinitarian Paradigm**

The undeniable fact of the Christian doctrine of God is Trinitarian and this Trinitarian God has revealed himself in the contingencies and the particularity of the person of Jesus Christ. Only on the foundation of this particularity of Jesus are we able to affirm the universal agency of God’s redeeming activity, for the God who redeems is always and everywhere the triune God revealed in Christ.<sup>37</sup>

### **Trinitarian Christology: the Particular and the Universal are Intrinsically Related**

One of the main issues in the Christian theology of religions is to do with the problem of the relationship between particularity and universality. This problem is easily addressed in a Trinitarian Christology. The Christian confession of faith in one triune God as Father, Son and the Spirit is intrinsically and inextricably linked to the person of Christ. For God’s revelation has taken place in its fullness in a Trinitarian form and in the particularities of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. In other words, in any attempt to tell the truth about Jesus, one must keep him always in the Trinitarian perspective. For God is also constantly revealing himself through history by means of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Hence, the Trinitarian Christology, while holding the truth of the reality that God has revealed in the particularities of the person of Jesus, not only affirms the unity

among and the distinction between the persons of the Trinity but also rightly stipulates against an exclusive identification of God and Jesus as well as a non-normative identification of God and Jesus.

Trinitarian Christology does not allow Christians to limit or monopolize God solely in term of Jesus. Athanasius's understanding of consubstantiality points out that whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except that the Son is not the Father. Though we come to know the Father through Jesus, we cannot claim that the Father is exclusively known through him because the revelation is not about a 'binatarian' or a 'unitarian' God but a Trinitarian God meaning that God is also revealed through the activity of the Spirit - Jesus is called *totus Deus*, never *totum Dei*; wholly God, but never the whole of God.

### **The Incarnation Constitutes the Particularity: The “no” to other Religions**

It is through the life and the person of Jesus Christ that Christians come to the knowledge of God as Triune. Hence, it is Christology that constitutes the foundation of Christianity's identity and “otherness,” in other words, the genuine “otherness” of Christianity is the incarnation of Christ. Christ is the principle of radical discontinuity with other religious traditions and may be seen as God's “no” to other religions as independent salvific systems.<sup>38</sup> Since God's self-revelation has occurred in its Trinitarian form and if the economic trinity is the immanent trinity, then there can be no *new* revelations of God. There cannot be a new revelation that is ontologically different from what God has revealed himself to be in Christ as Father, Son and Spirit. There can be no question of other ‘revelations’ in so much as this might be understood as other ‘gods’, or a cancellation of how God has chosen to reveal God's-self in Trinitarian form. The assertion that there cannot be any new revelation that contradicts or is not essentially related to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is to reaffirm the particular identity of Christianity expressed in the Trinitarian character

of Christian faith - it is *through Jesus* that Christians claim that God has revealed himself in a unique (although not necessarily exclusive) manner.”<sup>39</sup> It is this “otherness” of Christianity which forms a ‘no’ or a ‘discontinuity’ with regard to other religions. But what is significant is that the Christology of discontinuity or particularity does not deny God's activity elsewhere in history.

### **The “*norma normans non normata*,” of the Trinitarian Christocentrism**

Since the Christology of discontinuity or particularity of the Trinitarian paradigm does not deny God's activity elsewhere in history, a twofold question may naturally arise: the question of how to discern what may or may not be God's revelation in other religions and the question of what one means by the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The answer lies in the Christology of the normativity of the Trinitarian Christocentrism. Jesus Christ is the normative, for he is the full, the final, the definitive revelation of God as triune. He is the "*norma normans non normata*," the norm beyond all norms or the norm which measures all other norms but is not itself measured. All other revelations of God in history must be measured by the normativity of Jesus. God's self-revelation in the Christ-event as constituting a “discontinuity” or “no” to any other possible revelatory figures and events in history - “the story of the Son, understood and interpreted through the illumination of the Spirit within the community of the Church”<sup>40</sup> is the norm by which any other claim to God's revelation is measured.

### **Trinitarian Christocentrism and the Possibility of Revelation in other Religions**

Trinitarian Christocentrism while affirming God's revelation in Christ as the definitive and normative self-disclosure of God in history, does not in any way restrict God's activity in history or in other religious traditions. What does this mean? There is a possibility that God revealed himself historically and geographically apart from his revelation in the particularities

of the person of Jesus Christ. But such a disclosure of himself in other religious traditions cannot be a new revelation of God contradicting or not being ontologically related to God's revelation in Jesus Christ as Father, Son and the Spirit. For God's revelation has occurred in its Trinitarian form and "if the economic trinity is the immanent trinity, then we cannot discover something new about God, **in the sense** of ontologically unrelated or contradictory to Christ."<sup>41</sup>

While we affirm the possibility of revelation of God apart from the particularities of Christ, what we insist is that this revelation cannot be ontologically different from what God has revealed of himself in Jesus Christ. Hence, there is a "yes" and "no" answer to the problem, thereby bringing in a tension that accompanies Christianity in its relation to other religions. The tension is seen in the fact that Christian revelation resides and makes present Christ within the living community of the Church which is "indissolubly related and bound to God's self-revelation" in Christ and to God's kingdom. One cannot talk about revelation or the kingdom without reference to the community in which it takes place and to which it is entrusted. But this indissoluble relation does not mean that the Church possesses the truth of God, rather that the Church is possessed by this truth. For this truth is not a closed truth because the Christian revelation is eschatologically oriented, meaning that while the Church knows God it does not know everything about God.

### **The Trinitarian Pneumatology of the Paradigm**

#### **The Holy Spirit Relates the Particularity of Christ to God's Universal Activity**

The problem of the particularity of the event of Christ in relation to the universal salvific will of God in the theology of religions can be theologically met in the universal presence and the action of the Holy Spirit. The Biblical testimony that the *creative, prophetic* and *saving action* of the Word and the Spirit from the time of creation

and the fact that the universal salvific will of God is revealed in Christ's event, point to the theological possibility of the ongoing activity of God through the Spirit throughout history. Since all history is potentially a particularity, it is in this particularity that God reveals himself and the Christ event has necessarily taken place in the particularity of history. But the Christ event has not put an end to God's activity in history nor has it limited it to Christianity, for it is in this very event that the universal salvific will of God is revealed. Besides, the activity of the Spirit is not limited by space and time, for the Spirit "blows where it wills" (John 3:8) and, therefore, the Spirit of God is universally present in human history and certainly active outside the boundaries of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> In distinction to the Christological particularity, the Spirit is universal, in other words, the Spirit is active not only in the hearts of Christians, but also in "structural and social terms" in the world religions and in culture.

The universal presence and activity of the Spirit in history is part of the one and the same economy of the Trinitarian God, and hence it reflects the Spirit's activity in relation to the particularity of Christ and the universal activity of God in human history. This Pneumatological dimension of the Trinity, by facilitating and making actual the meeting of the particularity of Christ and the universality of God's activity, avoids the perils of the exclusivist and the pluralist paradigms in the theology of religions. Further, the particularity of Christ as constituting a "discontinuity" or a "no" to other religions is complemented with a "continuity" or "yes" within the Trinitarian pneumatology.

#### **The Universal Presence of the Holy Spirit as a "yes" to other Religions**

The belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions flows from the very heart of the gift of God's self-revelation in Christ, for in Christ God reveals himself *as Trinity* and consequently, the presence of God or his self-revelation cannot be simply limited to Jesus Christ. To believe that God is fully revealed in Christ

does not imply that God is confined to Christ, for the Trinitarian God is also revealed through the Spirit. Since the “Spirit blows where it wills” (John 3:8), the Spirit is not the exclusive property of the Christian Church and “the triune God is certainly not the property of Christians, rather they are possessed by him and the full freedom of God cannot be restricted by Christians, rather they find their freedom from him.”<sup>43</sup> From this flows the “yes” of Christians to the presence of the Spirit in other religions.

### **The Presence of the Spirit in other Religions Implies an Ambiguous Presence of the Trinity and the Church**

One of the important affirmations of Gavin D’Costa is that the presence of the Spirit among other religions is also “the ambiguous presence of the triune God, the Church and the kingdom.”<sup>44</sup> First, the activity of the Spirit is Trinitarian because whenever and wherever God is present it is always the presence of the triune God. Hence, the presence of the Spirit in other religions cannot be conceived apart from the Trinitarian presence of God. Second, the activity of the Spirit in other religions is ecclesiological because, “the Spirit, both inside and outside the Church, is related to the single issue of making the Church more Christ-shaped.”<sup>45</sup> If the Spirit’s activity in the Church consists in making the Church more Christ-like and its members live the Gospel values, its activity in other religions, in other words, in a community which is not the Church, bears an analogical relationship to the guiding task of the Spirit within the Church. Third, this activity of the Spirit in other religions certainly, signifies the presence of the kingdom in an inchoate manner often expressed in the lives of the people of other religions, who exhibit the gospel values: “the inchoate reality of the kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live Gospel values.”<sup>46</sup>

What we understand by these assertions is that, since the Spirit within the Church enables Christians to follow Christ more closely, it also has an analogous role of helping the followers of

other religions to follow the values of Christ. Further, since the universal activity of the Spirit is never separated from its activity within the Body of Christ, the Church, the inchoate kingdom found in the lives of the followers of other religions is related to the kingdom of Christ in the Church which is eschatologically oriented. The eschatological dimension of the Church signifies that the Church on earth is not the *triumphant Church* or identical with the eschatological Church and hence the Church cannot be blind to the presence of the inchoate kingdom of God in other religions which help in the even deeper understanding and application of the truth of God’s triune self-revelation entrusted to it.

### **The Presence of the Holy Spirit and the Providential Role of Other Religions**

In view of the considerations made with regard to the presence of the Spirit in other religions as the presence of the Trinity, the Church and the kingdom, can we envisage a theological space for a role for other religions in the economy of God’s salvation? The presence of the Spirit in different religious traditions, though it has to be answered *a posteriori* by discovering the meaning and dynamics of the religious life and practice of the *Other*, means affirming the possible providential purpose of other religions. Pope John Paul II in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994) which is a running commentary on *Nostra Aetate*, affirms a salvific “root” in all religions, “... the Holy Spirit works effectively even outside the visible structure of the Church<sup>47</sup> making use of the very *semina Verbi* [seeds of the Word] that constitute a kind of common soteriological root present in all religions”<sup>48</sup> Given the historical contingency of a human being, explicit elements within a religion may be used by the Holy Spirit in mediating grace to those who seek God sincerely. The explicit elements may be their religious practices such as prayers, as acknowledged by Pope John Paul II after the interreligious prayer meeting in Assisi in saying that “every authentic prayer is promoted by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>49</sup>

## **The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of the Trinitarian Paradigm**

The theological foundation for affirming the ecclesiological dimension of the Trinitarian paradigm is that it is the triune God who is the foundation of the Church. The Spirit's presence in other religions is an invitation to the Church towards a "relational engagement" with other religions. The "relational engagement" opens the possibility of the Church being challenged, developed and deepened in its understanding and commitment to the triune God.

### **Trinitarian Foundation of the Church: Openness to Other Religions**

A Trinitarian ecclesiology implies that any talk about Jesus Christ, the Spirit and the Father is always based on *ecclesiological grammar*. John chapters 14-16 which speak of the Spirit as advocate and guide, provide us an intrinsic connection between the Spirit and the Church in the framework of a Trinitarian high Christology. According to John's Gospel, after and by virtue of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, God is made present in disciples through the perichoretic indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This indwelling of the Holy Spirit is predicated upon the indwelling of the Son and the Father, and makes the Church, the body of Christ, "to be Christ to the world" in mutual love and sharing as well as in sharing that love with the world.

Hence, this indwelling of the Spirit not only brings into focus the Trinitarian foundations of the Church, that is, the integral connection between ecclesiology, pneumatology and the Trinity and facilitates the Church's participation in God's Trinitarian love, but also invites the Church to be open to other religions. Hence, if the Church wants to be faithful to the Trinitarian self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Spirit's indwelling within its community, it will have to be attentive and open to what God in the Spirit says to it through the "otherness" represented by different religious traditions. Otherwise it will not be able to respect the

God who reveals himself as triune. Besides, if the Church is closed to other religions, then it will be guilty of being inattentive to the promptings of God which may lead it into greater holiness, truth and goodness. For it will mean closing itself and denying that God always acts historically, and it will also mean a denial of its own reality as eschatologically oriented. What is significant is that openness to other religions is part of the reality of the Church, in other words being open to the Other is Church's basic vocation.

### **World Religions: "a Judgment Upon" and "A Sign of Promise to the Church"**

According to the Trinitarian ecclesiology, though God has revealed himself definitively in Christ, the full richness of the mystery of God is yet to be discovered by the Church. It is through the work of the Spirit who guides and declares what is of Christ (Jn 16:12-15) that the fullness of revelation in Christ is discovered in an ongoing process. Thanks to this feature of ongoing disclosure, there is a dialectical tension between the Son and the Spirit and in this ongoing process "the Church stands under constant judgment of the Holy Spirit and Christ if it is to be maintained in truth."<sup>50</sup> It is within this Trinitarian ecclesiological understanding that the presence of the Spirit in other religions becomes a judgment upon the Church and a sign of *promise* to the Church.

The presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in other religions make it "intrinsic to the vocation of the Church to be attentive to the world religions."<sup>51</sup> If the Church fails in this task, then it comes under judgment for having wilfully closed itself to the Spirit of truth, whose guidance is required to remain faithful to and discover the fullness of truth revealed in Christ. For D'Costa, "being inattentive to other religions is a form of idolatry."<sup>52</sup> Since the Spirit's presence, while creating everything new, is also a condemnation of the powers of darkness – "the ruler of the world is judged" (Jn 16:11) - the Church, through Christ-like practice of the members of other religions, may come to realize how it is itself ensnared by the powers of darkness. For example,

Jewish voices testifying “to the way in which the Christology of supersessionism had led to the Christian anti-Judaism”<sup>53</sup> resulted in repentance and led some theologians to reassess the formulation of certain traditional Christologies. The witness of the members of other religions through their lives and teachings, meaning the Spirit’s presence in the “other,” often poses a challenge to the Church so that, after the encounter with other religions, it can no longer be simply “the same;” in other words, Christian identity can be at times radically configured and transfigured through the encounter with the *Other* and its sameness can be thereby rendered both familiar and strange. The presence of the Spirit in other religions is also a “promise and greater joy to the Church” because, being attentive to the Spirit in others, the Church may not only discover more and more the richness of the mystery of the triune God revealed in Christ but also grow faithfully in holiness, truth and goodness and in its relationship with the triune God.<sup>54</sup> In this process, the Church is able to realize itself more fully in its deepening understanding of Christ and the ways of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Trinitarian Relationship Between the Son and the Spirit**

#### **The Creative “Tension” as the Foundation of the Trinitarian Paradigm**

It is in the tension arising from the fullness of revelation revealed in Christ and the continuing revealing activity of the Spirit in other religions that Christianity’s Trinitarian approach to other religions in the form of “yes” and “no” or “continuity” and “discontinuity” can be located. The various dimensions of the Trinitarian paradigm clearly points to the fact that the tension between the Son who constitutes a “no” to other religions and the Spirit who through his presence in other religions signals a “yes” to other religions, neither compromises the uniqueness of Jesus nor rejects the differences represented by other religions, thus doing justice to

both the irreducible particularity of Christ and the gratuitousness and universality of God’s grace. Since God is Trinity, the Son is never a *totum Dei* and neither can he be identified totally with the Spirit. Therefore, in holding steadfastly to the difference between the Son and the Spirit and their respective roles in the history of salvation we are able to find a constructive answer to the problem in the theology of religions. This, however, does not mean that the doctrine of the Trinity stipulates that there are two economies of salvation independent of one another: one of the Son and the other of the Holy Spirit. For the Son and the Spirit are equal divine persons in the *One* triune God.

