BEING, BELIEVING, BECOMING

Metaphysical Thoughts and Spiritual Insights

Festschrift in Honour of

Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS

Association of Christian Philosophers of India

ACPI Special Series - 7

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Edited by

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***Editors*: Dr. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal**
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Introductory Part

Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS

THE PERSON AS THE REASON

PHOTO

Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS

A Short Sketch of His Life

1959 (Jan 19)	Born at Nariampara, Kattappana, Kerala
1976	Completed SSLC at Nariampara
1976-79	Minor Seminary at SFS Seminary, Ettumanoor
1979-80	Novitiate at Salesianum, Visakhapatnam
1980 (June 10)	First Profession
1980-83	Philosophy at St John's, Hyderabad
1983-84	Regency at Fransalian School, Jonai, Assam
1984-88	Theology at St Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore,
1985	Perpetual Profession at Vinayalaya, Bangalore,
1988	Ordination to Priesthood at Vallakadavu
1988-89	Assistant Priest at Sacred Heart Church, Nagaland
1988-89	Visiting Lecturer to St Peter's and Suvidya College
1989-92	Doctoral Studies in Philosophy at Innsbruck
1992	Resident Staff at Suvidya College
1992	Member of the ACPI
1994-2002	Member of the ACPI Executive Committee
2002- 06	Secretary of the ACPI
2006 -12	President of the ACPI
1992-95	Dean of Philosophy of Suvidya College
1993-95	Director of Formation of Northeast Province
1995	At the General Chapter at Geneva
1997	At Extraordinary General Chapter (Bangalore)
1997-2003	Associate Editor, *Fransalian International*
1996-99	Provincial Councilor, Northeast Province
2004-09	Registrar of Suvidya College
2009	Second Doctorate in Indian Philosophy (Bangalore University)
2009-10	Senior Consultant of Philosophy Syllabus at IGNOU
2010	Releasing of the ACPI Encyclopedia, New Delhi
2011	Third Doctorate in Theology (St Peter's Bangalore)
2011	Paper at International Philosophy Congress at Jaganath University, Dhaka
2012-15	Visiting Professor to Symbiosis University, Pune
2012-14	Rector of Suvidya College
2004-14	Chief Editor of the *Fransalian International*
2014-20	Provincial of Northeast India Province
2015-20	Chair-person of the MSFS Provincials of India Forum (PIF)
2015-18	National Vice President of CRI Section of Priests,
2018- 21	National President of CRI Section of Priests
2020	Releasing of the CRI Encyclopedia at Guwahati
2020 –	Rector of Morning Star Regional Seminary, Barrackpore
2022	Formation of the Formators Course in Rome
2022 (8 May)	Audience with Holy Father Pope Francis

FOREWORD

The thought of bringing forth a *Festschrift* in honour of **Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS** is one of the best ways to acknowledge and thank a sagacious and scholarly person of the country. It is no surprise that no sooner the proposal was made than more than thirty contributors came forward. Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS deserves such an honour! I congratulate the members of the ACPI and thank ***Dr. Johnson Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap*** and ***Dr. Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil, MSFS*** for having accepted to lead the project.

From 1992, the year when Fr. George Panthanmackel came in contact with the ACPI, he fell in love with it, and he started journeying with the ACPI with undiluted cooperation and commitment, which was most evidently present in the works related to bringing out the first edition of *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in 2010. Besides what he has been to the ACPI, Fr. George has been an untiring scholar with three Doctorates (Western Philosophy, Indian Philosophy and Theology); and he places his vast erudition and experience at the disposal of the Church and the society. Above all, he is a person of *deep faith* in God and *generous heart* to others; a man of *deep faith*, not merely by knowing about it from various perspectives, but mainly by living a life of faith with conviction and commitment; his deep faith was vividly evident in the way he responded to his serious illness! Secondly, a man of *generous heart*: anybody who has come in contact with him will vouch for this truth, and those of us who have closer experience of him will reiterate the same. Besides, he is a man of daring nature: he keeps on asking himself, 'what more can I do?' Many of his creative suggestions have borne fruit. I see that Dr. Fr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS has realized the words of the Book of Proverbs in himself: "Wisdom will abide in your heart and knowledge will comfort your inner self. Foresight will guide you, and understanding will protect you" (Prov. 2:10-11).

I find the title of the Festschrift—***Being, Believing, Becoming***: ***Metaphysical Thoughts and Spiritual Insights***—quite meaningful in relation to Fr. Panthanmackel in many ways; the Editors have chosen

it very thoughtfully. I am sure; in proposing this title, they have taken into consideration the areas of Fr. George's academic specializations and personal interests.

Hence it is quite fitting that we acknowledge the person and the contributions of Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel with a *Festschrift*. I congratulate those of you who have taken the lead by suggesting this idea and by taking it forward. I wish all the best to the editorial team as well as to the contributors. May God bless abundantly the whole-hearted, inspiring, competent and enlightening contribution of all those who are part of this noble project!

25th July 2025
Feast of St. James, the Apostle

Archbishop Vincent Aind
Ranchi, Jharkhand

PREFACE

One's existence has the capacity to be dynamic, transcending and becoming. One's capacity for change shapes one's present and future, and enables one to authentically live in a world of interconnectedness. 'Being, Believing, Becoming'—the title of the *Festschrift* in honour of Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS—illustrates a fundamental desire to be integral in one's personality, holistic in approach, delving deeper into metaphysical concepts on the nature of reality, the mystery of human existence, the spiritual dimension of human pursuit and the timeless wisdom for personal and societal growth, facilitating possible transformation of all. Not merely grappling with abstract ontological questions and discussions on the fundamental notions of existence, our commitment to philosophizing in Indian Christian context demands exploration into concreteness of one's identity as multiple and plural, one's authentic presence in the world, and one's positive experience in the transcendence. Realizing one's potential for transformation through self-discovery, everyone consciously allows oneself in the process of change and transformation culminating in spiritual practices and commitment to societal change.

The interconnectedness of metaphysical thinking, spiritual practices and transformational processes, is witnessed in the life and works of Dr. George Panthanmackel. His metaphysical inquiry shapes his commitment to Faith; his Faith influences the actual experience of growth and transformation to be more authentic and fulfilled version of oneself than before. The power of his sharp inquiry in metaphysical realm, staunch beliefs in Christian values and concrete actions for change, has not only influenced his life, but also the philosophical association, ACPI, he is attached to. His contribution to the ACPI has been fabulous for more than three decades, as an active member, as its secretary and president for a number of years. Fitting it is that the ACPI reflects along with many scholars and confreres of MSFS congregation to which he belongs, on the theme of interconnection among metaphysics, spirituality and journey of transformation.

If 'Being' refers to our fundamental essence, true self and the underlying reality giving rise to our individuality and potentiality, 'Believing' helps us transcend the empirical and into the spiritual, 'Becoming' convinces us of possible transformation. The power of thinking, of belief and of change influences our choices, our experiences and our actions. The journey of life is a journey of embracing the potential, facing challenges, learning from experiences and actively committing oneself for a purposeful change. Holistic approach to life emphasizes that our inner core of being, our beliefs about ourselves and the world, and our continuous process of becoming, are all interconnected and lead us to the discovery of who we are and what we are meant to become.

We, the members of the ACPI and its Executive Committee, wholeheartedly thank Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel for his service and commitment and for what he has been to the association, guiding and directing its way, transforming its face and supporting in all its endeavours. The *Festschrift* in his honour, a special volume with number of articles, is a colourful bouquet of gratitude to him. We appreciate and thank the editors, Dr. Johnson Puthenpurackal and Dr. Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil for their thoughtfulness and efforts in bringing out this edited volume in ACPI special series.

Dr. John Peter Vallabadoss, OFM Cap.
President, ACPI

WORDS OF REMINISCENCE

As I swim back through my memory-stream of the ACPI, I vividly remember to have come across many great and scholarly people at the ACPI and IPC gatherings from 1976 onwards. But in 1997, when I became the ACPI Secretary, I came in close contact with a young and dynamic scholar—a scholar with a *difference*, a scholar with a *human* and *spiritual* touch! He was one of the ACPI executive Committee members, which enabled me to get to know him better at the administrative interactions. That person is none other than ***Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS***! I perceived in him a person who was committed and dependable; I mused within myself, "here is a person with whom I can work together on the platform of the ACPI." History has proved it to be true!

It was a long-cherished dream in many of the ACPI members to publish the research papers in the form of books; but it never got realized until 2002. As the then ACPI President, I proposed it in the General Body and the Executive Committee, and Fr. George Panthanmackel was strongly in support of this plan, and he was very determinate that we must go ahead with it at the earliest; it gave me confidence! That was the beginning of a journey of George and me in the ACPI boat; that journey of mutual support and total trust reached an important harbor in 2010, when the *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy* was released!

It was Fr. George who proposed this daring dream in around 2006; and he found in me someone to take the lead for it. I was trembling! But trusting in God who comes to our help through the instrumentality of persons like Fr. George, I told him, "If you are there, I am there with you!" There began our journey of struggle, but it was a journey of thrill! There was a hotline between us mutually to communicate and consult with each other. Fr. George was able to vibrate his enthusiasm to others, and thus we were a committed group of people working together for this cause. Both George and me have been strong believers in the providence of God; and we experienced it concretely in the various events, unforeseen for the humans, but foreseen by God, and

thus everything was providential! I dare not go into them, as there are too many of them. But I cannot forget the following which made me convinced of his faith and trust in God: as soon as we got the first copy of the Encyclopedia, George suggested that we take it to the chapel, and place it in front of the altar, and celebrate the Holy Eucharist in thanksgiving! I was very much inspired!

There are many other memorable events in our journey together; in fact we complement each other: George is gifted with sharp analytical mind, I am more reflective; and I was not as out-going as he was, because of which he was able to get persons for any work: proof-reading, language-correction, getting a suitable place for the releasing of the Encyclopedia, etc. This complementarity was very useful in our working for the Encyclopedia. I was surprised to note that Fr. George completed two doctorates just around the year of the Encyclopedia-release (2010): one in 2009, the other in 2011! How could he find time for it; he was everywhere with every work related to the Encyclopedia, still he found time! I refer to it only as a pointer to George's intellectual caliber of analytical mind and his disciplined and hard-working nature! For eighteen years we were taking turns in being the President or Secretary of the ACPI; whether he was the president or I was the president, it made no difference. We were not functioning in terms of functional difference; we considered that we were responsible for everything related to the ACPI, and together we worked whole heartedly!

I make a forced stop to these Words of Reminiscence, not because there are no more words, but because there are too many words more. I selectively focused on those points that are mostly unknown. I pray that his life 'inspire' many more persons for many more years.

Dr. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap

WORDS OF APPRECIATION
A Life of Zeal, Scholarship and Service

Fr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS, stands out as a priest whose life and mission are marked by an extraordinary blend of religious zeal, intellectual depth and tireless commitment to service. His journey of life has been one of deep faith, constant learning, and generous dedication to the Church and society. From his early days, his leadership qualities and oratorical skills foreshadowed a life that would inspire countless people in India and beyond.

From his first profession in 1980 to his ordination in 1988, Fr. George embraced the charism of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales with passion. His pastoral assignments, from the Sacred Heart Church in Bhandari, Nagaland, to leadership in formation and governance, have been imbued with a missionary spirit, always seeking to bring Christ's love to the people he serves. Whatever work that he was entrusted with, he carried them out with wholehearted commitment and pastoral sensitivity.

What truly sets Fr. George apart is the breadth and depth of his intellectual life. His academic accomplishments are extraordinary, earning three doctorates: in Philosophy (Innsbruck, Austria), Indian Philosophy (Bangalore University), and Theology (St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore). This triple doctorate is not merely an academic feat; it reflects his restless pursuit of truth and his ability to integrate diverse streams of thought into a coherent vision of faith and reason. His teaching portfolio, spanning philosophy, theology, sociology, literature, and even phonetics, attests to his versatility and mastery in multiple disciplines.

Fr. George's scholarship is prolific. His bibliography reads like a map of the contemporary Catholic intellectual landscape, with over ninety published works, ranging from monographs to philosophical treatises, historical studies and edited encyclopedias. His editorial leadership in monumental projects such as the *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

and the *CRI Encyclopedia* underscores his capacity to synthesize vast bodies of knowledge and coordinate collaborative scholarship at the highest level. His writings reveal a mind equally at home in western metaphysics and Indian philosophical traditions. He addresses themes as varied as the metaphysical foundations of democracy, the spirituality of Vatican II, the ontology of the Trinity, and the challenges of artificial intelligence, all with a clarity and depth that reflect both rigorous training and contemplative insight.