### **The Dynamic Character of the Normativity of Christ: the Dialectical Relationship between Christ and the Spirit**

While Jesus Christ is the normative criterion of God, the ongoing self-revelation of God in history is not closed. This ongoing disclosure takes place through the presence and the activity of the Spirit in other religious traditions. This affirmation certainly points not only to the dialectical relationship between Christ and the Spirit but also to the tension that accompanies it in Jesus being the only norm by which the presence and revelation of God in other religions can be judged. Since God’s revelation is Trinitarian and this revelation in Jesus Christ does not foreclose the ongoing revelation through the Spirit in other religions, the normativity of Jesus – the decisive norm by which all subsequent and previous revelations are judged and related cannot be a static norm.

The truth about God, although revealed in Christ and entrusted to the Church, is nevertheless *eschatologically* oriented and open. For the understanding of Christ is constantly enriched and deepened by the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-16) and, if the spirit is present in and active in other religions, Christians have to listen to and learn from them, and have to be ready for surprises and challenges. What is being asserted is that through the Spirit the Church may deepen and extend its understanding of the self-revelation of God in Christ and in this way, the Church may come

to a more profound understanding of what ‘the norm’ is about. Therefore, the activity of the Holy Spirit brings to the forefront the dynamic character of the normativity of Christ. Christ is both the norm for understanding God and yet not a static norm, but one that is being constantly transformed and enriched through the guiding/declaring/judging function of the Spirit.

### **The Dialogical Relationship between Christology and Pneumatology is Intrinsically Related to Ecclesiology**

We hold Christology, or the incarnation of Christ, as constituting the foundation of Christianity’s identity and “otherness” and in relation to other religions holds Christ to be the principle of radical discontinuity which may be seen as God’s “no” to the claims of other religions as independent salvific systems. On the other hand, the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions, being part of the one and the same economy of salvation, may be seen as “continuity” or God’s “yes” to other religions.<sup>55</sup> The tension arising out of both “continuity and discontinuity,” or the “yes” and “no” to other religions, is located within the parameters of the Trinitarian dialogical relationship between Christology and Pneumatology. But this dialogical relationship is extended to ecclesiology as well.

This intrinsic relationship flows from the fact that God’s irreversible and eschatological self-revelation in Jesus is understood and interpreted through the illumination of the Spirit *within the community of the Church*. The incarnation of Christ which constitutes the identity of Christianity sets the ongoing operation of the Spirit in history in the context of the community of the Church. In other words, though incarnation is the condition allowing for the possibility of bringing creation *by the Spirit and through the Church* to its eschatological fulfilment, i.e., that loving communion with God, it is the Spirit who perpetuates and unfolds God’s revelation in Jesus through the Church, the “body of Christ.”

The Spirit, while operating both inside and outside the Church, is related to the single issue of making the Church more Christ-shaped. Within the Church the Holy Spirit has the role of aiding the community to follow Christ more truthfully. While operating outside the Church, the Holy Spirit has an analogous role of helping individuals and communities to become more Christ-like. Since there is no separation of the Spirit’s “universal” activity and “his particular activity within the Body of Christ,” the Spirit leads all human beings towards Christ and gathers them around him in the Church in order to lead them in love to community with the Father. Hence when we acknowledge the presence of the Spirit in other religions, we must implicitly accept that there is also – in some mysterious, hidden way – a certain ‘dynamic’ directing people toward and gathering them around Christ in the Church.” In the affirmation of this “ecclesio-creative” character of the Holy Spirit, what is being brought to the fore for the Church is the tension in which the Church is called to follow a Trinitarian approach towards other religions. It is a challenge and judgment because the presence of the Holy Spirit in other traditions shows that there can never be simple identification between the Church and God’s Kingdom.

### **Important Gleanings from this Approach**

#### **Positives**

- i. The significance of this Trinitarian paradigm for the theology of religions can be simply affirmed in this way: the theological commitment to one’s Christian faith is compatible with the openness to that of others holding conflicting truth claims. The strength of the appeal of this paradigm is centred around the question of a correct understanding and the interpretation of the riches hidden in the Christian faith within the parameters of the revelation of the triune God as lived and witnessed within the community of believers.

- ii. This Trinitarian paradigm tries neither to employ any strategy other than what is found within the parameters of the Christian faith nor domesticate other religions with a “mirror-projection” of Christianity either negatively or positively. Thus it stands as a call to go beyond the well-defined boundaries of the typology in order to do justice to the particularity of both Christianity and other religions through new avenues of research within the parameters of Trinitarian revelation which neither allows any monopoly of truth nor rejection of plurality/differences.
- iii. This paradigm places itself as a viable tool to demonstrate the self-contradicting and false claims of the modern pluralists through their unhistorical and “all-encompassing schematization” of all religions in the name of neutrality, openness and justice. What we need is an open-ended approach to reconcile the seemingly conflicting terms in the theology of religions such as particularity and universality, continuity and discontinuity, open and closed (revelation), already and “not-yet” etc., provided such an approach is centred on the Trinitarian foundation of Christian theology.
- iv. In the face of conflicting religious truth claims which seem to vex many theologians D’Costa’s Trinitarian paradigm, invites us to hold the Trinity as absolute religious truth with its historical and eschatological orientations in order to make theological sense of conflicting truth claims and to seek the fullness of truth with the “Other.” Moreover, we are also warned against construing Christology and Pneumatology in two distinct and separate economies of God’s personal dealings with humankind in order to overcome the problem of conflicting truth claims as that would go against the parameters of the Trinitarian faith. In fact, it is only a balanced relationship (unity and distinction) between the two which can serve as a hermeneutical key for an authentic understanding of the plurality of religions and envisage a theology of religions which seeks a relational engagement with the “other.”
- v. What is more insightful and ingenious is the way in which this paradigm, based on the doctrine of Trinity as taught and preserved in the Church, calls for a new focus on the role of the Churches as theologically conducive to openness towards the “other” and the possible role of the “other” as helping the Churches to deepen their own faith in the Trinitarian God. This not only ties the Church to the necessity of dialogue with the “other”, but also provides the necessary “context for a critical, reverent, and open engagement with otherness, without any predictable outcome.”<sup>56</sup>
- vi. Raimon Panikkar and Jacques Dupuis have also attempted to develop a Trinitarian theology of religions. But the type of Trinitarian approaches that they have advanced stray from the theological parameters which govern the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>57</sup> While focusing on the notion of the Christian God, both tried to *conceptualize* the religions within a theological framework by limiting it to the question of whether God acts in and through world religions, either via a persistent divine presence in creation or through a universal spirit, rather than to focus on the Trinity as the Truth and as revealed in the particularity of Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup> For example, Dupuis, in order to create theological space for other saviours and mediators, outlines a “Trinitarian Christology” in which Jesus Christ is recognized not as “absolute” saviour but merely as “constitutive” saviour.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the importance of D’Costa’s project lies in preserving a sound Trinitarian position and theological grounding without conceptualizing other religions. He does not seek a unifying principle beyond God’s self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ as Father, Son and Spirit to maintain the Trinitarian truth. He develops his orientation from a balanced appreciation of the Christian tradition and on the basis of the particular actions of the Son and the Spirit. This means recognizing this doctrine’s potential and seeking an understanding in new and creative ways that

do not limit discussion nor prejudge the dialogical partners in the context of new questions and new experiences.<sup>60</sup>

### Glitches

- i. One of the often-repeated criticisms against D'Costa's trinitarian approach is to do with his methodology. For example, John Thoppil considers that D'Costa employs a totally deductive method which has its point of departure in the Christian Faith and Tradition with *a priori* general Christological, Trinitarian and ecclesiological perspectives.<sup>61</sup> If God is active in other religions and other religions may act as judgement on Christianity, as D'Costa often asserts, then he fails to take into consideration of what the "other" offers within his paradigm. We find a similar kind of observation made by Kärkkäinen. While appreciating the finer points of his tradition-specific method, he does have problems with D'Costa's methodology. He notes that D'Costa's methodology is limited in its scope as it is not only Catholic tradition-specific but also "a *particular* catholic approach in that it limits its discourse to Vatican II and selected Post-conciliar, mainly papal pronouncements."<sup>62</sup> He also questions the selective interpretation of the scriptural texts.<sup>63</sup> Przemyslaw Plata, though he does not directly question D'Costa's method, implicitly points out a problematic that can arise from it. According to him, his method leads one to appreciate the particular aspects of another religious tradition only within "one's own distinctive religious perspective" which can easily undo the "otherness" of other religious traditions.<sup>64</sup> D'Costa seems to lead us to a conclusion that the 'appreciation' of the "otherness" is possible only if the particular aspects of other religions conform to our trinitarian understanding as expounded in the Christian tradition or that they should be at least reframed within the context of the Christian perspective.<sup>65</sup> D'Costa argues: "[...] it is clear that auto-and hetero-interpretation cannot fully coincide, for Christ and the

Trinity are never the object of [other religious traditions'] proclamation and worship."<sup>66</sup>

- ii. One of the crucial elements on the basis of which D'Costa tries to build his arguments for the commensurability of the *solus Christus* principle with the plurality of religions is the Barthian understanding of the relationship between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity - "the immanent Trinity is not the economic Trinity until the eschaton" - rather than that of the Rahnerian affirmation that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.<sup>67</sup> There arises a question as to whether D'Costa has overemphasized the Barthian axiom by leaving the final answer concerning the plurality of religions to the *eschaton* and thereby neglecting the concerns of Rahner's rule to save the doctrine of God from *abstract speculation*. Besides, D'Costa's assertions that "the plenitude of *God's being* is present"<sup>68</sup> in the Christ event/incarnation or that "the Holy Spirit's activity in creation and history, especially as found in the history of Israel, reaching eschatological and proleptic finality in Christ"<sup>69</sup> seem to raise the question of a certain contradiction in his rejection of Rahner's rule.<sup>70</sup>
- iii. Paul D. Molnar in his recent book, *Incarnation and Resurrection: Toward a contemporary Understanding*, holds that the theologians who fail to correlate closely the incarnation and resurrection will inevitably compromise one or the other and will mistakenly search for salvation in ethical achievements.<sup>71</sup> We find D'Costa starting with the doctrine of incarnation on which he grounds the normativity of Christ for any recognition of God's activity in other religions. But the problem is that, as Flett points out, D'Costa's project clearly lacks a systematic attention to the doctrine of the resurrection.<sup>72</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ is as much integral to Christianity's self-definition and central to Christian theological reflection as the incarnation of Jesus Christ is. One of the key theological elements in D'Costa's paradigm

to show the commensurability of God's universal salvific will and the *solus Christus* principle or the universality and the particularity is that "God's activity in history is ongoing and certainly not limited to Christianity."<sup>73</sup> What grounds theologically God's ongoing activity in history is without doubt the doctrine of the resurrection. For this doctrine not only emphasizes that God continues to act because Jesus lives, but also that God's activity is not limited to Christianity because, while being the body of Christ, the Church is not Christ.

- iv. According to Plata "[t]he religious plurality itself is, if one follows the logic of D'Costa's argumentation, ultimately a result of misinterpretation, error, sin or ignorance. Therefore, as such, it is to be overcome – if not in the course of history, then at least at the eschaton."<sup>74</sup> There is undoubtedly a paradox that often engulfs D'Costa's approach. For example, there is unresolved tension found between D'Costa's positive claim concerning the activity and the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions and his negative assertion that other religions are not salvific structures or cannot mediate saving grace. Moreover, on the one hand he denies that other religions mediate saving grace and, on the other hand, he asserts that the Spirit "inchoately" forms children of God in these religions, inspires the prayers of the adherents of non-Christian religions, and mediates the presence of God; indeed he goes so far as to say that "a refusal to even consider encountering the mystery of God within the other in shared prayer runs the risk of idolatry."<sup>75</sup> D'Costa at times appears both to have his cake and eat it too. Hence, the question arises as to whether other religions really contribute anything substantial to the Christian understanding of God in D'Costa's scheme of things (Trinitarian paradigm).
- v. What are we to assume concerning the contribution of other religions to Christianity in the context of Jesus as the *norm*

- God has fully revealed himself in Christ - and the Holy Spirit also revealing the Father through its universal presence, particularly, in other religions? From the way he envisages his theology of religions, D'Costa does not seem to really leave much room for other religious traditions to contribute anything theologically. In their concrete relation with Christianity, it appears that their contribution is inevitably limited. Because, in his view, they can contribute only and insofar as their contribution illuminates God's revelation in Christ.<sup>76</sup> D'Costa considers the revelation in Jesus as ontologically true and whatever new insights into the faith that the Spirit helps the Christians to gain from the *Other* must be related to this revelation, in other words they must come from Christian understanding. It means that Christians will be able to affirm, according to D'Costa, only some parts of other religions and their practices, and reject the rest. It reveals certain ambiguities and to some extent a subtle tendency to "smother" the *Other* in D'Costa's theology of religions.

### Conclusion

In a contemporary context, a Christian theology of religions based on the Trinitarian paradigm as envisaged by D'Costa is a viable and valuable way by which Christians can approach the task not only of constituting Christian identity but also of entering into a fruitful relationship with the "Other." Such an approach can be conceived of as a continual affirmation of Christian identity amidst the challenges arising from the conflicting truth claims of various religious and other traditions by taking the *Otherness* of the "Other" seriously. It means taking seriously the voice of the triune God speaking through the particularities of other religions, and the resulting challenge to deepen the understanding of the Trinitarian God. It also involves bowing to the judgment of having been ensnared by the powers of darkness and having identified *a priori* our voice with God's voice or having claimed to *possess* Him. Indeed, D'Costa's project does not so much provide an

objective framework for comprehending the place of the world's religions but only the grammatical rules or parameters required to discern the presence of the living God in the "Other." The pitfalls indicate that the search for a theology of religions that would be faithful to the Christian faith and does not smother the differences in the context of Christianity's relationship with other religions is not over. In the light of the above D'Costa's Trinitarian project and considering its significance in the field of the theology of religions, we may argue that the Trinitarian paradigm is a viable way forward.