One of Fr. George's distinctive gifts is his extraordinary facility with languages. Fluent in Malayalam, English, and Hindi, he has also learned Lotha, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Assamese, and Bengali, along with classical and scholarly languages such as Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German, French, and Italian. This linguistic breadth allows him to engage original texts, and to make his teaching and writing accessible to diverse audiences. It also signals a profound respect for the people and traditions he encounters, a hallmark of his missionary identity.

Fr. George's influence extends well beyond the classroom and printed page. He has served the Church in significant leadership roles: President of the Association of Christian Philosophers of India (2006–2012), Provincial of the Northeast India Province of the MSFS (2014–2020), Chairperson of the Provincials of India Forum, and National President of the CRI Section of Priests (2018–2021). In these positions, he has combined intellectual vision with pastoral prudence, fostering collaboration, dialogue, and renewal.

His participation in international conferences, formation programs, and ecumenical dialogues demonstrates his commitment to building bridges across disciplines, faith traditions, and cultures. Memorable milestones, such as his audience with Pope Francis in 2022, symbolize the universal dimension of his ministry and the esteem in which he is held.

Despite his many responsibilities, Fr. George has never lost sight of his primary vocation: to live and share the Gospel. His religious zeal is evident in his preaching, his pastoral care, and his ability to inspire in others a love for truth, justice, and holiness. He approaches his work not as an academic exercise, but as a service to the Kingdom of God,

rooted in prayer and sustained by the Salesian spirit of gentleness and love. In Fr. George Panthanmackel we see a rare integration of contemplative depth, scholarly brilliance, and pastoral charity. His life is a testament to what can be achieved when one's talents are placed entirely at the service of God and His people. He challenges us to think deeply, to love generously, and to serve faithfully, reminding us that intellectual excellence and missionary zeal are not opposing paths, but complementary gifts in the life of the Church.

As a teacher, writer, leader, and pastor, Fr. George has touched countless lives. His legacy will not only be measured in books published or offices held, but in the minds enlightened, hearts stirred, and communities strengthened by his witness. In honoring him, we celebrate a life wholly given to the pursuit of truth and the building up of God's people—a shining example of the priestly, prophetic, and shepherding mission in our time.

Jose Panthaplanthottiyil, CMI

JOURNEYING WITH HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

Fr. George Panthanmackel: His intellectual and spiritual evolution stands as a testament to a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and growth. His journey of thought is defined by a constant search for truth, blending reason, spiritual depth, and social engagement. Beginning with the seeds of curiosity in his school days, his intellectual pursuits flourished during his seminary years, matured through his doctoral studies, and culminated in his significant contributions to philosophy, theology, and Christian formation. We try to reflect on the dynamic interplay between Fr. George's intellectual curiosity, disciplined inquiry, and profound spirituality.

1. Earlier Stage

The intellectual journey of Fr. George began in his school days, marked by an insatiable curiosity and a desire to understand the world through reason and reflection. His early education sparked a love for learning, a curiosity not only about the 'what,' but also about the 'why' of everything. The classroom, for him, was not just a place for information, but a space for discovering deeper truths.

This formative period laid the foundation for his later academic pursuits. Fr. George's early exposure to questions about existence, meaning, and morality contributed to the intellectual seeds that would later bloom into his philosophical and theological reflections. These initial intellectual stirrings would be refined and deepened during his time in the seminary, where his questions about life, knowledge, and God found new dimensions.

The seminary formation further clarified and honed his intellectual curiosity; the seminary environment was conducive to the integration of spiritual reflection with intellectual inquiry. It was during these years in the seminary that he began to seriously engage with Christian doctrine, theology, and human existence. His intellectual curiosity,

grounded in classical western thought, began to find a complement in spiritual reflection, as he sought to understand not only the workings of the human mind but also the divine truths revealed in Christian faith. These formative years set the stage for the advanced studies that would come in his later years.

2. Stage of Higher Studies

Fr. George's journey took a significant turn with his higher studies, culminating in three doctorates—Western Philosophy (Innsbruck, Austria), Indian Philosophy (Bangalore, India), and Theology (Bangalore, India). These three academic streams were not merely areas of study for Fr. George; they were ways of synthesising diverse worldviews into a cohesive intellectual framework. In western philosophy, Fr. George delved into the metaphysical and epistemological works of thinkers like Karl Rahner, particularly exploring the metaphysical implications of Christian doctrine. His works, *Nature of Jesus Christ according to Karl Rahner* and *One in Many: An Investigation into the Metaphysical Vision of Karl Rahner*, reflect this deep engagement with western philosophical traditions.

His studies in Indian philosophy brought an enriching perspective on interconnectedness and the metaphysical foundation of existence. His work, *Society in Being: Metaphysical Foundation of Sociology*, shows how Indian philosophical thought influenced his understanding of society, human nature, and the cosmos. His delving deep into spiritual theology, led him to explore the mystical and practical dimensions of Christian spirituality. Through these studies, he developed a robust understanding of the human soul's relationship with God, integrating this spiritual depth with his intellectual pursuits.

This synthesis of Western philosophy, Indian thought, and spiritual theology formed a unique intellectual worldview that guided his scholarly works, teaching, and formative role in the seminary.

3. Stage of Scholarly Contributions

Fr. George's intellectual evolution is reflected in his scholarly contributions. His writings, lectures, and editorial work illustrate the maturation of his thought over time. His books, such as *Coming and Going: An Introduction to Metaphysics from Western Perspectives* and *A Form in Forms: The Form of Postmodernism*, show his ability to bridge western and contemporary philosophical discourses, offering a comprehensive view of metaphysical and ethical issues. His editorial work, particularly with the *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, demonstrates his commitment to advancing the dialogue between Western and Indian philosophical traditions. Moreover, his papers, more than 70 of which were published in national and international journals, cover a wide range of topics, from metaphysics to social philosophy, demonstrating the breadth of his intellectual engagement.

Fr. George's lectures, both in India and abroad, reflected the integration of his philosophical knowledge with spiritual theology. His ability to engage his students and listeners with clarity and accessibility marked him as a teacher who sought to inspire transformative learning in others. His role as a formator in the seminary is pivotal, as he encourages seminarians not only to engage with intellectual inquiry but to live out their learning in their daily lives.

4. Stage of Reflective Life

Fr. George's intellectual and spiritual journey is not confined to his academic work but is deeply reflected in his lifestyle. His moral maturity and spiritual depth are evident in his ethical integrity, guided by principles of justice, compassion, and humility. His spiritual practices, particularly his contemplative prayer life, are central to his personal growth and his ability to integrate his intellectual and spiritual pursuits. In his social relations, Fr. George is known for building meaningful connections with colleagues, students, and peers, and for fostering academic dialogue and spiritual growth in the philosophical community.

Fr. George's intellectual journey is one of constant search and research—a lifelong commitment to knowing and growing. His legacy as a teacher and formator at institutions like Suvidya College, Bangalore, and Morning Star Regional Seminary, Kolkata, has inspired and continues to motivate countless seminarians and scholars to approach learning as a transformative process, not merely an intellectual exercise. His life stands as an invitation for all to embark on a similar journey—a journey that transcends intellectual curiosity and leads to a deeper understanding of the human condition, a greater connection with God, and a more compassionate engagement with the world.

* * * * * * * * * *

In conclusion, we find that Fr. George's journey of thought reflects a seamless integration of western philosophy, Indian thought, and spiritual theology. As we reflect on his life and work, we are reminded of the importance of seeking knowledge and growth, both intellectually and spiritually. His legacy is embodied in his lifelong pursuit of knowledge, which continues to inspire seminarians and scholars, emphasizing the harmonious integration of intellectual, spiritual, and ethical growth. Fr. George's example continues to inspire all who encounter his teachings and writings, urging us to live lives marked by intellectual search, spiritual depth, and ethical integrity.

Vintu Augustine Avittappallil, MSFS

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[This list does not contain several articles, whose publication details are not available, besides the Papers that Dr. George Panthanmackel has presented at various Conferences and Meetings. Special mention must be made of his editing of 238 Units of IGNOU B.A. Philosophy from 2009 to 2010, each unit consisting of around 5000 words. ***Editors***]

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WORDS OF GRATITUDE
'They and You' Love Me, Therefore I Am!

Ontology, which is the science of being, is the core and ground of philosophy. Ontology explains the relation between Being and beings. We do not see the possibility of beings without Being. Beings come from Being. If beings come from Being, how do they come from Being? Why should they come from Being? 'Why should there be beings rather than nothing?' It is a clear fact of experience that we are beings and what we encounter are all beings. One reasonable explanation for the presence of beings is that they all come from Being. Are they there on their own? They cannot be there on their own power because they are finite or limited. Hence, these must be there because of Being which is by its own power. If Being is there totally on its own power, it must be all-powerful. If it is all-powerful, it must be unlimited. If it is unlimited, it must be infinite. If it is infinite, it must be eternal. If it is eternal, it must be the ultimate. If it is ultimate, it must be the unconditioned condition of all other conditions. Hence, Being—which is the all-powerful, infinite, eternal, ultimate, and the unconditioned—is the principle of all finite beings. Since all finite beings come from Being the finitude of the finite beings must also come from Being that is infinite. The finite beings must be limited by Being only since there is nothing outside the domain of Being. If it is so, then, is Being finite? The question is contradictory because the infinite cannot be finite. Although the infinite cannot be finite, the infinite can allow itself to be limited so that finite beings are possible. In this way, there takes place always an 'ontological incarnation' by which the infinite on its own allows itself to be limited in the finite for the sake of the finite. In other words, Being gives itself so that finite can be. The finite beings are the instances of the self-giving of the infinite Being. This self-giving of the infinite completely for the sake of the finite is *agapeic* in nature. That is, Being by its very nature is self-giving or *agapeic*, love. Thus, Being is *agapeic* or love; ontology, by its very nature, is ***agapeic ontology***. One could be justified in saying, *I love therefore I am.* However, the fact is

that I love because Being and other beings give themselves to me. Their love preceded my love for them. Hence, I can honestly say, '***They and You' love me, therefore I am***.

ACPI: It is very true of the members of the 'Association of Christian Philosophers of India' (ACPI). Their encouragement and support, a clear manifestation of the love of Being of beings, of God, has been powerfully experienced by me. The *Festschrift*, an undertaking of the ACPI, is a concrete expression of the same. I would like to thank ***Fr Johnson Puthenpurackal OFM Cap.***, one of the best of all living Indian Christian philosophers, one of the most original and authentic thinkers, and one of the closest friends of mine, for his generosity in sparing his time and energy in bringing out this work in time. ***Fr Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil MSFS***, a long-time friend and confrere, an astute scholar and thinker, and an inspiring example of commitment to a noble cause, deserves my gratitude in contacting numerous persons and getting the articles for the work. ***Fr John Peter Vallabadoss, OFM Cap***., the current President of the ACPI, a long associate of mine, a sincere, humble and gentle philosopher, has to be thanked for organizing this *Festschrift* project. The ***Former Presidents of the ACPI***: I remain ever grateful to Fr Joe Mannath, SDB and Fr Keith D'Souza, SJ.

Contributors to the Festschrift: All the contributors to the volume were very cheerful and more than willing to cooperate with the ACPI in realizing this project, and I remain grateful to each of them. Special Word of gratitude to, **Most Rev. Dr. Vincent Aind**, Archbishop of Ranchi, for his Foreword to the work, ***Rev. Fr Jose Panthaplamthottiyil, CMI*** for his appreciative reflection, and ***Fr Vintu Avittappallil MSFS*** for his special articles. In addition to thanking every member of the ACPI, past and present, I gratefully remember ***Prof. Dr Richard De Smet, SJ*** of happy memory who initiated me to the ACPI in 1992.

Morning Star Regional Seminary: Special gratitude to the Governing Board members of Morning Star Regional Seminary (Archbishop and Bishops of Bengal), and all staff and students of Morning Star Regional Seminary for their loving and encouraging support. Thanks to Fr Ramen Pailan, Fr Nicholas Mariadoss MSFS and my loving Secretary Fr Biju

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Fr George Panthanmackel, MSFS
Rector of Morning Star Regional Seminary, Barrackpore, Kolkata

August 19, 2025

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

We are living in a culture of globalization and market-economy that claims to make human life comfortable and happy—a 'commodified' happiness of market-value and easy availability, a happiness that is limited to the *here* and *now*. Everyone looks to be on the lookout for making the 'present' as comfortable as possible. In such a situation there seems to be hardly any place for the realm of 'inner joy' and 'contentment' in life; there are only a few people who have realized the value of this realm! One of those few persons is **Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS**, who has realized as to how we can find inner joy and contentment, and translated it into his personal life by a life of commitment and discipline with regard to his academics and research, administration and organization, faith and spirituality, manifested in the form of his undiluted trust in God and generosity to others. The ACPI is fortunate to have him as its member from 1992; and with love and enthusiasm he started working with and for the ACPI with sincere cooperation and commitment, which was most evidently present in the works related to bringing out the first edition of *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in 2010. Besides what he has been to the ACPI, Dr. George Panthanmackel has been an untiring scholar with three Doctorates (Western Philosophy, Indian Philosophy and Theology); and he places his vast erudition and experience at the disposal of the Church and the society. In recognition of his contribution to the ACPI and to the academic world, it is quite fitting that the ACPI bring out a *Festschrift* in his honour.