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- 2 Karl Rahner "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. V, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, p.116.
- 3 Cf. [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population\\_enumeration.aspx](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population_enumeration.aspx).
- 4 John Farquhar J. N. the Scottish missionary in India advocated in 1913 that Christ was the fulfilment and crown of Hinduism. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, a Brahmin convert to Christianity and who considered himself a "Hindu-Christian," addressed the question of parallels between Hindu thought and Christian mysticism, and sought to Indianize Christianity within the limits of orthodoxy. Drawing inspiration from him, Jesuit missionaries from Belgium G. Dandoy and P. Johanns working in Calcutta tried to effect a rapprochement between Hinduism and Christianity at a doctrinal level. But their intention was to present Christ as the fulfilment of all the longing expressed in the wisdom of the East. John Farquhar J. N. *The Crown of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930. Vincent Cronin, *The Life of Roberto di Nobili*, Boston: Dutton 1959. Julius Lipner and G. Gispert-Sauch (eds.), *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, Vols. I & II, Bangalore: UTC, Vol. I, 1991; Vol. II, 2001. J. Mattam *Land*

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- 5 See *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965)* of Vat. II; *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals (1974)* edited by Staley Samartha contains the Consultations of the World Council of Churches.
- 6 Cf. Walter Kasper, "The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ," *The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ. In Dialogue with the Religions*, Massimo Serretti (ed.), Michigan, Cambridge: William B. Erdman, 2001, pp. 6-7.
- 7 John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM, 1977; *God Has Many Names*, London: Macmillan, 1980. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985; (ed.), *The Myth of Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987.
- 8 In 1991 Cardinal Jozef Tomko, the then prefect of the Vatican Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples, told the College of Cardinals during its consistory that in Asia and particularly in India, "there is agnostic relativism and a theological misunderstanding which levels all religions ... to a least common denominator in which everything is the same and each person can take an equally valid road to salvation." Cardinal Jozef Tomko, "On Relativizing Christ: Sects and the Church," *Origins*, Vol. 20 (1991), pp. 753.
- 9 Alan Race is generally considered as the one who coined the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism. Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, London, SCM Press, 1983. But as Alan Race himself acknowledges, it was John Farquhar, a nineteenth century Christian missionary in India, who first spoke of three possible approaches. See John N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1930. One should remember that the exact meaning of the three terms of the typology cannot be defined univocally as there may be considerable differences between the approaches of theologians grouped under the same category. For the meaning of the threefold typology see Terrence Merrigan, "*Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism*," *In Many and Diverse Ways. In Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, D. Kendall & G. O'Collins (eds.), Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2003, p. 60. Gavin D'costa, "Christian Theology and Other Faiths," *Companion Encyclopaedia of Theology*, Peter Byrne & Leslie Houlder (eds.), London: Routledge, 1995, p. 292. For elaborate explanation see the same Encyclopaedia pp. 293-301. See also C. Thomas Owen, *Attitudes towards other Religions: Some Christian Interpretations*,

- New York: Harper & Row, 1969; Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?*; Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis, 1999. pp. 180-201.
- 10 Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 198-201. Felix Wilfred, "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness: An Indian Perspective," *Pro Dialogue Bulletin*, 85-86/1 (1994), pp. 40-57.
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- 12 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1, G. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (eds. & trans.), Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1970, p. 301.
- 13 Peter C. Hodgson, "The Spirit and Religious Pluralism," *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, Paul F. Knitter (ed.), Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005, p. 136.
- 14 Mark Heim, "The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends," *Modern Theology*, Vol. 17 (2001), p. 22 (italics original).
- 15 Kevin J. Vanhoozer and B. William (eds.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age. Theological Essays on Culture and Theology*, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1997, p. x.
- 16 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2000, p. 9.
- 17 Gavin D'costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. ix.
- 18 Gavin D'costa, "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, Gavin D'costa (ed.), Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 17; "Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions," *A Universal Faith? Peoples, Cultures, Religions and the Christ: Essays in Honour of Prof. Dr. Frank De Graeve*, Catherine Cornille and Valeer Neckebrouck (eds.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, p. 147.
- 19 Cf. Gavin D'costa, "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," p. 28.
- 20 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of religions and the Trinity*, p. 3.
- 21 Cf *Ibid.*, p. 3. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, London: Duckworth, 1985; *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* London: Duckworth, 1988; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, London: Duckworth, 1990 and John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- 22 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, pp. 22, 39.
- 23 During the initial years of his theological endeavour to find a viable answer to the known problematic in the theology of religions without either compromising the central beliefs of Christianity or being insensitive to the truth claims of other, he located himself within the spectrum of the threefold typology by strongly defending Karl Rahner's inclusivist approach to religious pluralism as the one which intelligently reconciled and held together "the axiom of the universal salvific will of God and the axiom that salvation alone comes through God in Christ in his Church." Gavin D'costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, p. 111. According to Karl Rahner "... there is no reason to exclude such discoveries (saviour figures) from the outset, or to write off contemptuously, as if they stood in such contrast to faith in Jesus, as the eschatological, unsurpassable saviour, that they can be judged only negatively. Saviour figures in the history of religion can certainly only be viewed as signs that – since man is always and everywhere moved by the Spirit - he gazes in anticipation towards that event in which his absolute hope becomes historically irreversible and is manifested as such [Jesus Christ]." Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 17, p. 50.
- 24 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, pp. 34-35; "Theology of Religions," pp. 627-643.
- 25 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, pp. 23, 34. See also Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations VI* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982), pp. 390-398.
- 26 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, p. 23. See also Allan Race, "Christianity and other Religions: Is Inclusivism Enough?" *Theology*, 89 (1986), pp. 178-182; Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, pp. 74-75.
- 27 Jacques Dupuis, "Trinitarian Christology As a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism," *The Myriad Christ. Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*, T. Merrigan & J. Haers (eds.), Leuven, 2000, p. 97. See also Jacques Dupuis, "The Truth will Make you

- Free': The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited," *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999), pp. 226-228 and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, pp. 62-63
- 28 Cf. Gavin D'costa, "Trinitarian 'Différence' and World Religions," pp. 28-46; Gavin D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations," pp. 165-183.
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- 30 Cf. Gavin D'costa, "Inculturation, India and Other Religions. Some Methodological Reflections," *Studia Missionalia*, Vol. 44 (1995), pp. 121-147; "The Absolute and Relative Nature of the Gospel," *Pluralism. Tolerance and Dialogue*, M. Darrol Bryant (ed.), Waterloo: Waterloo Press, 1989, pp. 133-146; "Revelation and Revelations," *op. cit.*, pp. 165-183; "Revelation and World Religions," *Divine Revelation*, P. AVIS (ed.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, p. 129; "Nostra Aetate' – Telling God's Story in Asia. Promises and Pitfalls," *Vatican II and Its Legacy*, M. Lamberigts & L. Kenis (eds.), Leuven: University Press – Peeters, 2002, p. 347.
- 31 Gavin D'costa, "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," p. 18.
- 32 Gavin D'costa, "Trinitarian 'différence' and World Religions," p. 39.
- 33 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
- 37 Cf. Gavin D'costa, "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," pp. 16-17.
- 38 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, pp. 101-109.
- 39 Gavin D'costa, "Other Faiths and Christianity," p. 413 (Italics original).
- 40 Gavin D'costa, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, p. 148.
- 41 Gavin D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations," p. 166.
- 42 The Church's condemnation of Jansenist theory that "outside the Church no grace is granted" is a clear indication of the Church's acknowledgment of God's activity outside its boundary.
- 43 Gavin D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations," p. 170.
- 44 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, p. 111.
- 45 Gavin D'costa, "The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity," p. 114.
- 46 *Redemptoris Missio* no. 20.
- 47 Cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 13.
- 48 *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* no. 81.
- 49 *Redemptoris Missio* no. 20.
- 50 Gavin D'costa, "Christ, Trinity, and Religious Plurality," p. 23.
- 51 Gavin D'costa, "Christ, Trinity, and Religious Plurality," *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- 52 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 54 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, pp. 130, 133.
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- 56 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, p. 9.
- 57 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 58 By interpreting a created reality as *theandric* in the light of the Trinity and reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of an empirical analysis of religious experience of idolatry, personalism and mysticism, Raimon Panikkar severs the identification between Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Son, in order to affirm the many "economies" that sidestep the redemptive work of Christ. He posits many economic manifestations of the triune God which are incompatible with Christian experience of the triune God described in Scripture. See Raymon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, *op. cit.* and, for Christological and Trinitarian criticisms of Panikkar, see Ewert Cousins, "The Trinity and World Religions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 7 (1990), pp. 476-498.
- 59 Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-357.
- 60 Cf. Gavin D'costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
- 61 Cf. John Thoppil, *Christology, Liberation and Religious Pluralism. A Critical Study of M. M. Thomas, P. F. Knitter and G. D'Costa*, Rome: Gregoriana, 1998, pp. 7, 26-27.
- 62 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, p. 76. (italics original)
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 64 Cf. Przemyslaw Plata, *The Appeal to the Trinity in Contemporary Theology of Religions*, pp. 30-31.
- 65 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31. See also Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity*, p. 105.
- 66 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity*, pp. 117. Auto-interpretation refers to the understanding that the adherents of particular religions have about their own religious tradition.
- 67 Cf. Gavin D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations." p. 167; "Trinitarian 'différence' and World Religions," pp. 38-39. Karl Rahner believes that

the trinitarian tradition (West) has erred greatly in envisioning a great chasm between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. He builds trinitarian theology from humanity's existential experience of the triune God in the economy of salvation and proposes the identity of the economic and immanent Trinities as a basic axiom. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, New York: Herder & Herder, 1970, pp. 14-35. Barth, following closely the Augustinian tradition, namely that the economic and the immanent Trinity are closely related but not identical, tries to affirm God's subjectivity in his self-revelation. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2 519.

- 68 Gavin D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations," p. 168 (italics mine).
- 69 Gavin D'costa, "A Christian Reflection on Some Problems with Discerning 'God' in the World Religions," p. 149.
- 70 It is interesting to note that Gavin D'costa is in full agreement with Rahner's assertion that "Now there is nothing more to come: no new age, no other aion, no fresh plan of salvation but only the unveiling of what is already 'here.'" Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, p. 49. D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations," *op. cit.*, p. 168.
- 71 Cf. Paul D. Molnar, *Incarnation and Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding*, Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2007.
- 72 Cf. John, G. Flett, "In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: A Critical Reflection on the Trinitarian Theologies of Religion of S. Mark Heim and Gavin D'Costa," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 1 (2008), pp. 87-88.
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- 74 Przemyslaw PLATA, *The Appeal to the Trinity in Contemporary Theology of Religions*, Louvain Studies, Vol. 30 (2005), pp. 324. See also Gavin D'costa, "Revelation and Revelations," pp. 180-181.
- 75 Gavin D'costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, p. 144.
- 76 Cf. Gavin D'costa, "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," p. 23.

## Land, Livelihood and Identity An Inter-Textual Reading of Matthew 21:33-46 and 1 Kings 21:1-24

V. J. John\*

### Introduction

Creation,<sup>1</sup> Earth,<sup>2</sup> Land<sup>3</sup> and Nature<sup>4</sup> have been studied in recent years as important themes in theologizing, particularly in the context of increasing effect of ecological crisis and the struggle for survival of all forms of life. The attempt here is limited to look at the role of "land" as an important social, economic and theological category in understanding the biblical message for our times. We shall focus our attention on land as a means of livelihood, as a sense of identity marker and as a basis of future hope for all living beings through an inter-textual analysis of Matthew 21:33-46 with 1 Kings 21:1-24. We shall look at the social settings of these accounts, narration of stories with major points of convergence and differences in relation to the linkage between land, livelihood and identity and draw some implications for our life today.

### 1. The Social Setting

The story of Naboth's encounter with Ahab and Jezebel occurs not too long after the split of the United Monarchy into two; namely, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In the north, dynasties founded by Omri and Jehu had a greater degree of permanency. Omri who came to the scene as a military

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commander of the Israel army in 876 B.C.E. soon established a dynasty that was ruled by four kings.<sup>5</sup> He established a new capital and palace at Samaria and entered into military and commercial undertakings with neighbouring countries. Omri and his son Ahab were successful rulers, and were regarded thus by neighbouring kings, perhaps even surpassing King Solomon.<sup>6</sup> Their reign witnessed the expansion of the imperial power that adversely impacted the life of a vast majority of ordinary citizens of the kingdom. *The* kings had ignored or compromised the traditional Yahwist religion in marrying foreign wives as in the case of Ahab who took Jezebel of Tyre, a Phoenician princess as his wife. She in turn was responsible for the construction of a temple to Baal in Samaria to promote Canaanite religion. Her religious zeal was such that it took very seriously the economic principles underlying Canaanite Baalism as witnessed in her enthusiasm for its accompanying economic understandings in the role she had in the Naboth affair (1 Kgs. 21).<sup>7</sup> It was under these kings that prophetic criticism against the rulers began to increase. The eighth century prophetic outburst against the practice of injustice by the ruling class is to be seen in this context. Royal estates<sup>8</sup> or crown lands began to emerge with the establishment of monarchy (1 Sam. 22:7-8). Royal land could have been acquired in six different ways: military conquest (2 Sam. 8:2), taking possession of vacant land (2 Kgs. 8:1-6), buying (2 Sam. 24:24), exchanging for other commodities (1 Kgs. 21:2), receive as presents (1 Kgs. 9:16), and confiscating (1 Kgs. 21).<sup>9</sup> When the attempt to exchange land did not succeed, Naboth's vineyard was confiscated by the king Ahab.

Many an interpreters of Jesus' Parable of the Vineyard (Mt. 21:33-46) have considered it an allegory which foreshadows Jesus' own death at the hands of the Jewish leaders.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, the parable codifies a true portrayal of the socio-economic reality of the first century Palestine under the Roman rule. Galilee, Judea and other hinterland areas of the Roman Empire was agrarian society.<sup>11</sup> While the ruling class consisting of a miniscule

minority amassed wealth and property in the form of large estates, the marginal farmer was deprived of his patrimony and relegated as day labourer. It was a time of struggle over land and resources. Warren Carter remarks, "The parable evokes a dominant economic practice of the Greco-Roman world where high rents, civic and religious taxes, acquiring seed and feed for the next crop and for livestock, and the need to trade or barter for other goods not produced on a farm, made subsistence existence difficult for many."<sup>12</sup> Questions about land ownership and just use of resources therefore were issues of paramount importance. Waetjen observes, "The socioeconomic analysis of the realities of latifundialization and the concomitant dispossession of the peasantry during the Hellenistic and Roman domination of Palestine establishes the real-life plausibility of Jesus' parable of the Wicked Tenants."<sup>13</sup>

## 2. An Analysis of the Text

We shall proceed to analyse the two texts which seem to provide a similar setting for their origin despite having come from two different periods. The texts may be placed in a comparative chart as set below.

### Textual comparison of the accounts

1 Kgs. 21:1-24; 2 Kgs. 9:21, 25-26	Mt. 21:33-46
Naboth, Jezreelite owns a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of king Ahab of Samaria (v. 1)	Estate owner plants a vineyard (in Galilee) (v. 33)
Ahab desires to either exchange or buy it for a vegetable garden (v. 2)	lease it out to tenants for farming and he went away (v. 33)
Naboth refuses to sell it being ancestral Property of inheritance (v. 3, 4b, 6)	Tenants refuses to pay produce/rent (v. 34)

Ahab became upset, resentful and sullen (v. 4)	Tenants beat, kill and stone slaves Treat other slaves similarly (vv. 35-36)
Intervention of Jezebel, arranges murder of Naboth (vv. 5,7, 8-14)	Tenants kill the son to grab inheritance (vv. 37-39)
Ahab acquiring the vineyard (vv. 15, 16)	Estate owner put the tenants to death (to regain control over estate) (vv. 40-41)
Elijah pronounces judgement on Ahab And Jezebel (vv. 17-24)	Vineyard leased to others (v. 41)

“Land is a central theme, if not the central theme of biblical faith”, says Brueggemann.<sup>14</sup> The centrality of land was associated with the blessing of Yahweh in the OT though the emphasis varies in the NT.<sup>15</sup> Both the stories that we consider concerns the land, more specifically a vineyard. While Naboth’s vineyard came to him as his ancestral inheritance, the tenant farmers were entrusted the vineyard for care, protection and cultivation by the estate owner who planted it. While Naboth became heir to a piece of land which for generations was passed on from ancestors to descendants, the Estate owner may have planted the vineyard by his own efforts, albeit by dishonest efforts. The attachment to the land that was inherited as a promise and gift would have been greater and deeper than the vineyard set up perhaps through fraudulent means. In the Old Testament view as Lilburne notes, Land was not just economic resource, but sacred heritage, not just commodity but storehouse of religious meaning.<sup>16</sup>

Drawing the similarities between Biblical and African cultures Ojwang, a Kenyan theologian, reiterates, “. . . many African cultures similarly hold tenaciously to a view of ancestral land inheritance in much the same way as we see in the story of Naboth.”<sup>17</sup> This is also true with many an Indian contexts such

as that of the Dalit<sup>18</sup> and tribal<sup>19</sup> communities. As Nirmal Minz observes, “The story of land alienation and the tribals being deprived of their homes and hearth throughout history is the key problem in the discussion of tribal identity.”<sup>20</sup> Tribal identity is centred on their land. The tribals believe land is a community property and individuals cannot privately dismember any part of this community inheritance. It can not only be used, but to be passed on to the next generation. As an inalienable hereditary possession *nahalah* (ancestral) property can be sold only under certain conditions such as dire economic downturn, yet not to be sold in perpetuity (Lev. 27:16-24); when sold preference to be given to next-of-kin (Jer. 32:6-15); or a next-of-kin could redeem the sold land. In the Jubilee year land could come back to the original owner (Lev. 25). Naboth faced no dire situation and he refused to sell his land. The relation with the land involved a special kinship as well as ethical and moral responsibility on the part of the holder that goes beyond the land itself. A sense of belonging, of kinship and familial relationship undergirds one’s right of inheritance. “To possess the land was to share in the inheritance and responsibility of all God’s people. In short, the land for an Israelite meant security, inclusion, blessing sharing and practical responsibility.”<sup>21</sup> Land was not just commodity but had meaning beyond commercial, practical and economic interests.<sup>22</sup> The ancestral inheritance did not belong to Naboth personally but to the family of the past, present and future. It was granted to the people as a covenantal gift by Yahweh. As Ceresko observes,

[The land] was to remain within the family so as to ensure both present and future generations guaranteed access to the family members’ most fundamental source of life and livelihood—*land*. To sell permanently this parcel of land would have betrayed one of the most important elements of Israel’s basic socio-economic structure and religious ethos.<sup>23</sup>

Naboth's vineyard served as the means of his sustenance. Though, perhaps not a poor farmer, he and his family inherited the land from ancestors. It has sustained the family for generations. By working and keeping the land they almost become one with it. Their sustenance and their identity were very much tied up with this vineyard. People may have recognized Naboth with reference to his land, perhaps even being referred as the next door neighbour of the king. Could this be another underlying reason for the desire of the king to evict Naboth from his neighbourhood? So attached to his land was Naboth that he could never think of alienating himself from the land that provided his family livelihood and recognition among the community and hope for future survival for his household and the generations that were to follow. Naboth refused to part with his vineyard, his inalienable inheritance. Commenting on it Ojwang states,

As was in the case with Naboth, land for most Africans is not merely a commodity for sale. Rather, land, and especially ancestral land, is tied closely to one's identity, human dignity, historical, social, and cultural continuity, as well as being a means to a livelihood. Once land is seen in commercial terms, landlessness is bound to become the lot of countless people: those who can afford it will buy large tract of land, resulting in an African version of amassing a *latifundia*.<sup>24</sup>

The case with the Estate owner was different. It is very unlikely that he was dependent on this land for survival. He probably possessed other lands and estates. For him, the land was a means of profit making, already being well-to-do as his activities on planting a vineyard indicates. A vineyard might normally produce the first harvest only at the end of the fifth year. All these years he needs to care for the planted vine, besides meeting his own needs for livelihood. The vineyard planted was for generating more profit and thereby increasing his wealth and

status. He leased his vineyard on his own volition whereas the vineyard of

Naboth, in proximity to the palace, was sought to be acquired forcefully by illegal appropriation by the royal court. The geographical location of the vineyard became an issue with the king. He desired to have it for a vegetable garden "because it is near my house" on the promise that it may be exchanged for a better vineyard or for value of money, for he said "I will give you a better vineyard for it, or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money" (1 Kgs. 21:2), a subtle way of dispossessing people of their valuable land as happens in many an Indian setting. Brueggeman is of the view that Naboth's vineyard "features a contrast between two economic theories and practices."<sup>25</sup> Naboth could not measure the value of his inheritance in monetary terms whereas for Ahab, land was mere wealth that was tradable. Yee mentions the possible reasons for Ahab's coveting Naboth's vineyard in Jezrel as both economic and military. Ahab represented as exploiter of the land whereas Naboth as one who held it in sacred trust and preserve for future generations.<sup>26</sup> Imperial greed was the reason behind Ahab's demand for the land. Jezrel valley was a fertile agricultural land and the area had access to the major high ways such as Via Maris (Way of the Sea) and the road leading from Megiddo to Beth-Shean. Well situated, Ahab probably desired to make Jezrel as an agricultural and military base.<sup>27</sup>

Ahab was so upset at Naboth's refusal that he became "resentful and sullen" He was depressed and refused to eat (1 Kgs. 21:4-5). Jezebel could not comprehend how anyone could usurp the imperial prerogatives. She swung to action in the name of Ahab with the seal of his authority writing letters to nobles and elders of Naboth's city describing the plan to eliminate Naboth (1 Kgs. 21:8-10).

It is very interesting to note that the method employed by Jezebel to take illegal possession of the vineyard of Naboth was the criteria of nationalism/patriotism. Further, it is in the guise of

fasting (and prayer) that the most gruesome act was carried out by an emergency assembly called for the purpose. Naboth was falsely accused a traitor by two scoundrels or 'sons of Belial.' They charged him with cursing 'God and king' (1 Kgs. 21:10, 13), thereby blaspheming God and his representative the king. Being accused of treason, Naboth was stoned to death on the very nasty plan devised by Jezebel, paving way for acquiring an ownerless piece of land by the crown (1 Kgs. 21:15-16). The role of Jezebel in the killing of Naboth is absent in 2 Kgs. 9:21, 25-26. Perhaps both emerge from different periods, 2 Kings 9:25-26 from the eighth century and the account in 1 Kgs. 21 from the fifth century. Naboth's children could also have been killed to eliminate the possibility of any legal claim over the property (2 Kgs. 9:26). Land laws, if there were any, could not protect the poor Naboth from the greed of the royal court, Ahab and Jezebel. When the king himself becomes the land mafia, there was very little that anyone else could do. Land laws could not protect the poor and vulnerable from the hands of those who wield economic and political power. Laws can be rewritten or inconvenient protestors can be eliminated to serve the greed of the wealthy and powerful.

The prophetic protest over the action was so vehement. The palace which engineered the murder of its own citizen Naboth for the greed over his possession of his ancestral land, Ahab and Jezebel will in turn experience the same fate and in the same manner that Naboth was subjected to (1 Kgs. 21:19, 23-24; 2 Kgs. 9:30-37). The wheel of justice will finally roll.

The vineyard of Jesus' parable (Mt. 21:33-46), reflects what was true in the time of Jesus. There were many who possessed estates in Galilee and Judea during this period. The reality of the economy of this time was debt that kept subsistence peasants endlessly in debt to the interests of the greedy.<sup>28</sup> The vineyard was developed by a large Estate owner who was an absentee landlord. Commenting on it Waetjen states.

Jesus' story recounts a local peasant revolt and its activation of a spiral of violence. But nothing more need be presupposed by the opening of the story than a large holding of land, an estate, owned by a member of the political or religious elite who, by planting a vineyard and leasing it to tenant farmers, is engaged in the production of a cash crop.<sup>29</sup>

The owner of the estate was a wealthy man who may have acquired the land by foreclosure on loans to free farmers who could not pay off loans due to poor harvests.<sup>30</sup> He has planted a vineyard with all necessary facilities including fencing, winepress and watchtower though these details are missing in Luke and Gospel of Thomas. The vineyard was not for the purpose of making a living for the Estate owner who as an absentee landlord lived in the city. The owner leased out the vineyard to tenant farmers for a stipulated rent. This is paid in the form of agricultural produce, money or labour. While the estate barons lived in cities, their estates managed by estate managers and worked by tenant farmers.<sup>31</sup>

In the normal process it will take about five years<sup>32</sup> for the vine to produce grapes, vegetables were planted between the rows of vine in order to offset some of the expenses involved, of which tenants were to receive a fixed portion. Slaves were sent at harvest time to collect the dues of the owner, but were turned back, seized, beat one and killed another and stoned another. Thus begins a series of challenges that the master had to face in an honour and shame in society. He again responded by sending a second batch of slaves, but they were treated the same way. Finally he decided to send his son, who, he thought being the son will command respect. But he being the heir the tenants decided to eliminate him. They caught him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him with the understanding that with no future claimant for the inheritance left in the line, the vineyard could be claimed as their own property.<sup>33</sup> There was perpetual violence<sup>34</sup> in

the early centuries between estate owners and peasants who were deprived of their patrimony for the expansion of large estates. Such conflict between the owner of the estates and his tenants was one of economic class struggle.<sup>35</sup> However, they will not succeed in their plan as finally the owner himself will put them into a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the dues at the right time.

The two stories are concerned with the theme of inheritance and contest over inheritance. In the case of the Naboth story, he was an ordinary citizen whose inheritance was claimed by the powerful ruler of the land. The one who was responsible for the welfare and protection of citizens, on account of his imperial greed and desire to enlarge his estate eliminated the rightful owner and his family, so that he could easily acquire the land he coveted. In the case of the parable, once again, it was the representative of the empire, an Estate owner, who perhaps by fraudulent means or by the act of foreclosure may have built up his large estate, divesting people of their patrimony. To remain an honourable elite required continuing efforts towards increasing one's wealth and power. This was a recipe for violence. Perhaps, some of the tenants may have been original owners of portions of the estate. Having been deprived of their means of livelihood and mark of identity, they perhaps were left with no option, but to eliminate the slaves of the landlord and his son who represented the values of the empire. Having failed to get justice at the hand of the powerful as the laws too were written in their favour,<sup>36</sup> the tenants took into their own hands the task of administering justice. It was an act of rejection of the owner's claim to the vineyard. The future of the peasants depended on the maintenance of a fine balance of mutual subsistence needs without disruption.<sup>37</sup> A continued rejection over three years could make it possible for the tenants to claim ownership of the vineyard. However, the owner was endowed with power and wealth. He could crush any attempt towards tilting the balance. In both stories the inheritance rightfully belonged to the

ordinary citizen, but was wrongfully deprived by the elite, on one hand by Ahab and Jezebel and on the other by an uncaring Estate owner.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. Some Implications

The centrality of the land, its proper use and preservation is an important concern of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>39</sup> Biblical stories evolve from a predominantly agrarian society, where land and labour were the important resources available for sustaining life. By working on the land and by producing basic human needs were met. Agrarian society was a self-sufficient economy. They always shared their goods to meet the basic needs of the not so fortunate. Mutual help and support sustained the community. Everything depended on the fertility of the land and the proper function of the cycle of agricultural seasons. "One important aspect in the prophetic critique of ruling classes in Israel and Judah" as Carter notes, "was focused on the abuse of power that dispossessed peasants from their land (Amos 2:6-7; 4:1-2; Micah 2:2; Is. 5:8-10)" Greed for power and wealth resulted in creation of large estates depriving people of their legitimate inheritance making them poor. To overcome this there was the practice of Jubilee year when land was returned to the original owner and the command not to sell land in perpetuity, as the real owner of land was God who created it, human persons were trustees of what was entrusted under their care. They can use it without depriving the future generation of its benefit. Land belongs to the community; it cannot just be bartered away on the whims and fancies of some people, however noble their case may sound. The message emanating from the stories is loud and clear, that is, If God is the owner of all land (Lev. 25:23), land is given to humans as a gift and a sacred trust from God, it is to be used for God's life-giving purposes for all people, not just the benefit of the elites who more often than not misuse power and position to deprive the poor of their means of livelihood and identity.<sup>40</sup>

Asian-African and Latin American contexts are characterized by social, political and economic struggles. Land and landlessness is an important part of this struggle. Experiences of oppression, marginalization, and gender discrimination are important ingredients. Economics and identity are linked to land. Therefore “in our own time” as Brueggemann observes, “it is the same power of commodity—expressed as ‘free market’—that is willing to override any tribal tradition that causes conflict between traditional value and the ‘development’ of ‘underdeveloped economies.’”<sup>41</sup> Singur-Nandigram agitation by peasants of West Bengal whose land was forcefully taken away for TATA industry, Peasant struggle in Tamil Nadu for the protection of their agricultural land being taken away for high way construction, century old legal battles and agitation over Babri Masjid and Ram Janambhumi over a little piece of land in Ayodhya thought to represent the identities of the Muslim and Hindu communities are only some examples. Christian understanding of the future is also tied up with an apocalyptic hope of a renewed land and a renewed earth.<sup>42</sup> Unlike in western Christianity, Christianity in Asian-African context sees an integral link between land and their life struggles. Many of them only possess a little piece of agricultural land often came as ancestral inheritance. It is in working this land as farmers that they make a living. This little piece of land to which they are integrally connected through work which provide them an identity and recognition among native communities need to be protected. Often Land in these setting often is a community resource that is to be used and passed on to the next generation. For them land is more than an economic commodity to be sold and made profit at will. This would call for.

1. Churches and Christian institutions to make an audit of land and properties they have inherited by default at their founding and the percentage of it now left behind with an honest assessment of the benefits received by the Christian

community as a whole from the sale of properties over the years.

2. What is the land and properties acquired by churches and institutions on its own since the formation of the church? Much of it is bought in the name of the community and resources generated from them. The benefits to the community from what have been created needs to be assessed.
3. Churches and religious institutions in India are the owners of large land holdings in India after the government. What criteria govern the use and distribution of land by these communities and the land use policy followed by these trusts and institutions need to be clearly evaluated and remedial action undertaken.

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## **God of the Margins Reading ‘Horns and Craftsmen’ from Center-Margin Perspective**

***Rev. Dr. Shiju Mathew\****

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We are living in a world of center and margin. The developed nations appear to be dominating the developing nations. The picture of domination can be seen even in the Hebrew Bible, Early Christian writings, and in history. In the Hebrew Bible, we can locate major four powers that dominated and subjugated other nations namely Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Medo-Persian. The power of domination thereafter can be seen in the intertestamental period by Greeks and in the New Testament by the Romans.

The pertinent questions to be addressed are: Was God silent? Why did He allow the powerful nations to subjugate the weaker nation/s? In the language of prophet Habakkuk, why do you tolerate treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked (powerful nation/s) swallow up those more righteous than themselves (the covenant nation Israel)? The possible answer for these questions is the chosen nation Israel. The covenant people had hardened their hearts towards the covenant God and moved away from keeping covenant agreement. As they broke the covenant agreement, the Lord used the powerful nations to discipline<sup>1</sup> His people (c.f. Jeremiah 25, 29; Habakkuk 1).