I

By way of 'Introduction' the editors feel obliged to give a 'focused' view on the main theme taken up for this *Festschrift* (I), before introducing the various studies in this Volume (II). It consists of thirty-two scholarly studies, besides the other formalities of requirement for any Festschrift, such as 'Preface,' 'Foreword,' 'Biographical Sketch,' 'Bibliographical List,' 'His Journey of Thought,' Words of 'Reminiscence' and 'Appreciation,' etc. The various studies are grouped into three Parts,

titled with the three terms in the main title of the book, 'Being,' 'Believing,' 'Becoming.' This division into three Parts is not exclusive of one another, although we have taken care to place only those sub-themes that are properly fitting for each part.

The title for this volume is thoughtfully chosen and carefully worded; and hence it has an implied and extended meaning. The three terms of the main title, "Being, Believing, Becoming," refer to the mutually implying three realms of *Cosmos*, *Theos*, *Anthropos*, to use Panikkar's expressions. 'Being' points to the vast realm of reality—all that is! 'Believing' refers to the Divine realm; and 'Becoming' refers to the realm of humans in the process of becoming. These three realms roughly corresponds to Dr. Panthanmackel's three areas of specialization: 'Philosophy' (its subject matter is being or reality), 'Theology' (it is the study of *Theos* or God) and 'Indology' (it deals with human becoming or attaining *mukti*).

The sub-title is "Metaphysical Thoughts and Spiritual Insights"; this too has a meaningful reference. The two phrases, 'metaphysical thoughts' and 'spiritual insights,' point towards two apparently opposed realms of the 'secular' and the 'sacred.' These have been seen as opposed in the traditional 'either/or' thought pattern of binary opposites—'secular' is that which is 'not sacred.' As per the contemporary thought, the binaries are unified in the sense of 'belonging together' (*Zusammengehörigkeit*); Panikkar, in his typical style, uses the expression, 'Sacred Secularity,' blending the two realms. In this volume the three realms of "Being, Believing, Becoming" are considered from the perspective of the 'secular' (philosophy) and the 'sacred' (theology), or to be more precise, from the perspective of 'Sacred Secularity.' Thus the title of this *Festschrift* is quite meaningful in relation to Dr. Panthanmackel's academic specializations and personal interests.

II

The ten studies in first part of this volume are held together by the theme of '**Being**'—the realm of reality. The writers consider the various questions from a philosophical perspective. In the first article by ***Antony***

Kolencherry msfs, the author delves into the foundational theme of human person as a metaphysical reality, taking a foundational approach. It is followed by a related study by ***Suresh M., svd***, on the question of the 'Self' with an analytical and critical study, looked at from the western and Indian philosophical perspectives. The question of the Self is further worked out ***Aby Sebastian, vc,*** taking us to the abstruse world of Kant's *Critiques of Pure Reason*. Making use of Lonergan's insights, ***Maria Arul Anthuvan Tharsis, sdb*** leads us to self-discovery through the process of self-realization, self-understanding, self-knowledge, self-transcendence, and self-development. Brahman, as pure and non-dual consciousness, is the sole reality: this foundational premise of Advaita Vedanta is worked out in the next article by ***Manuel Uppamthadathil, msfs***. Heidegger's existential philosophy has greatly influenced Rahner's theology; it is systematically established by ***Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil msfs*** in his article. Basing himself on Kierkegaard's thought, ***Biju Pallippadan, vc*** clarifies the meaning of faith as a leap and commitment. ***Aloysius Hemrom, sdb*** makes a well-documented study in his article on the primitive religion of the Garos, and the influence of Christianity. ***Stephen Jayard***, in his typical style, looks into the question of 'Question,' considering it in its various implications. ***Kurian Kachappilly, cmi*** delves into the question regarding the relationship between philosophy and theology with the help of three imageries, *regina*, *ancilla*, and *socius*, each representing distinct paradigms of interaction.

The second part consists of eleven articles, and they are held together by '**Believing'**—the Divine Realm. Most of the studies in this part deal with Spiritual Theology. ***Clement Valluvassery-Paily*** opens this part with his study on the relevance of Rahner for the Indian context owing to his inclusive and integral approach. The next study on 'Divine Love' by ***Baviri Suresh Babu msfs*** is based on the teaching and life of Francis de Sales. In the article of ***John Peter Vallabadoss, ofm cap*** Divine love is considered from the Indian perspective as *Bhakti*. ***Sibichen Panthanmackel, msfs*** shows through his exegetical study the inseparability of forgiveness and Christian life. The article by ***Augustine Pamplany, cst*** explores the intersection of religious teachings and psychological science in understanding forgiveness,

bringing forgiveness from the sacred realm to the scientific. ***Sr Johncy Choorathottiyil, smi*** in her article makes a detailed look at the Blessed Virgin Mary as the exemplary model of Christian faith and discipleship. The next study by ***Thumma Mariadas Reddy, msfs*** shows the relevance of Spirituality for the contemporary society. ***Varghese Manimala, ofm cap***, in his article, shows the importance of empowering communities for making spirituality relevant to contemporary times. ***Joy Kachappilly, sdb*** taking inspiration from Gandhiji, dwells on the importance of prayer, supported by a life of ethical discipline. ***Jolly Chackalackel, msfs*** proposes in his article that prayer and contemplation are essential for humans to become better humans. In the concluding study of this part, ***Ivo Coelho, sdb*** argues that religious expression—both linguistic and non-linguistic—is indispensable for articulating, sharing, and deepening religious experience.

The third part, centred on 'human **Becoming**,' contains eleven scholarly studies, dealing with different aspects of human growth and becoming. The first study in this part is by ***Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, ofm cap***, that deals with the process of human transcending to be met with the Divine encountering. In the next study, ***Kuruvilla Pandikattu, sj*** examines the close relation between believing, becoming, and being, leading toward faith, the foundation of human flourishing. ***Alex Ancheles, cmf*** reaffirms in his article that the practice of universal love, as found in Christian and Indian traditions, is an answer to the various global crises. The next study by ***Francis Poovelil, msfs*** shows the theological and historical journey of *Christian Unity* as an ongoing process to be continued. ***Joseph Thazhattukunnel msfs*** has no hesitation to shout aloud what many have been silently holding that Gandhiji is an unbaptized Christian! The next study by ***Kuriakose Poovathumkudy*** reiterates the need of a formation style that enables the candidates to become persons and agents of the Beatitudes. ***Vintu Augustine Avittappallil, msfs***, in the next study, explores as to how educators need to guide seminarians to become compassionate shepherds. ***Raphael Karekatt, msfs***, in his article, looks into the growing world of the AI, and proposes the need of the Church to be equipped to face its challenges. In the next study ***Nishant A. Irudayadason*** shows, basing himself on Hegelian thought, that conflict is the testing ground of freedom, revealing its

depth and complexity. ***Lourdu Xavier, osm*** has made a study on the relevant question of eco-harmony from the perspective of Whitehead's metaphysics; this harmony gets destroyed with human tampering with the natural process. In the final study of this volume, ***Annie Kunnath*** dwells on the question of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," enabling us to understand how suspicion and trust interact while interpreting.

* * * * * * *

Before we conclude this Editorial Introduction, we give expression to our sincere gratitude to all those who have helped us in bringing out this volume. We are most beholden to ***Most Rev. Dr. Vincent Aind*** (Archbishop of Ranchi) for his "Foreword." As a person who is so closely associated with the ACPI, Abp. Vincent Aind knows the sentiments of love with which this *Festschrift* is brought out. We are grateful to ***Rev. Dr. John Peter Vallabadoss, ofm cap*** (President of the ACPI) for having written a fitting 'Preface' to this ACPI-Initiated *Festschrift*. The Editors remain grateful to all the ***Contributors*** of articles for their willingness to place their vast erudition and fruits of research at the disposal of many an inquiring mind. We also thank those who have given expression to their sentiments of love for Fr. George by writing 'Words of Appreciation,' 'Words of Reminiscence,' 'Journey of Thought,' etc. Our thanks are due to ***Asian Trading Corporation*** (Bengaluru) for publishing this book and to ***National Printing Press*** (Bengaluru) for printing it with remarkable neatness and perfection. Finally, we are grateful to the ACPI Executive Committee for trusting us by entrusting the privilege and responsibility of bringing out this Festschrift-Volume.

Finally, the most important person to be thanked is none other than the very person, in whose honour this *Festschrift* is brought out. We thank him for the person that he has been and the work that he has been doing. As a gesture of our love and appreciation, on behalf of the ACPI, we offer this Festschrift-Volume to **Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel, MSFS.**

Dr. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap
Dr. Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil, MSFS
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Part - I

BEING

The Realm of Reality - COSMOS

HUMAN PERSON AS A METAPHYSICAL REALITY
A Cross-Cultural Interpretation

Antony Kolencherry, MSFS

Abstract: *Socrates' enduring statement, "An unexamined life is not worth living," challenges the reflective mind to explore the mystery of human existence. (Plato, Apology, 38a). Metaphysics, with its profound appeal, offers a unique lens to discover the world anew and to gain insight into the human person—an enduring mystery still in need of deep exploration, particularly in relation to death and life. Understanding the human being as a metaphysical entity leads to a vision of the self as both self-understanding and self-transcendent, integrally woven into the web of existence. This article explores how the Christian and Hindu scriptures—specifically John 11:25-26 and Bhagavad-Gītā 2:19-20—conceive the human person as a metaphysical reality. It seeks to clarify the unity of body and mind from both Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives. It also investigates points of convergence and divergence in the understanding of the soul's immortality, offering a thesis from an intercultural and scriptural standpoint. Metaphysics, as the "first philosophy of being" (Aristotle, Metaphysics, I.1 (980a),—also known as ontology—serves here as a foundational approach for understanding the divine-human relationship, transcendence and immanence, and the distinction between noumenon and phenomenon.*

Introduction

Metaphysics posits that every entity is, in some way, mind-dependent, and it assumes the primacy of consciousness in apprehending reality. In its theological dimension, it examines the ultimate nature of reality—God—as the Absolute. Christian metaphysics, in particular, is deeply soteriological, concentrating on the divine essence, the Creator-creature relationship, the mystery of the Incarnation in Jesus Christ, and the final revelation of human destiny. St. Thomas Aquinas, known as the "Prince of Theologians," offered a rigorous philosophical and theological investigation of *ens qua ens* (being as being), asserting that knowledge

of God is the highest form of knowledge one can attain. (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q.12, a.12.) In his extensive writings, Aquinas affirms the unity of body and soul. Though ontologically distinct, they form a single substantial unity, rather than an accidental conjunction. This aligns with scriptural assertions from both traditions: “The soul cannot kill nor be killed” (Bhagavad-Gītā 2:20) and “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28). In the *Summa Theologiae* (Ia, q. 93, a. 6, ad 3), Aquinas explains that the human body reflects the image of God only as a "trace," whereas the soul bears the image in its fullest sense. Grace, he notes, is mediated to the body only secondarily, through the soul as its principal recipient. Both the Bible and the Gītā affirm the immortality of the soul, and the metaphysical traditions of both East and West support the conception of *homo metaphysicalis*—the human being as inherently metaphysical. There exists a profound biological and ontological rootedness of metaphysical consciousness.[1]

Despite their distinction, the soul and body constitute an indivisible unity: the body is mortal, the soul immortal. This view finds resonance in the Aristotelian-Thomistic*hylemorphic* (from *hylē*, "matter," and morphē, "form") conception, where the soul is the substantial form of the body. Together, they constitute a living being—plant, animal, or human.[2] Thomas Aquinas’ hylomorphism supports *survivalism* (the soul survives bodily death), as opposed to *corruptionism* (the soul ceases to exist until the resurrection). His theory of the unicity of substantial being holds that death does not annihilate the soul. This gives rise to the importance of *homo metaphysicalis* in addressing the question of ultimate reality. The rational mind accesses this reality because, as Hegel notes, “the rational is real, and the real is rational.”[3] For Hegel, reason is coextensive with reality, whereas Kant differentiates between the *noumenon* (the thing-in-itself, *Ding an sich*) and the *phenomenon*

1 Cornel W.duToit, *HTS Theological Studies,* Herv, vol. 73/3, Pretoria 2017 online version, https:/doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4676.

2 Thomas Aquinas, *De Anima*, Book II; see also *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 76.; *Faith and Philosophy*: Journal of the Society of Christian Faith and Philosophy: Volume 40, Issue 1 Article 3 1-1-2023.

3 G.W.F. Hegel, *Preface to the Philosophy of Right* (1820), trans. T.M. Knox.

(the appearance perceived by the senses).[4] This distinction remains central to any metaphysical inquiry into the human person.

I. Death and Life in St John 11:25–26

"And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:26). The Gospel of John, composed towards the end of the first century CE, is widely regarded as the "spiritual Gospel" due to its theological depth and symbolic language. Chapter 11 (vv. 1–54), which recounts the raising of Lazarus, is often identified as the **"compositional zenith"** of the Fourth Gospel.[5] The narrative and discourse are so intricately interwoven that they must be interpreted as a unified theological whole. This chapter offers a profound theological exposition on eternal life, engaging the paradox of human mortality while affirming the eschatological and present reality of resurrection. The statement of Jesus in verses 25–26—"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die"—is a cornerstone of Johannine theology. It asserts both Jesus' identity and his salvific mission, emphasizing a personal, relational dimension: Jesus himself is the resurrection, and belief in him transcends physical death[6].

The purpose of John's Gospel is stated explicitly: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Eternal life is thus the cardinal theme of Johannine soteriology, reinforced in texts such as John 6:27, 6:68, and 11:26, which present Jesus as the **source of eternal life.**[7] According to Johannine theology, eternal life is not merely a future hope but a present reality. The believer, through faith in Christ, already participates in this life. As John 5:24 affirms: "Whoever hears my word and believes... has eternal life and will not be judged but

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A235/B294; Webster's Online Dictionary defines: The intellectual conception of a thing as it is itself (Ding an sich), not as it is known through perception. *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. 2021.

5 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I–XII)*; Anchor Bible Vol. 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 425–29.

6 C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 399–401

7 Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 29–31.

has crossed over from death to life."[8] The believer, as a metaphysical person, is oriented toward immortality through union with God. As John 3:16 declares, "God so loved the world..."—a love that finds its fullest expression in the eternal life granted to those who believe.

This life has an *eschatological* and *metaphysical* dimension. Eternal life is not simply an unending duration of time but a qualitative participation in divine life (cf. John 17:3). Death, in this light, is redefined—not as cessation of existence, but as separation from God. Thus, the real death is "death forever," a spiritual alienation from the divine source of life[9]. In this sense, 2 Corinthians 4:16 captures the inner renewal of the believer even as the "outer self" wastes away. The raising of Lazarus is a *sign* (σημεῖον) with profound theological significance. Jesus delays his coming not out of indifference but to manifest "the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). This event functions as a dramatic epiphany of divine power and love, revealing Jesus as the one who holds the keys of life and death (cf. Rev 1:18). The raising of Lazarus is not the final resurrection but a restoration to mortal life—he would die again. It prefigures Jesus' own resurrection, which is of a different order: *glorified and imperishable* (1Cor 15:42–50)[10].

Jesus' "I am" statement in John 11:25 ("I am the resurrection and the life") parallels other declarations in the Gospel (e.g., John 6:35; 8:12; 10:11), affirming his divine identity and mediatorship of life[7]. The double affirmation—"the one who believes in me will live even though they die," and "whoever lives by believing in me will never die"—expresses a paradox that points to the coexistence of physical death and eternal life for the believer. Martha's response—"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27)—is a profound profession of faith that anticipates Peter's confession in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt 16:16). A remarkable theological point lies in Jesus' use of the phrase *"I AM"* (*egōeimi*),

8 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol. II (London: Burns & Oates, 1980), 304–305.

9 Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*(London: Epworth Press, 1958), esp. pp. 35–45.

10 N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 412–28.

found in John 11:25: *"I am the resurrection and the life."* This formula recalls the divine self-revelation in Exodus 3:14: *"God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'"* This identification is absolutistic and theophanic, revealing Jesus as consubstantial with the divine being.[11] In this light, Jesus as "the resurrection and the life" signals a new *Exodus*—not from political slavery, but from death into eternal life (cf. 1Cor 15:26). Christ *is* Life, and bestows the abundance of life upon the believer (Jn 10:10). This eternal life, initiated now, is not merely future-oriented but immanent. Thus, *"Everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"* (cf. Jn 3:16; 1Cor 15:22). Verse 25 of John 11 offers a promise of immortality, while mortality pertains only to our contingent, biological existence. As Jesus reminds the Sadducees: *"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"* (Mk 12:27). Importantly, Jesus does not merely *promise* resurrection—he *is* the resurrection, in the present tense. His being *the Life* is ontologically inseparable from his being *the Resurrection*.[12] Christianity, as a historically revealed religion, grounds this metaphysical truth in the person of Christ.

The theological import of the Lazarus episode is therefore twofold: the *revelation of the glory of God* and the *affirmation of Jesus as the life-giver***.** Lazarus's return to life is a sign pointing to Jesus' lordship over death, which is fully realized in his own resurrection. Eternal life is not a distant reward but a present possession of the believer—an already-but-not-yet reality[13]. The Greek verb ζήσεται ("will live") in John 11:25 indicates ongoing life that transcends biological death. Believers already share in the heavenly reality. As Jesus teaches in Mark 12:27, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living," further confirming the continuity of life in union with God[14]. Paul echoes this assurance: "Death has been swallowed up in victory... nothing can separate us from the love of God" (1Cor 15:54–55; Rom 8:38–39). In Christ, death is no longer the final word. Eternal life is the believer's present and future inheritance.

11 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Anchor Yale Bible Commentary; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 424–428.

12 Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 284–286

13 Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 344–46.

14 Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 251–255.

It is the ultimate *victory over sin, death, and the devil***,** made manifest in the resurrection of Christ and given to all who believe in him.[15]

II. Death and Life in the Bhagavad-Gītā

The ancient Vedic prayer *mṛtyormāamṛtaṃgamaya*—"Lead me from death to immortality" (BṛhadāraṇyakaUpaniṣad 1.3.28)—expresses a deep human yearning for eternal life. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* takes this aspiration further, articulating it in metaphysical terms: *najāyatemriyatevākadācit*—"He is not born, nor does he die; he is eternal" (BG 2.20).[16]

Metaphysical Foundations of the Bhagavad-Gītā: The *Bhagavad-Gītā* presents a coherent metaphysical vision, explaining the nature of God (*Īśvara*), the soul (*ātman*), the universe, and the transcendent reality beyond empirical phenomena. The Supreme Reality (*Brahman*) is both immanent and transcendent—pervading all existence yet beyond sensory perception and scientific observation (BG 13.16). According to the *Gītā*, the ultimate reality is God, who is eternal and unchanging. The material world, by contrast, is transient and perishable. The soul (*jīva* or *ātman*), like God, is immortal—unaffected by birth, death, or decay (BG 2.20; 13.32). The divine energy manifests in two forms: *aparāśakti* (inferior, material energy) and *parāśakti* (superior, spiritual energy), the latter being eternal and beyond physical comprehension (BG 7.5; 8.20).

Knowledge, Equanimity and Liberation: The *Gītā* proposes equanimity (*samatva*) as the key to liberation—freedom from the bondage of actions and their consequences (BG 2.48). This equanimity enables the soul to transcend dualities like joy and sorrow, success and failure, thereby leading to self-realization and liberation (*mokṣa*). True freedom is not merely the absence of suffering but the realization of one's eternal nature. The divine is described as subtler than the subtlest, both immanent and transcendent. Such knowledge is transformative: it liberates the seeker from illusion (*māyā*). The real self is eternal

15 Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 113–117.

16 Bhagavad-Gītā 2.20. See: Radhakrishnan, S., *TheBhagavadgītā*, HarperCollins, 1993.

and beyond the flux of empirical reality. The *Gītā* asserts that the self is not subject to the six modifications—existence, birth, growth, transformation, decline, and death—characteristic of the body. The body is impermanent, but the *ātman* is indestructible, immutable, and beyond time and space (BG 2.20).[17]

The Interplay of Mind, Body and Consciousness: Human experience involves an intricate interplay of mind and body, yet these are distinct from the eternal self. The mind, susceptible to illusion, often misidentifies the self with the body. Through meditation and self-discipline (*dhyāna* and *yoga*), the seeker attains knowledge of the eternal self, thereby achieving illumination and spiritual awakening. Metaphysics, as the study of being and ultimate reality, engages deeply with both physical science and spiritual truth, suggesting that consciousness, rooted in the soul, is fundamental and not reducible to physical processes.[18] The *Gītā* teaches that consciousness continues to evolve, but its locus, the soul, remains eternal. Thus, *najāyatemriyatevākadācit* is not merely a poetic assertion, but a metaphysical claim about the indestructibility of the self (BG 2.20).

The Symbolism of the Two Birds: The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (3.1.1–3.1.2) presents a powerful allegory: two birds sit on the same tree. One bird eats the sweet and bitter fruits, symbolizing the experiencing individual self (*jīva*), while the other merely watches in serene detachment, symbolizing the Supreme Self (*Īśvara*). When the *jīva* turns its attention to the Supreme, it is freed from suffering and realizes its true identity.[19] The message is clear: only through knowledge of the divine does one transcend mortality. True knowledge leads to the realization that death is not the end. Statements like "He was killed" reflect ignorance, since the self cannot be killed; only the body perishes (BG 2.19–20). A materialistic worldview, detached from spiritual knowledge, fosters fear, confusion, and a "soulless" society. But in reality, death reveals the illusion of bodily identity and points toward the undying self.

17 Cf. Larson, G.J., *Classical Sāṃkhya*, MotilalBanarsidass, 1998.

18 For the interface of metaphysics and consciousness studies, see: Chalmers, D.J., *The Conscious Mind*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

19 Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1.1–2.; Ref. also, Swetasvatara Upanishad 4.6-7. See: Hume, R.E., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, 1921.

The *Gītā* affirms that the physical body is composed of five elements (*pañcamahābhūtas*: earth, water, fire, air, and space) and returns to them at death. The soul, however, is a non-material, indissoluble reality (BG 7.4–5).[20] Birth and death are mere transitions for the embodied self, while the *ātman* remains unchanged, imperishable, and eternal.

Comments: The *Bhagavad-Gītā* (1st century CE)[21] and the Bible (Old Testament ca. 1200 BCE; New Testament 1st–2nd century CE) are two sacred texts from distinct historical and cultural contexts. While differing in theology and cosmology, both affirm the enduring significance of the soul and the reality of eternal life. The *Gītā* presents a tripartite path—*karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti marga* (BG 3, 4, 12)—to attain liberation (*mokṣa*), fulfilling especially one's own duties as "motiveless."[22] The soul, eternal and uncreated, is unaffected by the transience of the world (BG 2.20). The Bible, in contrast, emphasizes salvation through faith in a personal God—Jesus Christ—who promises eternal life to believers (Jn 11:25). God alone is inherently immortal (1 Tim 6:16), yet human beings, made in His image, partake in that immortality through divine grace.

Job's question, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14), finds affirmative echoes in biblical eschatology: "The righteous will shine like the sun" (Mt 13:43), and "God will wipe away every tear... and there shall be no more death" (Rev 21:4).[23] While Christianity rejects the cycle of rebirth, the *Gītā* accepts it (BG 2.13; 8.6), framing death as a transition within an ongoing cosmic process. Both traditions present metaphysical visions affirming the soul's permanence and God's ultimacy. The *Gītā*'s notion of the soul as part of the eternal self (*ātman*–

20 BG 7.4–5. On pañcamahābhūtas, see: Feuerstein, G., *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga*, Inner Traditions, 1996.

21 Sharma Arvind, (1986), *The Hindu Gita: Ancient and Classical Interpretations of the Bhagavad-Gita*, London: Open Court p. 3, "ca 200 BC is a likely date";Buitenen, J.A.B. van (2013). Some say that that Bhagavadgita was composed much later during post Christian era. Ref. also *The Bhagavad-Gita in the Mahabharata*, (University of Chicago Press,2013) p. 6ff.

22 Desireless action, work without motive, see full chapter BG 3, esp. slokas 7-12. For details, ref. Antony Kolencherry, *Philosophy of Karma Yoga,* Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 2009, p.113.