This paper is an attempt to read Zechariah 1:18-21 from a center-margin perspective focusing on four horns and four craftsmen. In order to understand the larger framework of

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Zechariah's vision of 'four horns and four craftsmen,' the paper will highlight the geographical location of Israel focusing on the nations surrounding Israel, the beginning and placing of the nation Israel, election and the covenant, reason for exile and restoration of the remnant.

### **Nations Around Israel: Supremacy and Strategies**

The nation Israel was surrounded by hostile and powerful nations, i.e., Egypt in the South, Philistia in the West, Moab and Edom in the East, and Assyria and Babylon towards the North.

Among all other surrounding nations, Assyria and Babylon were dominant. Assyria and Babylonia, who were the members of the Semitic racial group collectively, encompass Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> They were originally comprised of a single group called Akkadians. Akkadian is the language spoken both by Assyria and Babylonia.<sup>3</sup>

The Assyrian and Babylonian empire, which had been shaped and influenced by the fusion of two distinct cultures Semitic<sup>4</sup> and Sumerian culture<sup>5</sup> (particularly from *circa* 2000-612 BC) made a great impact on the culture of the whole of West Asia in its political, social and religious aspects. Throughout these centuries, there was a period of conflict and also a time of friendship between these two empires. They acquired their dominance by fighting for their own security and well-being. The victory over their enemies conferred on them the right to rule over the defeated enemies. The victory eventually not only gained them security but also profit and prestige. Other than these two empires, Egypt and Medo-Persian also dominated other nations.

#### **a. Imperial Assyria and her Supremacy**

Assyria made a great impact throughout Ancient West Asia from 1365 BCE when Ashur-uballit I (1365-1330 BC) came to the throne. The Assyrian dominance over others including Babylonia could be seen under the leadership of Enlil-nirari (1329-1320 BC), Arik-den-ilu (1319-1308 BC), Adad-nirari I (1307-1275 BC),

Shalmaneser I (1274-1245 BC), Tukuti-Ninurta I (1244-1208 BC), Kashtiliash IV (1242-1235 BC), Tiglath-Pileser I (1115/1114-1077/1076 BC), Adad-nirari II (911-891 BC), Tukulti-Ninurta II (890- 884 BC), Ashur-nasir-pal II (883-859 BC), Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC), Shamshi-Adad V (823-811 BC), Adad-nirari III (810-783 BC), Shalmaneser IV (782-772 BC), Ashur-dan III (771-754 BC), Tiglath-Pileser III (753/744-727 BC), Sargon II (722/721-705 BC), Sennacherib (705/704-681 BC), Esarhaddon (681/680- 669 BC), and Ashurbanipal (669/668-626 BC). The above mentioned kings not only extended and strengthened their control over the region of Assyria but also went farther into Asia Minor. All the principal trade routes were in Assyrian hands.<sup>6</sup>

The Assyrian empire unlike other nations was known for her military strategy. The king was the supreme head and chief commander. Every male member was obliged to actively involve in military activities. The strategy adopted was threefold: siege warfare, pitched battles, and psychological warfare. The first two requires energy, time and manpower. The third one was more effective and consumed less time. For this, the empire conquered a particular region and allowed the inhabitants to surrender. If they failed to do so, the next step was to surround the capital city and once again offered for surrender. If still they failed to do so, the city would be captured and the Assyrians would do extreme act of cruelty such as burning houses, rape, mutilation, slavery etc. This act would be a warning to the inhabitants of other region. If the captured people failed to pay tribute, they were even taken far away from their land in order to lose their identity.<sup>7</sup> This would not only strengthen their colonies but also the economic resources.

Besides political factor, ideological and religious factor motivated the Assyrian king to capture other regions. Being a king and commander of the army, he made an annual military expedition to extend further his regions than those of the king's predecessors. King being the vice-regent of the state god Asshur carried out his expedition on behalf of the god. And when he

conquered a new territory, he projected as if he conquered with the support of the god Asshur.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, the Assyrian empire adopted military strategy over other territories and their key factors, besides political factors, appear as an ideological and religious one.

### **b. Imperial Babylon and her Supremacy**

The first dynasty of Babylon was from 1894-1595 BC. The founder of this dynasty was Sumu-abum from a West Semitic origin. In his fourteen years of rule, he was engaged in strengthening Babylon by fortifications and subjugating neighbouring nations through diplomatic or military means.<sup>9</sup>

The successful king among the Babylon was Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC). He became the sole ruler of Babylonia in 1763 BC. During his reign, the state was expanded to the Persian Gulf and Elam. The reason behind his success other than his military achievement was his administrative and diplomatic skills. His administrative achievements matched with his military success. He turned many citystates including Sumer and Akkad into one kingdom, a centre of an empire. The whole land had one language for administration and business, and one legal system. The policy laid down by Hammurabi with regard to land was practiced throughout the history of Babylonia. His achievements could be seen in the collection of laws (Hammurabi Laws) promulgated by him.<sup>10</sup>

After the reign of Hammurabi, the Babylonian dynasty became weak. The rulers who succeeded Hammurabi were Hammurabi's son Samsu-iluna (1749-1712 BC), Abi-Eshuh (1711-1684 BC), Ammi-ditana (1683-1647 BC), Ammisaduqa (1646-1626 BC) and Samsu-ditana (1625-1595 BC). Unlike Hammurabi, these kings were engaged in small scale border campaigns and were more defensive.<sup>11</sup>

Comparing all other legal codes, the code of Hammurabi stands tall as it covers a good number of areas. The policy and legislation laid down and executed by Hammurabi had a lasting

influence not only in Babylonia but also throughout Ancient West Asia. For instance, the Hammurabi Code had striking parallels with the Laws of the Old Testament mainly the casuistic laws.

### **c. Imperial Egypt and her Supremacy**

The civilization of Egypt was much older than Babylonia and other Ancient West Asian nation. They were in peak stage in the area of art, literature, religion, etc., during Eighteenth dynasty (circa 1546-1319 BC). During this period, the Egypt rose as a dominant empire extending from upper Nile to the upper Euphrates. This period was known as her golden age. The trade in Asia which was controlled by Babylon was diverted to Egypt. Assyria was in infant stage and Babylonia had no longer any political influence in the West.<sup>12</sup> The Egyptian power started declining after 1150 BC. The empire which stood tall broke up into small principalities.<sup>13</sup>

The successful rulers during this period were Queen Hatshepsut (circa. 1504-1482 BC), Thutmose III<sup>14</sup> (circa. 1482-1450 BC), and Amenhotep III (circa. 1412-1375 BC).

Egypt, unlike Assyria and Babylon, had no fixed legal codes. The Egyptian king was considered as both God and man. He was conceived of as a divine being actually descending from the gods. Although he was living among mortals, he remained as an important part of the divine world. When he is dead, he again becomes God. He alone was entitled to communicate with the gods. The king was truly the sole source of authority. All official actions, both in the secular and in the religious sphere were controlled and authorized by the king.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the king was supreme and what he declared was considered as law. The people were expected to obey the word of the king.

### **d. Imperial Persia and her Strategy**

The Persian regime unlike Assyria and Babylon was more open to smaller nations. They adopted strategies different from Assyria and Babylon. Unlike Assyrian and Babylonian strategies of deportation and replacing the land with people of other nations

(II Kings 17:6, 24-27), the Persian Empire greatly encouraged the people to return to their homeland.<sup>16</sup> They adopted the strategy of rebuilding and resettling instead of deportation. The Persian regime permitted the people of other nations to worship their god/gods. They even helped in restoring or reconstructing the temple. Freedom was given to exercise their faith and ritual practices.<sup>17</sup> The religion and priesthood in Judah got restored under Persian Empire. The strategy of freedom and restoration adopted by the Persian Empire, on one hand, was to make their boundaries strong and on the other hand, to extract tribute and loyalty from the conquered nations.<sup>18</sup> The intention behind freedom and restoration was to dominate Judah both politically and economically.

### **Covenant Nation Israel and Covenant God**

The covenant nation Israel though was surrounded by these powerful nations but the eyes of God was upon her people (c.f. Psalm 121:3-8).

### **Beginning and Placing of the Covenant Nation Israel**

#### **Beginning as an Individual and as a Nation**

Genesis 12:1-4a: Abrahamic Call with Command and Promises

In the call narrative of Abraham, we can see both Protasis (Command) and Apodosis (Promises), i.e., the Call is in the form of commands which is followed by Promises. **Go (Command-C1)** from your country, tribe, and father's house to the Land that I will show you. **(Promise One- P1)** I will make you into a great nation; **(P2)** I will bless you; and **(P3)** I will make your name great. **Be seen as blessed (Command- C2)** is followed by three promises: I will bless those who bless you **(P1)**; whoever treat you lightly I will curse **(P2)**; and through *you* all the families of the earth shall be blessed/bless themselves **(P3)**.

In the call narrative of Abraham there are two commands and six promises. The first command [C1] 'Go' with three promises is focused to Abraham. The second command [C2]

'Be seen as blessed' with three promises is pointing to 'Others' through Abraham. The second set of command and promises will depend on the first set of command and promises. Abraham Obeyed (12:4c) - The *first fulfillment* can be seen fulfilled partially in *Exodus 1:7-10*: But the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them. The *second fulfillment* though not fully can be seen in the book of Joshua. The promises of *Progeny*, i.e., descendants and promise of *Land* reverberates throughout the Old Testament. Land is considered as the 'hinge' between the Covenant God and Covenant people.

The 'Promised Land' is a land flowing with milk and honey but it is placed in a strategic location. The placing of Israel is significant as it points out the Sovereignty of God and dependency of Israel towards God who is the owner of the Land.

### **Placing of Israel**

Israel was surrounded by the nations, in the North (Assyria and Babylon); South (Egypt); West (Philistia); and in the East (Band of Raiders-Edomites, Moabites, Midianites). Since Israel is surrounded by these powerful nations, the land of Israel is called as 'The Land Between.' The nations surrounding the tiny nation Israel was powerful in every aspect of life. Moreover, the land in which Israel lived was unpredictable as a slight climatic change will lead either to flood or drought. It is a land full of hills, valleys and cleft. Why God gave this type of land to Israel? It is to test the faith of Israel and to have dependency on God. If not, they may become Complacent, Compromising and Overconfident nation.

### **Election and Covenant: Blessings to All (Gen. 12:3d)**

Though Israel was a tiny dot in the map of the world, the eyes of the Lord was upon them. The creator God elected and made a covenant with them to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

### *What is Election and Covenant?*

Election/Bachar is a religious conviction that God has chosen one individual, one tribe and one nation to be a channel of blessings to other nations [Adam-Abel-Seth-Noah-Shem-Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-Israel-New Israel (the Church)].

Covenant/Berit is an agreement between the Covenant God and the Covenant People. The covenant made between God and Israel is different from Ancient West Asia (AWA). The covenant is also called Suzerain Vassal treaty, i.e., a treaty between higher party and lower party. In AWA, lower party approaches the higher party and makes an agreement that they will serve and abide by the law. Hearing this, the higher party will declare that, if you abide, I will take care of you. The biblical covenant is different. Here the higher party (YHWH) approaches the lower party (People of God Israel). This we could see throughout the Old Testament. The Creator God is approaching and making an agreement with the creature. There are six covenants in the Old Testament (also known as the Hebrew Bible).

1. Adamic Covenant-Genesis 3:15
2. Noahic Covenant-Genesis 9:8-17
3. Abrahamic Covenant-Genesis 12, 15
4. Mosaic Covenant-Exodus 19:3-6
5. Davidic Covenant-II Sam 7
6. New Covenant-31:31-34

In all these covenants we could see the love and care of God towards His chosen people. However, Israel, the chosen people of God knowing the reality that God is Sovereign and took care of them (Exodus 2-3) asked for a king like other nations (I Samuel 8:5). Samuel was disturbed hearing the request of the covenant people. Being a leader, he tried to convince the people not to ask for a king like other nations (I Sam 8:10-18). God said to Samuel, 'Heed to the people (I Sam 8:22).' The disobedience of the people led to division and exile.

### *Disobedience and Exile*

The rejection and disobedience of people led to the division of the glorious kingdom into two parts under the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam (I Kings 12), the northern kingdom (Israel) and the Southern kingdom (Judah). The northern kingdom was carried away by the Assyrians in 722/721 BC and the southern kingdom by the Babylonians in 597/587 BC. The northern kingdom got absorbed to the other nations but the southern miraculously escaped the total wipe out (c.f. Deut 28, 29; I Samuel 8; Isaiah 1:2-4; Hosea; Jeremiah 25, 29).

### *Remnant and Restoration*

The Covenant God remembered the obedience of Abraham and kept alive a remnant to continue the Abrahamic covenant (Isaiah 11:1, 10, 11) who in turn will become a light and blessings to the nations.

In all these stages, we could see few individuals who stick on to God and maintained a godly life and exhibited godly leadership both to the nation Israel and nations around, i.e., Joseph and Moses in Egypt; Daniel and his three friends in Babylon; and Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther in Persian Empire. This clearly points out that God is not only a Creator but also God of the margins. He always looks for individual who will execute His plan. In line with these partnerships between the Covenant God and His people, Prophet Zechariah reaches to the nation Israel with series of vision. Zechariah 1:18-21 (MT 2:1-4) is a vision demonstrating the act of God towards the marginalized nation Israel.

### **Reading Zechariah 1:18-21 'Horns and Craftsmen' from a Center-Margin Perspective**

As mentioned earlier, while the Jews were in exile, king Cyrus of Persia as promised by prophet Jeremiah took over the Babylonian empire. The Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews to return and rebuild the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the political leader and Joshua, the religious leader. However, when

Darius became king of Persia, the Jews feared that Cyrus' law would be repealed. In order to encourage the people of Israel, God appointed two prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Both prophets emphasized on the need for a new relationship with the Lord. While the message of Haggai was centered on the importance of rebuilding the temple, Zechariah encouraged the covenant people with visions of the future.<sup>19</sup>

The vision of Zechariah (Zech 1:18-21) is connected to the preceding verses (Zech. 1: 2-17). The preceding verses carry a call to return/repentance (1:2-6) and a message of blessings to Israel and judgment to the Gentile nations (1:7-17).

### **Horns and Craftsmen**

There are differences of opinion regarding the four horns and four craftsmen:<sup>20</sup>

1. The four horns are Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Medo-Persian and the four craftsmen are Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian and the Greeks.
2. The four horns are Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian and Greek and the four craftsmen are Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greeks and the Romans.
6. The four horns are Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and the Romans and the four craftsmen are Medo-Persian, Greeks, Romans and the Messiah.
4. The four horns are the hostile nations on all four sides of Judah and Israel: Egypt in the south, Philistia in the west, Moab and Edom in the east, and Assyria and the Babylon towards the North. The craftsmen are other peoples or nations the Lord will use to destroy these nations.

In the Hebrew Bible, God addressed Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus as my servant, which points out clearly that God is using Babylon and Persian to discipline the covenant community. By taking this into account, we can arrive at a possible conclusion that the four horns are Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and

the Romans and the four craftsmen are Medo-Persian, Greeks, Romans and the Messiah (c.f. Zechariah 2:1-5; Galatians 4:4).

### **Horns as Symbol of Center and Margin as Symbol of God's Presence**

Horns (Heb. *qeren*) are symbolized as the symbol of strength of bulls and rams representing military and political power (Deut. 33:17; I Kings 22:11; Dan. 7:7).<sup>21</sup> In this vision, craftsmen (Heb. *Charashim*) appear to chop off the horns. The powerful nation is stripping the powerful nation resulting in the victory of the margin nation. God of the margin is the sovereign Lord of all the earth and He has the authority and the power to use any nation to accomplish His will. All nations are accountable to Him.