23

brahman) and the Bible's vision of the soul's eternal communion with God converge in affirming the human longing for transcendence.

Jesus is emphatic when he says, *"Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die"* (Jn 11:26). In this Johannine declaration, death and burial are not the end; the one who believes will live forever. He will "live" because this life is essentially immortal. Believers already experience this in the here and now. Even if the *outer man* perishes, the *inner man* remains alive—immortal and untouched by decay (cf. 2Cor 4:16). These insights find resonance in both Eastern and Christian scriptures, which present a metaphysical anthropology rooted in the immortality of the soul and the transformative power of life in God.[24] Both John's Gospel and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* articulate what unites and what separates the human person from ultimate reality. In both Christian theology and Indian philosophy, the soul is understood as a metaphysical reality, the true self (*ātman* in the Gītā; *psychē* in the New Testament). In Johannine language, the expression *"one who believes"* occurs frequently (cf. Jn 1:4; 3:15; 5:24; 6:27; 10:10, 28), always in the context of life and its fullness. The term *resurrection* may refer to a future bodily resurrection (Jn 5:29), yet in the Gospel of John it is also deeply present and relational, linking the eschaton with the present experience of divine life.[25] The phrase *"resurrection and life"* thus fuses a traditional eschatological hope with the distinct Johannine Christology of Jesus as *the Life*. This Life is not abstract—it is a Person: one who knows us, and is known by us (cf. Jn 10:14). Yet a dualistic worldview often separates metaphysics from empirical reality. A holistic metaphysical vision integrates both: the spiritual and the physical, the eternal and the temporal. St. Paul underscores this integration: *"Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's"* (Rom 14:8).

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* likewise presents man as *homo metaphysicalis*, an embodied yet immortal being. In Chapter 2, verses 19–20, Krishna

24 N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 147–165.

25 Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 2 (New York: Scribner's, 1955), 54–56.

proclaims that the soul neither kills nor is killed; it is unborn, eternal, and unchanging. This dissolves dichotomies such as action versus inaction, or duty versus freedom, by placing them within a transcendent metaphysical context.[26]Through such teachings, the Gītā affirms the indivisible truth that arises from pure consciousness—a vision akin to the Christian concept of *visiobeatifica*, the final beatific vision of God. Christian theology offers a cosmic and ecological vision of unity: an integrated whole that respects the interdependence of all creation. Human beings are inherently self-transcending and dialogical; they are drawn toward what is beyond themselves. This self-transcendence is best understood in light of metaphysical principles such as unity, holism, and communion. The metaphysical person is thus one who lives in conscious awareness of their immortal nature, despite the transient nature of material existence.[27]

Both the *Gospel of John* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* contain rich metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological frameworks. These are not mere abstract systems; they illuminate human consciousness and invite ethical transformation. As science evolves and increasingly dominates cultural narratives, metaphysics is often sidelined. Yet, this is precisely the time when a *metaphysical revolution* is needed—a revolution that respects scientific advancements without abandoning the perennial questions of being, purpose, and immortality.[28] Human knowledge is constantly evolving, yet metaphysical truths endure. There is a pressing need for a pluridimensional theory of cognition: one that integrates pluralistic metaphysics with a scientifically informed worldview. Such an approach can dissolve rigid dichotomies between science and religion, matter and spirit. Despite science's extraordinary advances, it cannot offer ultimate answers to questions of human existence, meaning, and destiny. These remain in the domain of metaphysics and theology.

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26 Radhakrishnan, S., *The Bhagavadgita: With an Introductory Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes* (New York: Harper, 1948), 110–114.

27 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Vol. 2: Dramatis Personae: Man in God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 56–75.

28 Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Faith and the Future* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 58–65.

Science, with its giant strides of progress and insurmountable leap in technological advancements, challenges the age-old theories of metaphysics. However, metaphysics still remains unchallenged and stable, whereas science makes headway to many changes but without adequate answers to the ultimate questions. I do not believe that science can ever give an absolute 'yes' or 'no' with one-size-fits-all answers to human quests. The controversy arises between the absolutistic claims of both. Metaphysics is on the track of a "comeback," but dialogical and optimistic interplay between the two has the potential to deepen human understanding and promote holistic wisdom.

THE NATURE OF SELF
Atman, Anatta and Personhood

Suresh M., SVD

Abstract: *This article examines the perennial philosophical problem of the self, critically analysing its nature, structure, and persistence from both Western and Indian philosophical perspectives. Beginning with Descartes' cogito and Hume's critique of the unitary self, this work traces the development of modern eliminativist and constructivist positions that deny the existence of a substantive self. It then contrasts these views with classical Indian theories, focusing on the Buddhist doctrine of anattā, which rejects any enduring self, and the Upaniṣadic notion of Ātman as the unchanging essence of individual existence. Through detailed engagement with first-person and third-person accounts of selfhood, typologies of self, and theories of personal identity, including memory continuity, bodily persistence, and narrative construction, this study highlights both the conceptual complexity and practical significance of theorising about selfhood. By juxtaposing these divergent traditions, the article illuminates how metaphysical and soteriological commitments shape understandings of the self, suggesting that any robust account must grapple with the irreducible tension between the empirical variability of experience and the felt continuity of personhood.*

Introduction

Descartes, the father of modern Western philosophy, aiming to find the sure ground for philosophy, famously proposed the dictum, “I think, therefore I am” (*cogito ergo sum*). Who is this I? Stephen Priest[1] has countered his argument, pointing out the basic illogical foundation that mere thoughts do not imply the certainty of the thinker's being. Thinking and thinker, do they co-exist always? Are they one and the same? What about the thoughts after the demise of the physical body of the thinker? Every person is a bundle of experiences. Experiences create feelings and emotions in a person. What happens to these bundles of experiences? Let us imagine a tourist enjoying the sunrise at a beach.

1 Stephen Priest, *Theories of the Mind*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 19-20.

Here could be the probable conversation between him and a questioner.

Q (Questioner): Who are you?

T (Tourist): I am a tourist

Q: Who is this 'I'?

T: I am 'me'

Q: Are you experiencing the events at this beach?

T: Yes

Q: Who is in you that is experiencing the events at this beach?

T: Myself

Q: Could you describe what you mean by 'myself'?

T: 'Me', 'my body', 'my brain', 'my consciousness', and many more.

The question of self (some might refer to this as mind or spirit) has been baffling philosophers from time immemorial. Parapsychologists and cognitive neuroscientists have been less successful in recent times in explaining in clear terms the nature of self, even though they claim to have achieved a breakthrough. V.S. Ramachandran[2] claims that if we unravel the nature of self, we may unravel the mystery of consciousness as well. Does this notion remain in Pandora's box? In this article, I aim to discuss the possibility of understanding the nature of self, taking into consideration the contributions from Vedic and Upanishadic understanding of Atman and the counter position of the Buddhist notion of Anatta.

1. Understanding the Complexities of 'Self'

Descartes famously contends that the existence of the self is beyond doubt, even if the precise nature and functions of the self remain uncertain.[3] By contrast, Hume[4] offers a radical critique of this assumption. Through introspective analysis, Hume claims he perceives only a succession of

2 V. S. Ramachandran,*The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human*, (W. W. Norton, 2011), xii.

3 René Descartes, "*Meditations on First Philosophy*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*," Vol. 2, edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 17.

4 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*,edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 164-65.

discrete impressions and ideas, never an underlying, unitary self. He concludes that the self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions."[5] Despite these philosophical challenges, the concept of "self" remains deeply embedded in ordinary language. Expressions such as self-esteem, self-image, self-perception, selfishness, and selflessness reflect the pervasive assumption of some form of selfhood in everyday life. Nevertheless, influential modern thinkers- including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Duchamp, Foucault, and Derrida- have argued that the self is ultimately an illusion, a claim underscored in Wegner's account of the constructed nature of conscious will.[6]

However, even the notion of illusion arguably presupposes an experiencer. As Klein[7] observes, the very experience of illusion demands the existence of a subject to whom the illusion appears. This observation complicates strong eliminativist positions and suggests that while the self may not possess a stable or essential nature, its existence cannot be entirely dismissed, at least in a minimal phenomenological sense. The question thus shifts from the binary of whether the self exists to the more nuanced inquiry into its nature and features. What kind of entity- or process- is the self? How should its structure and functions be characterised in light of these divergent philosophical accounts? Addressing these questions remains central to ongoing debates in philosophy of mind, phenomenology, and cognitive science.

3. Nature and Kinds of Self

Contemporary discussions of selfhood reveal significant disagreement over its definition and unity. Stern[8] and Klein[9]argue that our inability to define the self in clear and consistent terms arises precisely because

5 Ibid.

6 Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5.

7 Stanley B Klein, *The Two Selves: Their Metaphysical Commitments and Functional Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

8 D. N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psycho analysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 7.

9 Stanely B Klein, *The two Selves: Their Metaphysical Commitments and Functional Independence*, ibid, 7.

there is no single, unified self. In a similar vein, Dennett[10]discusses the possibility of quasi-selves, while Hardcastle[11]advances the idea of multi-selves, suggesting a fundamentally plural conception of personal identity. A productive way to analyse these debates is through the distinction between the first-person (subjective) and third-person (objective) perspectives on selfhood. The first-person perspective refers to the direct, subjective experience an individual has of being a self. This form of self-awareness is not accessible through empirical perception or sense data.[12] Rather, it is a qualitatively private experience that resists precise articulation in language.

By contrast, the third-person perspective of the self involves empirical and observational accounts accessible to others. This perspective characterises the self in terms of personal memory, bodily appearance, emotional dispositions, and other observable features.[13] Within cognitive science and neuroscience, researchers have examined the cognitive and neurological bases of self-representation from this third-person vantage.[14] Wittgenstein offers an instructive framework for understanding these dual perspectives through his distinction between the use of "I" as subject and "I" as object. When "I" is employed to describe one's internal states in ways that cannot be externally verified, such as feelings or emotions, it functions as a subjective reference. Conversely, when "I" refers to a person about whom descriptive claims can be made and verified, it serves as an object. Wittgenstein suggests that even in cases of self-knowledge, both senses coexist. For example, in the utterance "I know that I have a sweet tooth," the phrase "I know" indicates the subject-self, while "I have a sweet tooth" points to the

10 Daniel C. Dennet, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), 422-25.

11 Valerie Gray Hardcastle, "Constructing Selves, Constructing Minds." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15, no.4 (2008): 4- 26.

12 Stanley B Klein, "The Two Selves: The Metaphysical and the Epistemological Self," *Consciousness and Cognition* 21 no. 1 (2012): 1–16.

13 Stanely B Klein, *The two Selves: Their Metaphysical Commitments and Functional Independence*, 134-35.

14 Stanley B. Klein, and Cynthia E. Gangi, "The Multiplicity of Self: Neuropsychological Evidence and Its Implications for the Self as a Construct." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4, no.10 (2010): 896–909.

object-self, which is referable and potentially verifiable.[15]

Furthermore, Ganeri[16]and Klein[17]caution against the limitations inherent in describing the objective self. They argue that objectivity entails studying the self as an external entity, which risks reducing the ontological self to something it is not. Shoemaker reinforces this concern by asserting that the subjective "I" cannot be simply equated with the objective "me" at any given time.[18] This nuanced exploration of first-person and third-person perspectives underscores the complexity of theorising about selfhood. It suggests that any comprehensive account must grapple with both the irreducible immediacy of subjective experience and the empirical, externally accessible dimensions of personal identity. The concept of the self has long resisted a single, unified definition, giving rise instead to numerous typologies that reflect its complexity and multidimensional character. William James offers an early influential account, distinguishing among the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self, each capturing a different domain of personal identity.[19] Neisser extends this framework by proposing five distinct forms of selfhood: the ecological, interpersonal, extended, private, and conceptual selves.[20] These categories aim to capture the diverse contexts and functions through which self-representation emerges in human experience.

Further illustrating the proliferation of self-concepts, Strawson suggests there may be as many as twenty-one distinct types of self.[21] This proliferation highlights the degree to which the notion of self is shaped

15 L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 246.

16 Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

17 Stanely B Klein, *The Two Selves: Their Metaphysical Commitments and Functional Independence*, 134-35.

18 Sydney Shoemaker, "Introspection and the self," in *The First-person Perspectives and Other Essays*, edited by Shoemaker, S. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-24.

19 William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1. (New York: Henry Holt, 1890),292.

20 Ulric Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge," *Philosophical Psychology* 1 no. 1(1988): 35–59.

21 Galen Strawson, "The Self," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4 , no. 5–6 (1997): 405–28.

by the theoretical and methodological commitments of those who study it. Indeed, philosophers and psychologists have identified a range of self-concepts- including the physical self, social self, competent self, inner or psychological self, and spiritual self each emphasising different aspects of personal identity and experience. Such classificatory diversity underscores that "the self" is not a unitary phenomenon but rather a family of related constructs. But then, it is an experiential reality that each one of us is aware of the persisting self of an individual.

4. The Concept of Persisting Self

The problem of the persisting self lies at the heart of metaphysical inquiry into personal identity: what grounds the unity of a person over time despite psychological and physical change? Classical accounts such as Locke's famously locate personal identity in memory continuity, claiming that a person persists by being able to appropriate past experiences as their own.[22] This psychological continuity model, however, has faced objections for its apparent circularity- memory presupposes identity rather than constituting it- and for neglecting the embodied nature of human existence. Materialist and animalist theories argue instead that persistence consists in the continuity of the living human organism, resisting psychological reductionism.[23] Alternatively, narrative theories propose that the self persists through the interpretive activity of constructing a coherent life story, emphasising the role of practical concerns and normative commitments in maintaining identity over time.[24] The debate thus reveals deep philosophical tensions between reductionist and non-reductionist accounts, psychological and biological criteria, and descriptive and normative dimensions of selfhood. A satisfactory theory of the persisting self must grapple with these competing intuitions, clarifying what it is for a person to remain the same despite change, and what implications this has for moral responsibility, survival, and the meaning of personhood.

22 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 266.

23 Eric T Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 124-35.

24 Marya Schechtman, *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of a Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 150 & 201.

5. Western Denial of Self and the Concept of Buddhist 'Anattã'

Prominent philosophers in the contemporary Western tradition-including Daniel Dennett,[25] Patricia Churchland,[26] Thomas Metzinger[27] and Daniel Wegner[28] have advanced arguments denying the existence of any enduring or substantive self. Instead, they maintain that the self is best understood as a cognitive construct, an interpretive framework that organises and makes sense of our experiences. According to this view, what we call the "self" is nothing more than the dispersed and dynamic contents of consciousness, without any underlying, unifying subject. Metzingerfamously asserts that "no such things as selves exist in the world,"[29] proposing instead that we possess only mental models of self. Similarly, Thomas Clark argues explicitly that there is no self existing independently of experience, but rather an assemblage of qualia- discrete experiential elements- that together generate the illusion of personal unity.[30]

We can find a similar argument in Indian philosophy, especially from Buddhist tradition. The doctrine of *anattā* (Pāli; Sanskrit: a*nātman*)) states that what is conventionally called the self is analysable into five *skandhãs* (aggregates): form (r*ūpa*), feeling (v*edanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (s*aṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*vijñana*).[31] None of the five aggregates (*skandhas*) is regarded in Buddhist thought as constituting a permanent or persisting self. Instead, what is conventionally referred to as the "self" is understood as impermanent, contingent, and interdependent. The doctrine of *anattā* (no-self) is thus not merely a metaphysical thesis but a fundamentally soteriological one: the realisation of *anattā*is essential to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*,

25 Daniel C Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 132-38.
26 Patricia S Churchland, *Brain-Wise: Studies in Neurophilosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 124.
27 ThomasMetzinger,*Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 397.
28 Daniel M Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 13.
29 Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One*, 397.
30 Thomas W Clark, "Fear of Mechanism: A Compatibilist Critique of Theism." *The Humanist* 55 no. 4 (1995): 17–20.
31 RahulaWalpola, *What the Buddha Taught*(New York: Grove Press, 1974), 25-26.

the cessation of suffering. Later developments within Buddhist philosophy, particularly in the Madhyamaka school, radicalise this position by extending it through the doctrine of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), which holds that all phenomena- including the self lacks*vabhāva*, or inherent existence.[32] This extension underscores the anti-essentialist thrust of Buddhist metaphysics and its implications for liberation. This is in direct contrast to the Vedic (Upanishadic) understanding of the Self (Atman).

6. Understanding of Atman as Permanent Self

In the Upaniṣadic tradition of Vedic philosophy, *Ātman* is conceived as the permanent, unchanging essence of the individual, fundamentally distinct from the transient, physical and mental states that constitute empirical experience. This Atman itself is of five layers. Taittiriya Upanishad speaks about the notion of 'self' as a conglomeration of *pancakosas* (five sheaths): *annamayakosa* (physical layer), *pranamayakosa* (life-force layer), *manomayakosa* (the emotional layer), *vijnamayakosa* (cognitive layer), and *anandamayakosa* (bliss/ eternal joy).[33] Further, it is stated that 'self' is not just the conglomeration of the five *kosas*; rather, it is above and beyond the conglomeration of these *kosas*.The Upaniṣhads identify Ātman with Brahman, the ultimate, unconditioned reality, articulated in the mahāvākyas such as *tat tvamasi* (literally meaning *that thou art* which is found in Chandogya Upanishad), which declare the essential unity of the individual self with the absolute.[34]AdvaitaVedānta, most systematically articulated by Śaṅkara, develops this insight into a rigorous non-dual metaphysics, maintaining that Ātman and Brahman are not merely similar but numerically identical.[35] According to Advaita, the empirical self (*jīva*) appears distinct only due to *avidyā*(ignorance), which projects illusory distinctions upon the undivided reality of Brahman. Liberation

32 Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

33 Hiriyanna, M, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), 25.

34 Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 148-52.

35 Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1980), 62-63.

(*mokṣa*) is achieved not by attaining something new, but by realising one's true nature as non-dual *Ātman*, which is unchanging, eternal, and self-luminous consciousness (*cit)*. This realisation dissolves the false identification with the body-mind complex and ends the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). Thus, the AdvaitaVedāntic interpretation of *Ātman* offers a sophisticated philosophical account of selfhood that is simultaneously metaphysical and soteriological, presenting non-dual knowledge as the path to ultimate freedom.

7. Understanding of Self and Personhood

The conception of individuality is foundational to the philosophical understanding of self and personhood. Sorabji[36]contends that the recognition of personal ownership of experiences, actions, and a continued existence is indispensable to survival; without such awareness, the coherence of individual life disintegrates. Realo et al. identify three core dimensions of individuality: autonomy, mature self-responsibility, and uniqueness.[37] Autonomy denotes the capacity for independent thought, judgment, and adaptive action. Mature self-responsibility refers to the self's recognition of its agency in decision-making. Uniqueness captures the individual's awareness of their irreplaceable and non-replicable existence- one that cannot be equated with that of another. These elements, when unified, constitute a person's identity, which shapes how the self is experienced and enacted.

Philosophers have long explored the metaphysical contours of individuality and identity. For Aristotle, individuality arises from the soul's embodiment in a specific material and social context. Self-recognition is thus not only natural but necessary; only the irrational, he argued, fail to apprehend their particularity.[38] Leibniz in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, formalised the principle of the identity of indiscernible, asserting that no two individuals can share all their properties; if they

36 Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 20-22.

37 Realo, Anu, JüriAllik, and Eldad Davidov, "Exploring the Structure of Individualism-Collectivism," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 33 no. 4 (2002): 421–49.

38 JoonaShivola, *Self-Knowledge in Early Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 126.

did, they would be one and the same being.[39] He emphasised that individuality cannot be captured through empirical observation alone; it remains ineffable, a singular instantiation in space and time that resists full conceptualisation. The first-person pronoun "I" exemplifies this irreducibility- it indexes a particular consciousness that cannot be exhaustively described by any empirical account.

For both Leibniz and Kant, identity is bound by temporal and spatial limits: the self knows itself only as localised and embodied at a specific moment. Yet this raises a paradox- despite physical, psychological, and social changes across time, individuals continue to experience a persistent sense of selfhood. One feels continuous not because of unchanging characteristics, but due to an enduring first-personal perspective. This raises a deeper question: what enables the individual to experience themselves as the same person throughout their life, despite the multiplicity of roles, attributes, and contexts they inhabit? E.J. Lowe suggests that personhood consists in the ability to engage in self-reference. That is, a person is a being capable of recognising itself as itself across contexts.[40] John Locke provides one of the most influential accounts of personhood, defining a person as “a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places.”[41]For Locke, consciousness- specifically, memory- is essential to personal identity. The self is that which perceives and knows that it perceives, thus constituting a continuous, self-aware agent. This framework grounds what later philosophers call the psychological continuity criterion of personhood.

However, Locke's theory has not gone unchallenged. Galen Strawson critiques Locke's account as treating personhood as a functional kind, one defined by a set of psychological capacities.[42] If this is so, then any

39 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, translated by Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1969), 308.

40 E. J. Lowe, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 264-97.

41 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 335.

42 Galen Strawson, “The Self,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Brian McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter (Oxford: Oxford

entity possessing such capacities- whether a human, a dolphin, or even a hypothetical Martian- could qualify as a person. Bernard Williams offers a notable objection, contending that memory alone is insufficient for personal identity. He defends a bodily continuity criterion, arguing that veridical memory presupposes bodily persistence. In his view, the condition under which person X can remember person Y's action is that X and Y are the same physical individual; psychological identity must therefore be anchored in somatic continuity.[43] Together, these debates illuminate the multifaceted nature of personhood. It is simultaneously biological, psychological, relational, and moral. No single criterion- be it memory, body, or rational capacity- fully captures its richness. Yet the persistent inquiry into self and personhood remains central to philosophy, for it not only informs metaphysical accounts of identity but also frames the ethical dimensions of agency, responsibility, and dignity.

Conclusion

The question of the self remains among the most enduring and contested in philosophy, straddling metaphysics, phenomenology, ethics, and spirituality. As this article has shown, Western philosophical traditions have produced both robust affirmations of the self's continuity- rooted in memory, bodily identity, and narrative coherence- and radical critiques denying any enduring subject, instead construing the self as a dynamic, constructed illusion. Similarly, Indian philosophy offers contrasting paradigms: the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā*rejects the notion of a permanent self, seeing it as a source of suffering and illusion, while the Upaniṣadic tradition asserts the existence of an eternal Ātman, ultimately identical with Brahman, as the ground of true liberation.

These divergent accounts underscore that the concept of self cannot be reduced to a single definition or criterion. The self is both a locus of subjective immediacy and an object of empirical description; it is fractured and multiple, yet also the seat of enduring first-person

University Press, 2009), 59-81.

43 Williams Bernard, "Personal Identity and Individuation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 57 (1957): 229–52.

perspective. A satisfactory philosophical account of selfhood must acknowledge this complexity, avoiding reductionism while respecting the diverse traditions that have grappled with its meaning. Ultimately, understanding the self is not merely a theoretical exercise but a question with profound ethical, existential, and soteriological implications, inviting us to reflect on the nature of human agency, responsibility, and the possibility of liberation from suffering.

IDENTITY OF THE KNOWING AND KNOWN SELF
A Study Based on Immanuel Kant

Aby Sebastian, VC

Abstract: *The critical-transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant is a watershed moment in the history of Western philosophy, especially in epistemology by marking the scope and limitation of human knowledge. In the Critique of Pure Reason, we can detect a self that ventures into cognition through the cognitive faculties. It generates the fundamental notion that the self is endowed with epistemic faculties. Kant underscores that human cognition takes place through the reciprocal relationship existing between the cognitive faculties of sensibility and understanding within the framework human experience. The inevitable consequence is that the domain of metaphysics stands beyond the human experience and metaphysical notions cannot be cognised but thought as transcendental ideas. From this backdrop, we strive to posit the reality of self, by navigating through the Critique of Pure Reason. From the level of cognition, we can detect a self which is endowed with cognitive faculties of sensibility and understanding. In the realm of metaphysics, Kant accommodates the self as a metaphysical reality (soul) which cannot be cognised but thought of as a transcendental idea. At this point, my endeavour is to explicate the identity of the Kantian self, as manifested in the Critique of Pure Reason. After considering the various philosophical approaches to the identity of the Kantian self by the neo-Kantian scholars, my enterprise is to establish an integrated notion on the identity of the Kantian self in the critical-transcendental philosophy by staunchly asserting that self cannot be constrained merely to the level of thought. We need to employ a philosophical attitude of 'understanding' towards the reality of self by closely observing the inner dynamism and aspirations of the self.*

Introduction

From the oracle of Delphi, philosophy has always progressed in the strides of history with an inquiry into the reality of self. It became a philosophical affair of turning into one's own reality and explicating the

hidden horizons and possibilities that one is capable of. At the phase of modernity, we can notice that the historical journey of the philosophy of self is tinged with the questions of howwe can fundamentally know and what the very sources of our knowledge are. Atthis backdrop, we try to place the critical and transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant in order to derive a philosophy of self and its very identity in the entire arena of the Copernican revolution of Kant. In the act of cognition, we can identify two facets of the reality of self: a self that knows (knowing self) and a self that announces itself (known self). Fusing these dimensions together, my attempt is to delve into the identity of the Kantian critical-transcendental self which would facilitate the unveiling of the latent dynamism and aspirations of the self. The chief objective of this article is to examine the different manifestations of the self in the Kantian *Critique of Pure Reason*. Self is real and it bears a Kantian transcendental bearing which would prompt everyone to delve more deeply into the inner dynamism of the reality of self.