In this section, the author will focus on one horn (Babylon) as it resembles with our present context.

### **Babylonian King and the Four Young Men: Center and Margin**

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and nobility with certain qualifications. They were assigned with royal foods and training (Daniel 1:1-5). Daniel and his three friends decided not to defile themselves with the royal food and wine (Daniel 1:8). They said to the guard to test for ten days, for they perhaps believed that God who created the world in 6 days will be able to bring favorable result in 10 days (1:15). Their belief yielded result as the king found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom (1:18-20). However, the real test of life took place in chapter two. In chapter two, king Nebuchadnezzar

saw a dream<sup>22</sup> and forgot what he saw and became restless.<sup>23</sup> The summoning of the diviners implies that the dream carries state significance. Realizing the life threatening situations of the wise men, Daniel asked for time (Daniel 2:13, 16). Daniel explained the matter to his three friends. The God of margin revealed to Daniel both the dream and interpretation of the dream.<sup>24</sup> The statue's four parts signify four regimes with Nebuchadnezzar as the head. The effect of the dream given to Nebuchadnezzar, the center about his significant role in gentile history in (Daniel 2: 17-28) puffed him to erect his own image in chapter three (the head of gold in chapter 2:38 perhaps made him to erect image of gold in chapter 3). Nebuchadnezzar after erecting his image of Gold<sup>25</sup> of 90/9 demanded a public display of recognition and submission to his absolute authority in the kingdom. The fact that the officials were commanded not only to fall before the image but also to worship it indicates that the image had religious as well as political significance. It seems he was instituting a new form of religious worship with his image as the center (note that in chapter 2 he is projected as the 'head' of the image). He purposed to establish a 'unified' government and also a 'unified' religion and constituted himself as both the 'head/center' of the state and the 'head/center' of religion. All who served under him were demanded to recognize and certify both his political and religious authority. It is interesting to read the Septuagint reading of chapter 3:1. The LXX adds that this event occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's 18<sup>th</sup> years (587 BC) one year before the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC- c.f. II Kings 25:8).<sup>26</sup> The three friends realizing the hidden agenda of 'unified' government and also a 'unified' religion, decided with firm faith to defy the command of the King. They believed in Yahweh knowing the fact that the mighty hand of God they experienced in chapters 1 and 2 will do so in this situation too [the numbers of days is not an issue to bring result (chapter 1) and God is the revealer of mystery (chapter two)]. The three representing margins know the consequence of defying the words

of the king, but stood firmly for the faith (c.f. Acts 5:29). The angry king ordered them to be 'bound/tie up' (3:21-24). It points out an important message, 'standing in unity' for the God of margins against the 'unified' government and 'unified' religion of the puzzled and bewildered king of center (chapter 2). Because of the firm faith in God amidst challenges and encounters, a dramatic scene took place-the God of margin appeared with the three in the blazing fire. The reactions of Nebuchadnezzar are six fold:

1. The king leaped to his feet in amazement (3:24).
2. He testified that all the three and the addition one are unbound and unharmed (sign and result for unity). The fourth one looks like a son of the gods (3:25).
3. He approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *Servants of the Most High,*<sup>27</sup> Come out! Come here!' So they came out of the fire (3:26).
4. He praised the God of 'the three' and commended them by saying 'they trusted in God and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than to *Serve* or *Worship* any god except their own God (1:28).
5. He passed a decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of 'the Three' be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubbles, for *no other god* can save *in this way*.
6. He honoured 'the three' by giving promotion in the province of Babylon (3:30).

Nebuchadnezzar while erected his image of gold in 3:1 focused only a part of the dream of chapter 2 but failed miserably to read and understand the wider picture of the dream of chapter 2 which at last came to his senses in the end of chapter 3 (2:26-47 c.f. 3:28-29). He failed to understand the fact that the God of Margin has given him dominion and power and might and glory. Moreover he is described by God as 'my servant' (Daniel 2:36-

38 c.f. Jer. 27:6). When his role designed by God came to an end, God appointed Cyrus as 'his servant.' The pride of the horn Nebuchadnezzar 'what God will be able to rescue you from my hand? (Dan. 3:15)' came to an end by Cyrus 'the craftsmen.'

## Conclusion

Based on the events of Daniel chapters 2-3 and Zechariah 1:18-21 (MT 2:1-4), we can bring few applications in our life as margin when the nation ruled by the center is contemplating towards 'Unified' government and 'Unified' religion:

1. Standing firm in faith will make us different from the 'Others'.
2. Standing firm in faith will give us courage amidst challenges/encounters.
3. Standing firm in faith will bring the God of margin in our midst resulting to confusion/bewilderment in the enemy camp.
4. Standing firm in faith will bring realization to 'the center' that God is with and for 'the margins.'

Summing up, the prophet Zechariah's depiction of the empires as 'horns' and raising 'craftsmen' to throw down the 'horns' points out the limitations of the powerful nations and the supremacy of God in history. The climax of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar is not the gold rather the rock that crushes the whole statue and fills the whole earth.

## End Notes

- 1 The disciplining of the Lord is always aimed at correcting and restoring the covenantal relationship, i.e., behind the judgment, there is a message of salvation.
- 2 In classical times, Babylon was the southern part and Assyria the northern half of the country. C.f. John C. Miles and G. R. Driver, *The Babylonian Laws*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 1-4.
- 3 Georges Contenau, *Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1955), 3-7.

- 4 Semitic was patriarchal in nature. The position of women was inferior to man. The woman was considered as the helper and shadow of man. The inferior stage was applied even to the goddess (Rollin Chambliss, *Social Thought: From Hammurabi to Comte* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1954), 35-36.
- 5 The Sumerian culture was matriarchal in nature, where women were given respectable position and fully recognized c.f. Rollin Chambliss, *Social Thought: From Hammurabi to Comte*, 36-37; S. H. Hooke, *Babylonian and Assyrian Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1953), 21.
- 6 H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, (New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1962), 96-141.
- 7 A. Kirk Grayson, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 959-961.
- 8 A. Kirk Grayson, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia," 962. Refer also pages, 963-967.
- 9 H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, 80.
- 10 H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, 81, 86-87. It was even argued that it was King Hammurabi who gave to Babylonia one pantheon, with Marduk, the god of the city of Babylon, as its head. Though Hammurabi received the credit for unifying the kingdom and brought out the collection of laws, in reality he set out not a new law, rather picked up the laws from the earlier common collection of laws. For instance, the language of laws seen in Code of Hammurabi resembles with the laws written down by Bilalama, king of Eshnunna and Sumerian Laws (John C. Miles and G. R. Driver, *The Babylonian Laws*, 6-11, 12-13.)
- 11 H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, 87-88.
- 12 Rollin Chambliss, *Social Thought: From Hammurabi to Comte*, 42, 46. During this period the royal coffers were filled with tribute and the rulers exercised power throughout the vast empire which they had conquered.
- 13 Rollin Chambliss, *Social Thought: From Hammurabi to Comte*, 46.
- 14 Thutmose III was known as the 'Napoleoan of Ancient Egypt'.
- 15 Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E Keep (London: Methuen & Company Ltd, 1973), 37-40.
- 16 See David J. Ellis, "Zechariah," in *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing house, 1979). For Ellis, Cyrus encouraged the exiles to return to their own land. He was reversing the policies of his former Babylonian enemy, but possibly also relieving himself of further responsibility for the welfare of the exiles

- within his empire. He further suggests that Cyrus' tolerant, even benevolent attitude towards the returning exiles was not entirely without self-interest (Ellis, 964). In line with Ellis, Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers say that 'the Persian imperial policy was very much committed to the building and resettlement projects, which was but one expression of a much broader policy of restoring conquered subjects when politically and physically feasible in the hope of installing loyal colonies in critical geopolitical areas. The policy was designed to encourage the subjects to be the cooperative members of the larger configuration.' [See Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *The Anchor Bible: Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, Vol. 25b (New York: Doubleday, 1987), xxxi-xxxii].
- 17 Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), 302.
  - 18 Jon L Berquist, *Judaism in Persian's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Eugene, Origen: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995), 25-26.
  - 19 Solomon Kumar, "Zechariah," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, ed. Brian Wintle (Rajasthan: Open Door Publications, 2015), 1192.
  - 20 Solomon Kumar, "Zechariah," 1194. Many interpreters associate the four horns with the fourfold image or the four beast in the book of Daniel 2 and 7; others see the number four here as representative of universal opposition, more or less like the use in the 'four winds of heaven'; there are a few who consider four horns and four craftsmen as symbolic expression [See F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Secunderabad: Authentic Press, 2012), 1552; Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (England: Apollos, 1995), 434; James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 1986), 164; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *The Anchor Bible: Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 146-147; Ralph L. Smith, "Micah-Malachi," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 32 (Texas: Word Books, 1984), 193].
  - 21 Solomon Kumar, "Zechariah," 1194. The people of the East being predominantly pastoral people consider horn as a symbol of power and pride. To lift up the horn was to be proud or even arrogant about one's strength and position. In Daniel 7 this imagery is used to symbolize the nations coming together to oppose God [James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 164].
  - 22 The Babylonians believed that dreams contained important communication from the god, and thus it was important to interpret them (See Angukali Rotokha, "Daniel," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, ed. Brian Wintle (Rajasthan: Open Door Publications, 2015), 1090).
  - 23 Literally, his spirit was agitated. This incident took place just after Nebuchadnezzar's great triumph at Carchemish. The victor king is down to size (Hammer) [See John E. Goldingay, "Daniel," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 30 (Texas: Word Books, 1989), 32].
  - 24 The dream revealed to Daniel sounds similar to the vision of Zechariah 1:18-21 (MT 2:1-4) - The four parts of the statue (Gold, Silver, bronze and iron-a symbol of history between the exile and the Messianic age) are the four horns: Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Romans. The rock mentioned in Daniel 2 is the kingdom of God (c.f. I Cor. 10:4). The God of Margin who dwells in heaven will wipe out these kingdoms and will set up another and a different kingdom which will be indestructible and will not be conquered and will endure forever and extend over all the earth. This new kingdom refers to Jesus Christ that began during the Roman Empire and is still spreading throughout the world and will continue until He returns to judge the earth. There is a different interpretation to it. Four horns are the reigns of four kings namely Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. The rock is the Cyrus, which fits with the task ascribed to him in Isaiah 41, 45. It also fits with the promises in Jeremiah 25:12 and 27:7 [For further and differing readings see Angukali Rotokha, "Daniel," 1092; A. R. Millard, "Daniel," in *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing house, 1979), 856; C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 295; J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Secunderabad: Authentic Press, 2012), 1334-1336; Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DI Lella, *The Anchor Bible: Daniel*, vol. 23 (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 147-150; Tim Meadow Croft and Nate Irwin, "The Book of Daniel," in *Asia Bible Commentary Series*, ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 2004), 54-55; John E. Goldingay, "Daniel," 49-51].
  - 25 There are differences of opinion regarding the image: Is it the image of Nebuchadnezzar or the god of Nebuchadnezzar or the image symbolizing the empire. Whatever the view may be, the image of gold points out the character of Center defying the interpretation of Daniel that his kingdom would pass away. Here Nebuchadnezzar wants to establish that the king, god of the king and the empire are powerful and all others are subject

and margin. (Also refer A. R. Millard, "Daniel," 856; John E. Goldingay, "Daniel," 70).

26 J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," 1337.

27 The title 'Most High God' was common to both the Jews and the Babylonians. For the Jews, it meant that the Lord is the only God, but to Nebuchadnezzar, the highest god among many gods (Angukali Rotokha, "Daniel," 1094).

## Loving Surrender and Social Engagement

*Gifta Angline Kumar\**

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### Introduction

Christianity puts surrender to God/Love at core of the spiritual journey. For us to understand exactly what that involves, we need to examine more carefully this concept of surrender. This article is an attempt to deal with loving surrender in Christianity taking the example of Jesus how He surrendered Himself to God for the sake of saving humanity and how it motivates Christians to involve themselves in social engagement. Hence the concern it who surrender themselves to God how do they engage themselves socially.

### 1. Understanding the Concept of Surrender

Love and Surrender are two words that are often used in spiritual teachings. However, like so many words, what they point to cannot be expressed or contained in words, and so love and surrender are often misunderstood. Love and surrender are important because they bring one's deepest heart's desire as a human being. Surrender is the boat that takes a person from one shore to another, from the limited human experience to the experience of the divine incarnate.<sup>1</sup>

Surrender is essentially an exchange. Surrender requires faith that something will take place of what was surrendered and faith that what takes place its place will be better than what was given up. Usually, this faith comes naturally when the old way of being creates sufficient suffering.

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Surrender plays a crucial role in the spiritual journey as understood by most major religions and spiritual traditions. Far from being a sign of weakness, only surrender to something or someone bigger than us is sufficiently strong to free us from the prison of our egocentricity. Only surrender is powerful enough to overcome our isolation and alienation.<sup>2</sup>

Surrender is essentially an exchange. We surrender the old for the new, since the two cannot coexist. One cancels out the other. Surrender cancels the old and makes it possible to discover something new. But first, the old must be surrendered. The old must be given up, let go of, and only then can you discover what takes its place.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.1. Understanding of Surrender According to Christianity: A Paradigm of Jesus' Surrender**

Christians often focus on obedience more than surrender. But while the two concepts are closely related, they differ in important ways. As we shall see, surrender is foundational to Christian spirituality and is the soil out of which obedience should grow. Christ does not simply want our love and He offers us his. He invites us to surrender to His love.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus showed us the way; he showed us how to be selfless. He taught us to serve others and think of others as better than ourselves. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20: 25-28).<sup>5</sup>

In Philippians a beautiful Hymn describes the descent of Jesus Christ, saying that,

... who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of slave, being born in human likeness (Philippians 2:6-7). The hymn presents Christ as the ultimate model for Christian behaviour and action.<sup>6</sup> The very root of Christ's life

was absolute surrender to God. He came as a man whom God had sent into the world and as a man who had nothing in Himself but who every day depended upon God and waited for God to teach Him and speak words through Him – to show Him the works He had to do. The Son can do nothing of Himself (John 5:19).<sup>7</sup> The following points show that how Jesus surrendered Himself to God.

Jesus found it a great joy to submit to the Father for the scripture says, “sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears you have opened; burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, “Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me, I delight to do your will, O My God, and your law is within my heart” (Psalm. 40:6). Jesus knew that God did not just desire sacrifice or the ritualistic way of doing things. Rather, God desires obedience from a yielded and surrendered heart, a heart that only desired to please Him. Such was Jesus' attitude as He came down on earth to die for the sins of humanity.<sup>8</sup> Hence, our submission must be with the right attitude, that is an attitude of joy, focusing on Christ as our example.

#### **1.1.1. Absolute Surrender of Jesus**

Jesus, in response to the will of the Father, demonstrated what it means to be fully human when He took upon Himself the form of a man and in so doing voluntarily and gladly chose both dependence and obedience.<sup>9</sup> Jesus lived a life of absolute surrender to God. He lived and he died for God's will, God's honour, and God's kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

What do we find when we look at Christ? The very root of Christ's life was absolute surrender to God. He came as a man whom God had sent into the world and as a man who had nothing in Himself but who every day depended upon God and waited for God to teach Him and speak words through Him – to show Him the works He had to do. The Son can do nothing of Himself (John 5:19).<sup>11</sup>

### 1.1.2. The Humility of Jesus

In the Gospel of John, we have the inner life of our Lord laid open to us. Jesus speaks frequently of his relation to the Father, of the motives by which he is guided, of his consciousness of the power and spirit in which he guided, of his consciousness of the power and spirit in which he acts.<sup>12</sup> The life of entire self-denial, of absolute submission and dependence upon the Father's will, Christ found to be one of perfect peace and joy. He lost nothing by giving all to God, and God. God honoured his trust, and did all for him, and then exalted him to his own right hand in glory. And because Christ had thus humbled himself before God, and God was ever before him, he found it possible to humble himself before men too, and to be the Servant of all. His humility was simply the surrender of himself to God, to allow him to do in him what he pleased, whatever men around might say of him, or do to him.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.1.3. Surrender of Will

Jesus surrendered His own will. This is the last thing we let go. Humans would rather be a king in a cottage than a servant in a place. But Jesus, who had created all things and ruled the whole creation, stooped to be a servant in a place. But Jesus, who had created all things and ruled the whole creation, stooped to be a servant in His own world – to be controlled by His Father's will and the will of others; to hold Himself in constant subjection to the people around him; to comfort the disciples who learned upon Him and claimed Him as a brood of children would a fond mother; even to submit to the very enemies that at last deprived Him of His liberty and His life. And He yielded all, step by step, sacrifice by sacrifice, until at last He was "led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).<sup>14</sup> Like him, the Christian temper enables us to yield our personal will, to be subject one to another in the fear of God and to count ourselves the servants of God, waiting on His

bidding, listening to his word and surrendering all to his supreme command.

### 1.1.4. Love as Unconditional Self – Abandonment

In Jesus Christ the unity of love was fully realised. His self-surrender to God was concretely borne by His act of love towards the people for whose sake He willingly died.<sup>15</sup>

To love Jesus is like loving another human being, and the love for Him implies a total surrender. It is about a willingness to share even in his destiny of death. The wish to love unconditionally meets its limit because surrendering totally to another person implies the absurd risk of following that person even to hell. The only person who can really be loved unconditionally is the one who possess the divine characteristics found in Jesus Christ. In him, we have 'only one who can be loved with absolute security and reliability... who possesses the purity and unconditionality and who is totally accepted and united with God'. Hence, a love for Jesus cannot be compared to absurdity of the willingness to surrender as far as damnation.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Christian Obedience and Surrender: A Social Engagement

Christian obedience should always be based on surrender to a person, not simply acceptance of an obligation. It is surrender to love, not submission to a duty. Far from being incompatible with obedience, surrender provides the motive for obedience. We should obey because he has won our hearts in love.<sup>17</sup> If He has not, our focus should not be so much on obedience as on knowing his love. For once we get that solidly in place, obedience begins to take care of itself.

Apart from love, obedience is simply an act of obligation. As a response to love, duty becomes an act of devotion. God wants our devotion, not simply our acts of duty. Exploring the role of surrender in Christian spirituality, Francis de Sales distinguishes between two aspects of the will of God – what he calls God's "Signified will" and the "will of His good pleasure."<sup>18</sup>

While God's "signified will" invites the surrender of active obedience, the "will of God's pleasure" invites a more passive, gentle surrender. Through it God invites us to yield to his way, to prefer HIS way to our own. He invites us to learn to prefer His reign over our life to our own reign. Surrender to the "will of God's good pleasure is, according to Francis, trust in God's love.<sup>19</sup>

Christ perfectly illustrates both form of surrender. He submitted Himself to God's authority and perfectly did as God command. This was His active surrender to God's revealed will. But He went beyond this. He also trusted the will of God's good pleasure, choosing and trusting God's love and resting confidently in God's will.<sup>20</sup>

Surrender and obedience are closely related. The surrender God desires begins in the heart and express itself in behaviour. It involves both an active embracing of God's designated will and a passive acceptance of his permissive will. Knowing the trustworthiness of his love is the foundation for both.<sup>21</sup>

Submission means learning, resting, trusting and abandoning all of ourselves to the Lord. Jesus set us an example by leaning on, and trusting the Father throughout His life. Right to the end, on the cross He trusted in the father as He yielded Himself to the will of God.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.1. Concerns of Justice

Love cannot exclude concern for any human being, because all humans bear the image of God, whose heart is increasingly becoming our heart. Alfred Adler says that the single most important criterion of psychological health is what he calls *social health*. It doesn't allow me to limit my interest to those within my tribe – whether tribal boundaries are understood in religious, ethnic or national terms. Instead it leads to a sense of oneness with all human beings – connection with all of God's children. Nothing less than this is worthy of being called genuine love, for this is the love that flows from the heart of God.<sup>23</sup>

The church in India should become a church for others, or rather People's Church promoting the values of the Kingdom, such as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and dialogue. The kingdom-centred and Abba-oriented approach of the Church in the pluralistic context of India challenges her for a radical solidarity with the people who undergo poverty, marginalization and oppression in various ways. At the same time, the church of this century should be the one that aspires and strives for unity among the churches acknowledging each other's failures and be a church that is open with a transcending spirit, ready to accept the goodness and truth of every religion in a spirit of harmony and unity of the entire universe. The church has to become a true Jesus Community in its dynamic way, a community of mutual love, sharing and communion and acting at the grass-root level, taking care of the marginalized and the poor.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2. Concerns of Equality

Biblical equality refers to fundamental biblical principle that every human being stands on equal ground before God; there is no group of persons that is inherently more or less worthy than another. It follows from this principle that there is no moral or theological justification for permanently granting or denying a person status, privilege, or prerogative solely on the basis of that person's race, class, or gender.<sup>25</sup>

The truth of the equality of all persons under God is grounded in creation. Genesis 1:26-27 and 5:1-2 states that both male and female humans bear God's image equally and without distinction. Both have been commanded equally and without distinction to take dominion, not one over the other but both together, over the rest of God's creation for the glory of the Creator. The essential equality of all people is foundational to the message of Jesus Christ, who insisted that the concern of his disciples be the exercise of submission and servanthood, rather than the effort to claim or attain status and authority (Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27).<sup>26</sup>

In the new covenant, God shows no favouritism for one group of people over another (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11; James 2:8-9). And believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted in prophetic ministry without respect to age, gender, or social status (Acts 2:17-18). According to Galatians 3:26-28, all believers are “sons,” or heirs, in Christ; there is no longer any distinction in spiritual privilege or status between either Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:7 states that husband and wife are equal heirs of God’s gift of life, and Romans 8:15-17 declares that all believers are adopted sons of God, and hence “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”<sup>27</sup>

God created both man and woman as equals. He created man in His own image, and in His image, He created them as male and female. There is no inequality or disparity in God, and therefore, there is no inequality or disparity in in His image the woman.<sup>28</sup> Jesus vision included an inclusive society where none is marginalized on the basis of colour, creed or gender. He envisioned a society characterized by belonging and community feeling.

### 2.3. Ecological Concern

Genesis 1:26-28 interpreted as the basis for stewardship-humans as stewards ruling on behalf of God. God as an absentee landlord put humans in charge of his property. Earth has provided food, shelter, beauty and many other riches to sustain the body and the spirit of humanity. In return, humans have assumed these riches as their right rather than the contribution of their partners in the earth community. The meaning of the text is enriched by this perception of eco-justice. Certainly, this requires a new commitment to the earth and her future.<sup>29</sup>

Appreciation of creation’s goodness, acceptance of our responsibility as image of God, compassion for all our fellow creatures, are at the heart of the biblical text. Life is given through the creativity of God. As such it is to be cherished and safeguarded. Stewardship of God’s creation is about affirming, cherishing and enabling to flourish all life-oriented values.<sup>30</sup>

Love cannot exclude ecological concern for the planet.<sup>31</sup> The created order contained the wisdom of God, which is grounded on common good. God has created everything so that humans could lead a life of quality with all the realizable potentials (Gen. 1:29-30; 2:8-9). Human beings are vested with the responsibility to be co-stewards of retaining and restoring God’s creation for the present and future generations.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.4. Women’s Concern

Jesus’ mother, Mary, has been a model of surrender. In fact, more than any other character in scripture, Mary embodies the full extent of what it means to surrender oneself to God. She was a flesh-and-blood woman who made an astonishing commitment to put herself at God’s disposal when the angel announced to her that she would carry the saviour in her womb. The rest of her life offered her the opportunity to make good on that promise.<sup>33</sup>

There was nothing about Mary from an outward perspective that would make her worthy of “who’s who in Israel” or any list of “Most Widely Admired Women,” let alone qualify her to carry the son of God in her body. Having no idea what her yes would mean for her, she surrendered: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).<sup>34</sup>

The odds were stack against Mary, for she was a young woman betrothed to be married and she stood the chance of single parenthood, should Joseph reject her. More worrying than that is the fact that Mary stood the chance of being stoned to death for adultery and getting pregnant out of wedlock.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, marry chose to surrender to God’s plan and purpose and yielded her body and life for the Saviour of the world to be born, nurtured and raised up. When we submit, it is with this attitude, that we can trust God to make all that He’s purposed come to pass. When we yield and surrender, we are taking a step of faith and trust, knowing that our obedience will be pleasing to God and bring honour and glory to His Name.<sup>36</sup>

God may call any person or community into service to fulfil God's purposes in the world. No particular community is closer or more important to God than another. Hence, women also should be included in the service of God.

## 2.5. Liberation Concern

Liberation lies in total surrender. If we hold something with us, it is not full surrender. Full surrender means bringing all pluses and minuses to Lord's feet with no concealment and reservation. Less than total surrender will not serve any purpose, as for liberation is concerned.<sup>37</sup> God went to greater lengths to set human free. He sacrificed His own son to release humans from the grip and clutches of Sin and Satan. God's only begotten Son died to set Human free! (John 3:16). The son of God had to die to purchase our freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Salvation and deliverance from deceit requires spiritual rebirth, which God offers to all who will receive it! However, salvation and deliverance is a profound and holy calling upon the life of the one being called to it. His offer of salvation demands unconditional surrender and complete surrender and a reversal from our sinful ways and attitudes. Acceptance of that gift of God's grace is confirmed by the heart of the one who has accepted it and by the change in attitude, activities and character of the "born again" Christian.<sup>39</sup>

## 3. Love is the Fulfilment of Our Humanity

Love is the true point of contact between God and humankind. Humankind is made in the image of God, and the image of God is the capacity of self-surrender. The more kind and loving a man or woman are, the most like God he or she is. A good man or woman prefers others before himself/herself. Therefore, when Christians are commanded to love, the command is much a judgment against unloveliness as it is a pre-scripture to be lovely.<sup>40</sup>

Our service draws us closer to God. Hence, our service to God must flow from love. Jesus said to Peter, in response to his

declaration of undying love for Him, "if you love me feed my sheep." With our works we demonstrate our love for Jesus. If we fail to serve God in whatever way He deems fit for us, then, we have failed in our redemption and response to His love, and have not fully appreciated or understood what the Lord has done for us.<sup>41</sup>

If the core of Christian obedience is listening to God's will, the core of surrender is voluntarily giving up our will. Only love can induce us to do this. But even more remarkable, not only can love make it possible, it can make it almost easy. Surrender to anything other than love would be idiocy. Surrender involves too much vulnerability to be a responsible action in relation to anything other than unconditional love. Ultimately, of course, this means that absolute surrender can only be offered to Perfect Love. Only God deserves absolute surrender, because only God can offer absolute dependable love.<sup>42</sup>

Love is the fulfilment of everything that makes us human. The ability to care deeply for others and to place their interests ahead of our own is the capstone of psychospiritual development.<sup>43</sup> Love aligns us with the basic design plan for the universe. Christians understand that the love of God is the most basic ingredient in the cosmos. From the beginning love has been the way of creation, because creation is of God.<sup>44</sup>

James Olthuis describes this cosmic dynamic of Love as follows:

To love is to let love well up and stream through us as the beat, plus, and rhythm of our lives, connecting us to ourselves, our neighbours, the whole family of earth's creatures, and God, the alpha and omega of love. To love (which is to live) is to be seeking, fostering, and sustaining connections with that which is different and other – without domination, absorption, or fusion, in delight, in care, in compassion.<sup>45</sup> Because God is love, and because human beings are made in God's image. Love is who we

are. Love is not, first and foremost, something that we do. More basically, it is who we are.

It is in loving (or not loving) that we are (or are not) human. It is in heeding that call of love – in making life-affirming connections – that we become human... loving is not merely one thing among others that we are called to do – an extraordinary achievement, a heroic gesture that completes ordinary acts and raises them to a higher level. Love is not an additive, a spiritual supplement reserved for saints... loving is of the essence of being human, the connective tissue of reality, the oxygen of life.<sup>46</sup> The point of being human is to learn to love.

### Conclusion

Submission is an attitude and act of the will. It is a decision and choice one has to make. Like everything else, God gives us the option to decide what we want to do. A decision to love and serve God requires us to also adjust our minds, attitudes and hearts, and to yield Him and to the people He has placed in our lives.

Jesus set an example for us when He “made Himself of no reputation...” in other words He set aside His deity and voluntarily came to earth in the likeness of man to redeem us. He humbled himself, which was a choice and act of His will. No one forced him to do it... out of his own heart, his love for humanity and desire to see God’s purpose fulfilled, He yielded His life. It is an awesome lesson for us to learn.

Submission is more than obedience. It must be done with joy. Again, the attitude must be right. The Bible says that the “joy of the Lord is our strength.” When we understand God’s purpose and align our will and attitude to it by surrendering and yielding with joy, the Lord gives us the grace and strength to do what we need to do.

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## End Notes

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## A Critical Reading of *Vāstu* (architecture) in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* from the Perspective of the Marginalized<sup>1</sup>

Satvasheela Pandhare\*

### Introduction

It is said that "*Sabai bhumi Gopal ki, nahi kisi ki mālki*", meaning, 'no one else, but God is the owner of the whole land'. In 1951 Vinoba Bhave used this slogan while promoting the *Bhoodan* Movement (Land gift movement) to make people understand that land is the nature's gift to humanity and each person is dependent on it. With this slogan he encouraged the landlords to donate a small portion of their land to the landless people.<sup>2</sup>

Though it is true that God is the owner of whole land and that everyone must get it for use, with the development of civilization, private ownership of land became the norm. Thus, one who was able to hold the biggest portion of land became the landlord. The one with huge possession of land was regarded high and subsequently the biggest landlord became the king. Thus, during the monarchical rule in India, Brahmins changed the meaning of "*Gopal*" (God) to *Raja* (king) and "*Sabai bhumi Gopal ki*" then became "*Sabai bhumi Raja ki*" (King is the owner of the whole land).<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the king became the authority for the distribution of land, who according to his wish was free to assign the portion of land to his subject. However, from Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* it could be understood that the land distribution was biased against the

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lower caste of the society. Also, the construction on the land was favouring the powerful and the uppercaste communities.

Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* is considered as a guideline for land distribution and architecture in India. This paper is presenter's humble attempt to study about the building strategies and land distribution in Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* from the perspective of the marginalized communities, who are landless victims of our times.

The ideas in this paper are presented by largely depending on the translation done by R. Shamasastri. The paper is developed using Analytical method.