Knowing Self: A Self that dares to Know

Kant was certainly a champion of the European Enlightenment movement which had its motto: '*sapereaude*'[1]. The spirit of Enlightenment instigated Kant to break the barriers of the so-called ready-made answers from external sources and turn into one's own self, especially to one's own epistemic possibilities of knowledge by unearthing its very conditions. To counter the discrepancies in philosophy in general and the arbitrary nature of the claims of the metaphysics in particular, Kant investigates into the very possibility of human knowledge that the reality of self can achieve in the spectrum of human experience. It is methodically executed through the analysis of the faculties of knowledge which would eventually make him the synthesiser of the conflicting rationalist and empiricist philosophical schools. The first epistemic faculty of sensibility, through its pure *a priori* forms of space and time, engages with the human experience which results in the creation of sensations. From the plane of human experience, Kant moves forward to the realm of human thinking through epistemic faculty of understanding. Human

1 '*Sapere aude*' is considered to be the motto of European Enlightenment movement. It means 'dare to know' or 'have the courage to use your own understanding.'

thinking proceeds through concepts of various kinds and we club them together in a knowledge claim which we term as a proposition. Thus, it is staunchly indicated by Kant that the reality of self is actively engaging in the act of knowledge through the joint collaboration of the epistemic faculties of sensibility and understanding. Hence, the self is a knowing self.

Known Self: A Self that announces itself

The entire epistemic enterprise of the critical philosophy of Kant is also adhered with the announcing of the active presence of the reality of self. It is indeed a futile attempt, when we venture to compartmentalise the spectrum of self fully isolated from one's own cognition. Primarily, the annunciation of the self occurs when Kant identifies a third and highest faculty of knowledge and he terms it as 'reason.' Reason is depicted in the transcendental philosophy purposefully as the source of the metaphysical ambitions of human beings. Even though the very possibility of the knowledge on the metaphysical realities is restricted as an impending consequence of the Copernican revolution, reason is brought by Kant as the metaphysical faculty of the reality of self. The self is conceived to be the abode of the metaphysical ideas which cannot be known but only be thought. Therefore, the whole prospect of metaphysics cannot be realised into the realm of cognition rather only in the levels of thoughts and thinking. At this juncture, in the light of our explication, the reality of self becomes a 'known being' which thinks on the metaphysical realities through the metaphysical faculty of reason.

Understanding the Identity of the Kantian Self

Kant does not cancel the existence of the metaphysical realities including the reality of self and it can be recognised only when we move from the point of cognition to the understanding of the self. Understanding is used by Kant with a special reference to the metaphysical ambitions of the reality of self. The understanding of the self is done in thinking and the self is that which understands (not cognises) the metaphysical realities which stand beyond the spectrum of human experience. The

self is real and ideal in the context of all human epistemic (perceptual and metaphysical) aspirations. The self is elucidated as a subject which is endowed with thoughts and it is the reality of the self that brings unity among our thoughts. The Kantian self stands on the platform of the human experience in the Kantian venture of establishing the scope and limitation of reason. At this juncture, it is essential to dig deeply into the essence or whatness of the reality of self. There are different approaches to the very manifestation of self in the Kantian critical philosophy. A critical survey towards such philosophical approaches will definitely help us to endow ourselves with a proper vision of the Kantian self.

1. The Self as a Form or Structure

The Kantian scholars vividly acknowledge that the notion of the Kantian selfhood is inextricably linked with consciousness. The self is portrayed as a form or structure of consciousness. Kant uses the concept of consciousness that the self is shaped by the innate structure of the mind (especially epistemic faculties) and external experience. The portrayal of the self as a form or structure is firmly grounded upon the Kantian reflection in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Yet this I is no more an intuition than it is a concept of any object; rather, it is the mere form of consciousness, which accompanies both sorts of representations and which can elevate them to cognitions only insofar as something else is given in intuition, which provides the material for the representation of an object"[2]. Here, Kant illustrates the self as the structure or form of consciousness. This structure or unity of consciousness is present in every human experience as a principle of unity. P. F. Strawson notices: "Kant has shown that there are certain necessary conditions of the possibility of self-consciousness which can be described coherently without describing the full conditions of this possibility and in particular without referring to our conception of a subject of experiences as himself being an object of outer sense"[3]. We, as epistemic beings, are endowed with a structure or form of consciousness to our representations.

2 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*,ed. and trans.Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 432.

3 P. F. Strawson, *Bounds of Sense*: *An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1993), 167.

2. The Self as a Force or Activity

The self plays an inevitable role in all our epistemic enterprises, as envisaged by Kant. The epistemic enterprise after knowledge is progressed through thinking. Therefore, the very notion of self functions in the Kantian critique of reason through the proposition 'I think'. As the self is referred to thinking in general, the outcome is that the conception of self as purely an intellectual activity or force. Many Kantian scholars employ the view that the Kantian self is a structure or form of consciousness which is exposed to the givenness of the outer objects through impressions in the domain of the epistemic faculty of sensibility.[4] At this point, the self is identified and formulated as an intellectual activity applied on the manifold that was fashioned by the senses within the spectrum of human experience. The act of thinking is articulated as the 'self activity'.[5] It is intriguing to denote that in the spectrum of thinking, the self is not depicted as an entity but as an intellectual power.

3. Self: Bundle of Perceptions

It is important to note that the Kantian self does not stand alone in the sphere of thinking, but it is placed in front of representations which are yielded from the human experience. Since the self is engaging itself with representation, the notion of self as a bundle of perceptions comes to exist. The self combines various representations in the cognitive act of synthesis. The representations, which are totally interconnected, are bundled so that cognition can be made out of them. The representations do not have the capacity to organise or order themselves. Kant illustrates the role of the self in the bundling of the representations by distinguishing the 'I – think' element. Kant asserts that I – think is directly attached to all our representations: "The I think must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that representations would either be impossible or at least would be

4 Cf. H. E. Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*(New York: Cambridge University Press,1996), 96.

5 Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 245.

nothing for me"[6]. Beyond the bundle of representations, Kant places the self as the ground of the unity of concepts in judgments in the purview of the faculty of understanding.

From Cognition to Understanding: The Emergence of a New Kantian Self

Kant's explication of the human experience resulted in the unveiling of the dynamism of the reality of self. The Copernican revolution of Kant strongly established that experience stood as the scope and limitation of the human cognition. The self announces itself as knowing and known, through the cognitive faculties of sensibility and understanding. The reality of self is bridging the movement of representations and concepts and is depicted to be the link between the epistemic faculties of sensibility and understanding. The Kantian system of human cognition limits itself to the point of human experience and the pure *a priori* of the cognitive faculties of sensibility (space and time) and understanding (a priori categories). The self is indeed a reality that has a surpassing scope beyond the restriction of the spectrum of human experience and the cognitive faculties of sensibility and understanding. It gives the way for understanding the reality of self more than cognising it. Definitely, the *Critique of Pure Reason* accommodates ample space for a selfhood which stands beyond all our representations and concepts or ideas. The self is that which exists in the world and is characterized with an ontological status too. It is only a lopsided view, when we consider only the epistemic aspiration of the self. The reality of self is inclined toward doing good and avoiding evil (ethics) or creative expressions of one's meaningfulness and imagination (aesthetics). Therefore, a philosophical investigation after the cognitive aspirations of the self would reveal only to us a cognizing self which can only be a part of the spectrum of the understanding of the self. In other words, the *Critique of Pure Reason* reveals only a self that cognises out of human experience. An understanding of the self encourages us to search reality the reality of self by closely observing the inner aspirations, aptitudes and other dynamisms of the self. It puts into question all our epistemic claims on

6 Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 246.

the self. What we possess at this point is only the cognitive dynamism of the self. This philosophical discovery should prompt all seekers of knowledge to seek after an understanding of the self which gives an integrated vision of the reality of self.

Conclusion

Immanuel Kant is a staunch proponent of the philosophy of the reality of self and his philosophical investigation led him to explicate the fundamental cravings of the self. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he primarily deals with the epistemic aspiration of the self. His discovery through the Copernican revolution that our cognition is deeply adhered with the bedrock of the experience and sensibility and understanding as the faculties of knowledge. All our cognition derives from the way in which things appear (phenomenal world) to the faculties of knowledge. From the limitation of cognition, Kant opens the door to the immense possibility of knowledge which stands beyond human experience and deals with things in themselves (noumenal world). In the light of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the self is perceived to be a dynamic reality that cognises and is being cognised in the very act of cognition. However, there is a self in the Kantian transcendental philosophy that stands beyond the human experience, the pure *a priori* intuitions of space and time of the faculty of sensibility, and the pure *a priori* categories of understanding. In other words, Kant establishes that there is a real self that stands beyond all human cognitions. At this point, we need to nurture a philosophical mindfulness of 'understanding' toward the reality of the self by closely immersing into the philosophical and epistemic aspirations and engagements of the self. The critical philosophy of Kant reminds that it is indeed a lifelong affair to delve vigorously into to hidden corners of the reality of self.

THE NOTION OF SELF-APPROPRIATION IN BERNARD LONERGAN

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Abstract: For Bernard Lonergan, the notion of self-appropriation is a pivotal aspect in his symbiotic conception of philosophy and theology. The notion of psychological introspection develops into the notion of self-appropriation in his later writings. It amounts to getting an insight into insight, or, understanding understanding by way of heightening one's own consciousness or raising one's own awareness of interiority in oneself. Such a process leads one to self-realisation, self-understanding, self-knowledge, self-transcendence, self-development; in a word, self-discovery.

Introduction

In this article, I would like to discuss the notion of self-appropriation in the writings of Bernard J.F. Lonergan (1904-1984), a Canadian Jesuit philosopher-theologian. Though Lonergan seems to use the Heideggerian term "self-appropriation" in his writings,Lonergan has a nuanced and specialized use of the term. While, for Heidegger self-appropriation involves a self-critique and a self-understanding that is a grasp of one's own pre-understanding and situatedness, for Lonergan self-appropriation is a matter of heightening one's consciousness that leads to self-realisation, self-knowledge, self-transcendence, self-discovery, self-development. Kenneth Melchin says, "More than any other author, Lonergan makes self-discovery the central activity of philosophy and theology." Lonergan makes self-appropriation the cornerstone of his thought, where self-appropriation is the personal discovery and embrace of one's own "passionateness of being," i.e., the spirit of inquiry, reflection, and moral responsibility for one's own good and the good of the other, especially expressed as openness to love.

1. Introspection

To understand clearly what self-appropriation is, we need to see the genetic development of this notion in Lonergan. When we trace the development of the notion of self-appropriation in Lonergan, we see that the notion of psychological introspection in Lonergan's *Verbum* articles (1946-1949),[1] is transposed into the idea of self-appropriation in his*Insight* (1953).[2] In this section, we shall discuss the notion of introspection. In the *Verbum* articles, introspection is a question of understanding understanding.[3]Commenting on Thomas Aquinas, Lonergan says that Aquinas derived a method of empirical introspectionfrom Aristotle.[4] For Aristotle, "the acquisition of an understanding of anything, of any habitual scientific knowledge, makes our intellect habitually capable of understanding the scientific object in question but also of understanding itself. We can know what understanding is by understanding anything and reflecting on the nature of our understanding; for the *species* of the object understood also is the *species* of the understanding intellect."[5]

For Lonergan, along with Aristotle and Aquinas, this process of introspection "almost catches intellect in its forward movement towards defining and in its backward reference to sense for the concrete realization of the defined."[6] Because of this Lonergan states that the act of understanding, which is a psychological fact, is central to Thomist

1 Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, **2**, eds. Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College and University of Toronto Press, 1997). Lonergan wrote a series of four articles for the journal*Theological Studies*, from 1946 to 1949, on the inner word (*verbum*) in Thomas Aquinas which became highly influential in the study of St Thomas Aquinas' accounts of knowledge and cognition.

2 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, fifth edition, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, 3, eds. Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College and University of Toronto Press, 1992). This work was substantially completed in 1953, and first published in 1957.

3 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 88-89, 90, 91-92, 94, 97-98, 105, chapter 2 passim.

4 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 87.

5 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 88.