### **I) A Brief Introduction about Kautilya**

Kautilya was an Indian statesman and philosopher. He was the Chief Advisor and Chief Minister of the Indian Emperor Chandragupta, the first ruler of the Mauryan Empire (321-297 BCE). Mauryan Empire is well-known for its strong control over the resources that were gathered from different parts. It was also renowned for its administration.<sup>4</sup>

The name 'Kautilya' signifies that the author of *Arthasāstra* belonged to the *Kutila* family or race. The word *Kutila* has a negative connotation since in Sanskrit it means crooked or wicked.<sup>5</sup> It is believed that Kautilya's personal name was Visṣṇugupta. However, he was popularly known as Chanakya. There are diverse views about his birthplace. Some believe that he was a Brahmin from South India whereas others assign his birthplace to North India. He was a professor of Political Science and Economics at the University of Taxila in Rawalpindi District of the Punjab province of Pakistan, where he had studied. He had thorough knowledge of Vedic literature.<sup>6</sup>

It is believed that Kautilya was the supporter, promoter and protector of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya of Magadha (in Bihar). Before Chandragupta, Magadha was ruled by king Dhana Nanda, who was known as an arrogant, greedy and wicked king. He was addicted to accumulate money; hence he used to levy unfair taxes on the poor.<sup>7</sup>

Initially Kautilya and king Dhana Nanda had good relations but slowly Dhana Nanda developed dislike towards Kautilya for his bold speech. It is told that king Dhana Nanda once humiliated Kautilya during a royal feast and ordered him to leave the banquet hall. He was asked to get up from the seat that was meant for a learned Brahmin. Kautilya challenged the king and the court to prove if anyone was as intelligent as he. Dhana Nanda became angry and asked the guards to chase him out of the court and punish him. However, Kautilya escaped this punishment through the intervention of Rakshasa, who was known for his superhuman energy.<sup>8</sup> Because of this insult Kautilya vowed to destroy the monarch and his family.<sup>9</sup>

As Kautilya was thinking about taking revenge with Dhana Nanda, he met Chandragupta, who in the first meeting itself impressed Kautilya with his intelligence. Chandragupta belonged to a poor family. Kautilya decided to educate him and train him in politics, warfare and economics.<sup>10</sup> Chandragupta Maurya was disinterested in the affairs of the state and thus became a tool in the hands of Kautilya.<sup>11</sup> However, he was impressed by the teachings of Kautilya. Once Chandragupta was equipped for the warfare, Kautilya organized a small army for him to attack Magadha. His strategy was to go slow, steady and systematic. Kautilya and Chandragupta made a deceitful and diplomatic plan to attack Magadha. While Chandragupta's army was ready, Kautilya misguided the army of Dhana Nanda saying that Chandragupta had withdrawn from the war. However, on the other hand, he asked Chandragupta to attack the capital Patliputra (Present Patna). Thus they were succeeded in overthrowing the Nanda dynasty and Chandragupta was crowned as the king. Kautilya became the Chief Minister in the kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, it looks like Kautilya is credited highly ignoring Chandragupta's potentials and conviction to fight for justice. They both, as a team made a perfect combination of intelligence and bravery that are required for war as well as administration of the country.<sup>13</sup>

Kautilya is regarded not only for his practical thinking but for quickly putting his thoughts into action. Though the plan he made along with Chandragupta to attack Magadha was deceitful, Chandragupta was adored by his subjects for justice and equity.<sup>14</sup> It was believed that he brought-in reformation and reorganisation.<sup>15</sup>

## II) Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* (Science of Politics)

Kautilya defined *Arthaśāstra* as the branch of knowledge which deals with the acquisition and preservation of dominion. It contains the branches of internal and foreign administration, civil and criminal law as well as the art of warfare. Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* was produced probably in the last quarter of the fourth century B.C.<sup>16</sup> There are various opinions regarding the date of the *Arthaśāstra*. According to the research done by German scholars the *Arthaśāstra* came into existence in the Mauryan Age. On the other hand, some scholars observe that though some insertions that may have been done in the existing text reflect the later date, most of the work belongs to the Mauryan period, which began with the reign of Chandragupta and ended after the time of Asoka.<sup>17</sup>

The *Arthaśāstra* is divided into 15 great *Adhikaranas* (sections) with 180 *Prakaranas* (sub-divisions). For Kautilya, the source of humankind is *artha*. In other words, it is earth that contains human. Thus, for him, *Arthaśāstra* is the science which shows how to acquire and preserve the earth. Thus *Arthaśāstra* is the science which deals with the acquisition and maintenance of land.<sup>18</sup>

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is the combination of the theories he developed for the organization of army and warfare, the information he gained through political ties with other kingdoms and his practical knowledge about economical principles.<sup>19</sup> Thus it is of great interest and importance not only to students of Sanskrit literature, but also to students of Indian History. It throws light on the material, social, political condition of the ancient Hindus during third and fourth centuries B.C.<sup>20</sup>

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* has different dimensions. It is considered to be of significant help in understanding the Indian architecture (*vāstu*). Nevertheless, its core focus is on Indian Science of Polity, Economy, Commerce and Civics. For some, Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is the description of the Mauryan Empire, whereas some may think that it sets guidelines for government to rule. However, it should be noted that Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is a normative plan rather than a description of existing conditions. It is also a text-book on general administration.<sup>21</sup> Wendy Doniger terms the *Arthaśāstra* as the 'compendium of advice for a king.'<sup>22</sup>

It is observed that Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* provides two important principals for personal and organizational wellbeing:<sup>23</sup>

- a) The principle of 'Acquisition of Resources', which motivates one to acquire and sharpen capabilities to carry out her/his responsibility.
- 2) The principal of 'Retention of Acquired Resources', which implies the development of an organisational culture in which the relation between superior-subordinate, teamwork and collaboration contributes to one's professional well-being.

Given the nature of guidelines that project the Empire as the sole controller, Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is even called as 'the Bible of Imperialism.'<sup>24</sup>

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is patriarchal in nature. E.g., it does not recognize capacity of the individuals. Sons were not allowed to live independently until the parents or ancestors were alive.<sup>25</sup> It discriminates the outcastes, eunuchs, idiots, lunatics, blind and lepers, for they have been barred from family inheritance. It is also not quite favourable to the women. The sisters/daughters had no claim over the property of their parents except the jewelleries. 'The fallen women' and their children were provided with education. They were used to be trained in languages, music and dancing.<sup>26</sup> Thus in Hindu civilization a scientific provision for pleasure of the citizens was carefully made.

### III) 'Vāstu' (architecture) in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*

The word 'Vāstu' is derived from the root Sanskrit word, 'Vās', which means 'to reside'. It also means 'Vāsna', which means 'desire'. Hence, 'Vāstu' deals with living life both in accordance with desire and reality.<sup>27</sup> *Vāstu* is based on the principal of maintaining a balance in proper direction, of five elements viz., air, water, fire, earth and space of which human body and the whole universe is made up.<sup>28</sup>

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* contributes significantly to the understanding of Indian architecture (*vāstu*) by formulating rules regarding construction of forts, royal residences, highways, and immovable property which includes both earth (*dharā*) and building (*harmya*). However, it should be noted that the *Arthaśāstra* being the Indian Science of polity, economics, commerce and civics, it deals with *vāstu* only incidentally in connection with polity and civics. Because of his primary focus on the Science of Polity in ancient India, Kautilya gave utmost importance to the construction of forts and royal residential area.<sup>29</sup> The texts devoted to other sciences but seldom examining architecture may deal with a few topics. However the texts belonging to various *Arthaśāstra*, has significant contribution in facilitating us with understanding of Indian architecture.

Kautilya defines *Vāstu* as houses, fields, gardens, buildings of any kind (*setubandhah*), lakes and tanks.<sup>30</sup> In its broad sense, *Vāstu* means architecture that includes the earth (*dharā*), building (*harmya*), conveyance (*yāna*) and bedstead (*paryāṅka*).<sup>31</sup> While the *dharā* (earth) can be said to include choice sites<sup>32</sup> conducive to constructions, the *harmya* (building) includes *prāsāda* (castle), *maṇḍapa* (a temporary shed), *sabhā* (private meeting), *sālā* (hall) and *prapā* (reservoir of water). It should be noted that the term *vāstu* primarily denotes villages, towns, forts, commercial sites, dwelling houses and cities.<sup>33</sup> The Hymn in *Agnipurāṇa* (106) devoted to architecture indicates that it secondarily implies even the sculpture which is the handmaid of architecture.<sup>34</sup>

The texts totally devoted to *vāstu* or architecture such as *Mānasāra*, which is considered as one of the authoritative treaties of *Vāstuśāstra*<sup>35</sup> primarily deals with the things on which architecture depends, e.g., the fitness of parts of fabric, agreeable harmony between the several parts; different branches of architecture such as building, selection of sites, examination of soil etc.<sup>36</sup>

### IV) Place of the Marginalized Community in *Vāstu*

An Indian king had two special duties: 1) preserving the class and caste system and 2) providing order.<sup>37</sup> Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* provides instructions for the king to maintain the hierarchy as well as the administration.

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* directed that the Brahmins should be provided with forests so that they could do some plantation, engage with religious learning and perform penance. These forests must be made safe from any danger to the living or non-living being. Plantation of delicious fruit trees, thorn-less trees was prescribed to plant. Provision for a huge lake of water for king as well as harmless animals was made in the land for king's recreation and sports.<sup>38</sup>

The *Śūdras* were either agricultural workers and day-labourers, or artisans such as tanners. As Kautilya maintained the tasks of the *Śūdras* are, "service of the twice-born, engaging in an economic calling (viz., agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade) and the profession of the artisan and the actor."<sup>39</sup>

The king is given freedom to carry on mining operations and manufacture, exploit timber and elephant forest, offer facilities for cattle-breeding and commerce, construct roads for traffic, both by land and water, and set up market towns. He was also asked to construct reservoirs (*sētu*), filled with water either perennial or drawn from some other source. He may also provide may provide with sites, roads, timber, and other necessary things to those who construct reservoirs in collaboration with each other. Whoever stays away from any kind of co-operative construction, shall have

a share in the expenditure, but shall have no claim to the profit.<sup>40</sup> Thus the contribution of the inhabitants was given importance but not the consent for construction on the land.

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* prescribed certain rules on the village-life. Only the forest-hermits (*vānprastha*), the native people, those who are born in the village were allowed to enter into the village of the kingdom. The villages were banned to have any sports or recreation activities. The villagers were not allowed to earn extra money by exchanging commodities. They were restricted to work and were not supposed to waste time in other activities. Hence actors, dancers, singers, drummers, clowns were not allowed inside the village.<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that actors, dancers, singers, drummers, clowns were the lower caste people, whose livelihood was dependent on these activities as the caste-system assigned them.<sup>42</sup> Banning their entry in the village would push them to face starvation for lack of money and food. Thus, in the concept of *vāstu* in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* the lower class community is excluded. On the other hand the uppercaste Brahmins are given a comfortable life. The services of some of these lower castes would be rather utilized for maintaining day-to-day life of the uppercastes, e.g., clearing roads of traffic, guarding the boundary (*antpāla*). *Āṇḍālas*, wild tribes (*aranyačara*), hunters (*pulinda*), archers (*sābara*) were used for guarding the boundary.<sup>43</sup> However, it is interesting to note that the guard of the inner apartment was required to be deformed, either lame or hunched-back, dull-wit so that he would not have sensual indulgence. He is required to be a man of self-control and devoid of any attachment to the world.<sup>44</sup>

Kautilya directed that the Royal buildings should be constructed on strong grounds and it should face either the north or the east side, where royal teachers and priests could perform sacrifices, water reservoir and ministers should stay. On the other hand, artisans manufacturing worsted threads, cotton threads, bamboo-mats, skins, armours, weapons, and gloves, as well as the

people of *Śūdras* were assigned dwellings to the West side.<sup>45</sup> The notion of purity and pollution was sustained so highly that even the cremation or burial grounds for the lower castes and the upper castes were designed in different places. For the lower castes, it was situated to the North or the East, whereas for the people of the highest caste it should be to the South side of the city. Violation of this rule was subject to fine. The dwellings of the *Āṇḍālas* were designed beyond the burial grounds.<sup>46</sup>

The outcaste men were assigned a serious responsibility of building a grand treasury at the extreme boundary of the kingdom so that it remains safe from all kinds of dangers and calamities. The outcaste men are termed as *abhityakta-puruṣa*, meaning criminals, who, after the completion of the building were put to death to safeguard the secrecy of the plan.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the life of the outcastes was exposed to danger in the most safest '*vāstu*' meant for the empire and the uppercastes.

## V) Land Distribution and Lower Castes

Kautilya clearly stated that some land could be sold by one citizen to another. Kinsmen, neighbours (*upvāsa* – meaning the original inhabitants)<sup>48</sup> and creditors shall have the right to purchase landed property (on sale) in the order that it is mentioned. After that, others who are outsiders may request for purchase.<sup>49</sup> Roger Boesche argues that this passage clearly implies private ownership, although perhaps someone leasing land for life from the state is just transferring this lease to another for a price.<sup>50</sup>

Kautilya maintained that the king should make grants of lands to certain people for the benefit of the state. Priests, preceptors, Brahmins should be granted land and exempt from fines and taxes. Their heirs also were granted this privilege. From this it becomes clear that the privilege was given to those who were already living comfortably. On the contrary people from the lower castes were not considered for the privilege.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that the Kautilya's land distribution was a biased endeavour in which

Brahmins would receive the right of private ownership, although others who receive grants of land could not sell or mortgage that property. As a result, their ownership was only partial.

Perhaps the biased attitude as reflected in the guidelines as that of Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*, further must have developed in denial of land to the Dalits. In the present context, one of the major struggles of the outcaste Dalits is the basic right of livelihood which can be secured with the land; but this basic right is denied to them and they are forced to suffer. The majority of the Dalit community is the victim of the prevailing anti poor systems and structures. E.g., in the State of Maharashtra, most of them, in order to satisfy their growing need, have occupied *Gairan* lands (Grazing Land) for shelter. According to the Supreme Court Judgment, the landless laborers, the scheduled castes/tribes are allotted the grazing land. Also in 1960 the Government of Maharashtra passed a resolution of extension of the village (*Gavthan Wistar*) by incorporating *Gairan* lands in the village territory. The Dalits were given plots in this land. But the uppercastes and the rich people of the villages do not allow the Dalits to occupy it. Therefore they remain landless in spite of the resolutions passed in their favour.

Kautilya believed that participation in the development project should be invited from those who don't have interest to receive. He gave importance to life; however for him power and capacities are seen as the channels to support life.<sup>51</sup> In this light a critical study of Kautilya's *Arthśāstra* only underlines the fact that life was denied to the powerless outcastes by discrimination and marginalization. It is in such a context Kautilya's *Arthśāstra* is an oppressive writing. This makes it possible to even critique the Indian nationalists who use these writings to make claims of the 'golden past' of the country.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* is a normative plan and also a text-book on general administration. It is considered as the Bible of

Imperialism for it guides the king for having complete control over the resources and the subject.

Having studied the concept of *Vāstu* and distribution of land as prescribed in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*, it could be safely said that it is discriminative in nature. It favoured the uppercastes and discriminates the lower-castes. Kautilya denied minimum safe life to the outcastes of his time in spite of their great contribution in agriculture and in maintenance of the village.

Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*, probably could be understood as a pathway to perpetuate discrimination against Dalits and deny them land and the minimum respectable living for which they struggle from generation to generation.

## End Notes

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