6 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 88.

psychology.[7] Therefore, in *Verbum*, we can say that introspection is a question of understanding the act of direct understanding that follows the question for intelligence and precedes the first *verbum* or definition. In another place, Lonergan discusses descriptive psychology as describing the virtualities of the act of the understanding and conceptualising the preconceptual act of intelligence. Here he also states that Aquinas tried to attempt this method but only implicitly.[8]

We also need to note that Chapters 9-13 of *Insight* were written first.[9] So the language of these chapters is close to that of *Verbum*.[10] Lonergan states in Chapter 12 of *Insight*, that introspective analysis is not mere abstracting or prescinding.[11] It is more than that; it is a grasp of one's own way of understanding or conceiving something. In the introduction to this magnum opus, Lonergan says that "it is both easy and common to conceive introspection and intellectual experience in a fashion that, when submitted to scrutiny, proves to be meaningless."[12]Lonergan is cautioning against simplistic or uncritical understandings of introspection and intellectual experience. He suggests that while it may seem straightforward to describe how we reflect on our thoughts or gain understanding, such descriptions often fall apart under careful analysis and reveal themselves to be incoherent or empty. His point is that true insight requires rigorous thinking, not just surface-level assumptions. Introspection is not something that you do with your closed eyes, to look into yourself, but something that is the simultaneous result of struggling with some text or object or datum.

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7 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 224, 226, see also 59, 65, 104.

8 Lonergan, *Verbum*, 57-58; see also Bernard Lonergan, "Consciousness and the Trinity," *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan,**6**,ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1996),128.

9 See the editorial introduction of *Insight*, xxvii.

10 Bernard Lonergan, "*Insight* Revisited," *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. William F.J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, Toronto, 1996),267: "As soon as I finished the *Verbum*articles I began writing *Insight*."

11 Lonergan, *Insight*, 380.

12 Lonergan, *Insight*, 14.

Moving further, introspection in the Existentialism Lectures (1957) involves a shift of attention from the object to the operating subject and act.[13]The idea of "shift of attention" will be later termed "heightening of consciousness" by Lonergan. This idea will prove significant for his discussion of self-appropriation. Later, even after the notion of self-appropriation has been introduced, Lonergan still uses the idea of introspection in *Method in Theology* (1971). Here, introspection is a process of objectification.Objectification is self-knowledge, obtained through applying the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious.[14] Since introspection is a process of objectification, we may say that introspection is not identical with self-knowledge, but the beginning of the process of self-knowledge.From all this we can say that introspection, for Lonergan, is a prerequisite for self-knowledge. Introspection is distinct from objectification as self-knowledge. We can also note that Lonergan does not abandon the term "introspection" in the later works, though this notion has been transposed into the notion of self-appropriation.

2. Self-appropriation

As mentioned earlier, in *Insight*, the earlier notion of psychological introspection is replaced with that of self-appropriation, which is a matter of understanding understanding, having an insight into insight. What is an insight? It is an act of understanding. Lonergan writes, "By insight, then, is meant not any act of attention or advertence or memory but the supervening act of understanding."[15]Therefore, insight into insight means an act of understanding into the act of understanding; and this implies an introspective mode of cognitional process.

13 Lonergan, "Existentialism," unpublishednotes for Lectures at Boston College, 15-19July 1957, mimeographed edition (Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1957), 19. The Existentialism Lectures have now been published as Bernard Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan,**18**, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

14 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*(Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, Toronto, 2007),14-15.

15 Lonergan, *Insight*, 3.

Self-appropriation, in *Insight*, consists in one's rational consciousness possessing one's own rational self-consciousness. Appropriation, for Lonergan, isto discover, to identify, to become familiar with, the activities of one's own intelligence; "the point is to become able to discriminate with ease and from personal conviction between one's purely intellectual activities and the manifold of other, 'existential' concerns that invade and mix and blend with the operations of intellect to render it ambivalent and its pronouncements ambiguous."[16]

In fact, the very aim of the work of *Insight* is itself self-appropriation. Lonergan emphatically states: "Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding. … [I] t is only through a personal appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness that one can hope to reach the mind of Aquinas, and once that mind is reached, then it is difficult not to import his compelling genius to the problems of this later day."[17] The original subtitle of *Insight* was "An Essay in Aid of a Personal Appropriation of one's Rational Self-consciousness." This would have been a wonderful and apt subtitle according to Fred Crowe, since it stresses the importance of self-appropriation.[18]

Similarly, in the Halifax Lectures on *Insight*, published as *Understanding and Being* (1958), the central idea is self-appropriation, which is attaining the dynamism of the mind, i.e., moving into the pre-formulated. This interestingly resonates with Heidegger's focus on the pre-propositional. For Heidegger, pre-understanding is a matter of tapping into the existential, everyday understanding a human person possesses, and lives on. This existential understanding is a pre-formulated, pre-logical and pre-propositional understanding; an understanding that is the source of scientific, logical and philosophical statements.

16 Lonergan, *Insight*, 13-14.

17 Lonergan, *Insight*, 769-770.

18 Frederick Crowe, "The Exigent Mind: Bernard Lonergan's Intellectualism," *Spirit as Inquiry: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan, S.J.* (Chicago: Saint Xavier College, 1964), 22; see also Lonergan, *Insight*, 748.

To reiterate the point of our discussion, self-appropriation as discussed in *Insight* and *Understanding and Being* corresponds to the notion of psychological introspection of *Verbum*. Moreover, self-appropriation is nothing but a heightening of consciousness.Therefore, it is a question of understanding one's own data of consciousness through a heightening of consciousness, which proceeds further to yield objectification or self-knowledge.In 1970, in a clear way for Lonergan, self-appropriation is a"heightening of consciousness." In consciousness, one is aware both of the object and the act. The heightening takes place not by eliminating the object but by enlarging one's own area of attention. As a result, both the act and the object come to light. And if one substitutes one act with another, one gets clear of the act. Lonergan adds that this heightening of consciousness is an experience itself.[19]

In his second magnum opus *Method in Theology* (completed in 1971, and published in 1972) Lonergan clearly states that "self-appropriation occurs through a heightening of consciousness and such a heightening reveals not the subject as object but the subject as subject. I should contend, however, that this heightening of consciousness proceeds to an objectification of the subject, to an intelligent and reasonable affirmation of the subject, and so to a transition from the subject as subject to the subject as object. Such a transition yields objective knowledge of the subject just as much as does any valid transition from the data of sense through inquiry and understanding, reflection and judgment."[20] Self-appropriation as occurring through a heightening of consciousness suggests a distinction between self-appropriation and self-knowledge. Self-appropriation may not involve the affirmation (judgment) of the understanding of our data of consciousness. According to *Method in Theology*, a heightening of consciousness involves "inquiry, enlarged interest, discernment, comparison, distinction, identification, naming."[21]

19 Bernard Lonergan, "Method in Theology,"Course at Boston College, Boston, 15-26June 1970, unpublisedtranscript by Nicholas W. Graham (Toronto, 1984), 432-434.

20 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 262.

21 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*,15.

Furthermore, Lonergan linkshis notion of self-appropriation to transcendental method, an approach inspired by Kant, and developed variously by Husserl, Heidegger, Ricoeur, and especially the Transcendental Thomists. The transcendental method, in general, is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand the conditions for the possibility of knowledge, experience, or existence. For Lonergan, the "transcendental method rests on a self-appropriation, on attending to, inquiring, understanding, conceiving, affirming."[22]He further says that the process of transcendental method will be hindered by the presence of misconceptions of knowing. He also says, "self-appropriation of itself is a grasp of transcendental method."[23] If the term "grasp" here implies "understanding," then self-appropriation may include not only a heightening of consciousness but also understanding.

Lonergan also says that "appropriation [of one's own interiority], in its technical expression, resembles theory."[24] From these, self-appropriation seems to be pertaining to the level of intelligence, rather than of judgment. He is also of the opinion that one needs a long philosophic training so that they may gain entry into interiority. One will achieve a basis or foundation for such interiority through self-appropriation. This foundation is distinct from the realms of common sense and of theory as well. It distinguishes these realms, accounts for them and critically grounds them.[25] He also says that the "primary function [of philosophy] is to promote self-appropriation that cuts to the root of philosophic differences and incomprehensions."[26] Self-appropriation, therefore, is a matter of discovering oneself in oneself.[27] In other words, it is a process of self-discovery. Moreover, for Lonergan, the process of self-appropriation is attained through struggle and hard work with *Insight* or any other similar work. It occurs only gradually, very often very slowly.[28]

22 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 34, n. 6.
23 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83.
24 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83.
25 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 85.
26 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 95.
27 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 260; see also Lonergan, "*Insight* Revisited," *A Second Collection*, 269.
28 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 7, n. 2.

Therefore we may say that it is the process of self-appropriation that leads one to self-knowledge, self-discovery, self-transcendence, and self-development. Lonergan writes in*Understanding and Being*: "We make ourselves. It is not only that knowledge is an ideal and that its precise nature is something that has to be discovered in the pursuit of knowledge itself; but we ourselves are selves that develop. We develop in response to situations, outside influences, but we also develop from within. That development from within is the fundamental problem: becoming aware, explicitly conscious, of what intelligence is; becoming explicitly conscious of what judgment is; and seeing the philosophic implications of what intelligence and judgment are."[29]

Self-appropriation as becoming aware, explicitly conscious, or heightening of consciousness is the first step towards growth and maturity, because "we make ourselves." Lonergan and all existentialists insist on this point that "we make ourselves." In line with Kierkegaard, Lonergan says that being human is not merely a logical inference, but it "springs from an inner and free determination that is not scientifically observable."[30] Moreover, being oneself or being human results from a decision and is consequent to the continuous use of freedom.[31] In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan would speak of an "existential decision" to become an authentic human person—of making oneself a truly mature person.[32]

Conclusion

A central aspect of Lonergan's thought is self-appropriation.When we trace the development of the notion of self-appropriation in Lonergan, we see that the notion of psychological introspection in Lonergan's *Verbum* articles(1946-1949),is transposed into the notion of self-

29 Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: The Halifax Lectures on* Insight, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan,5, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli, revised and augmented by Frederick E. Crowe, with the collaboration of Elizabeth A. Morelli, Mark D. Morelli, Robert M. Doran, and Thomas V. Daly (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College and University of Toronto Press, 1990), 99.

30 Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 222.

31 Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 221, 223.

32 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 121.

appropriation in *Insight* (1953). This notion is a matter of understanding understanding; a grasp of one's own interiority. Self-appropriation, as clearly formulated in *Method in Theology* (1971), is a heightening of consciousness that is key to self-discovery, and that yields self-knowledge and results in self-development. Ivo Coelho points to a wonderfully complex articulation of Lonergan's symbiotic conception on philosophy and theology, that is centred on self-appropriation: "A philosophy that rejects extrinsecism, that begins from the self-appropriation of the subject = his self-mediation with respect to a tradition = mutual self-mediation within a tradition,begins with man as he concretely is, as a member of a community, as a receiver and transmitter of a tradition, as in need of conversion; such a starting point is isomorphic with the starting-point of one that inquires into Christian claims; while there are two formally distinct starting points, there is only one full solution: when one deals with man in the concrete, one is dealing with man under original sin, in need of grace, receiving it, and either accepting or rejecting it—one is in a theological context."[33]

33 Bernard Lonergan, "Method in Theology. The Problem. External Factors" (LRI Archives, folder entitled "Various Papers," containing notes pertaining to the Summer Institute on "The Method in Theology," Georgetown University, Washington, 13-17 July 1964; unpublished), 14, slightly edited; quoted in Ivo Coelho, "Hermeneutics: Notes for the Master's Degree Course in Philosophy" (Nashik: Divyadaan - Salesian Institue of Philosophy, 2012; unpublished), 88.

ADVAITA METAPHYSICS
The Falsity of the World according to Advaita

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Abstract: *This article explores Advaita Vedanta's foundational premise: Brahman, pure, non-dual consciousness, is the sole reality. It investigates the paradoxical appearance of the multifaceted empirical world, positing it as a transcendental illusion (Avidyā) or superimposition (adhyāsa) on Brahman. Falsity is meticulously defined as distinct from both the Real and the utterly unreal, being eternally negated in its locus, and removed by the true knowledge of its substratum. The world's falsity is argued from its attributes: it is perceived (dṛśyatvāt), inert (jaḍatvāt), and finite (paricchinnatvāt). Though possessing causal efficiency (arthakriyākāritva) in the empirical realm, this is relative, akin to dream experiences. The world's existence is merely practical (vyāvahārika) and dissolves upon Brahman-realization, signifying that what appears is not ultimately real.*

1. Introduction

Advaita proposes the thesis that the Absolute in Itself, without any distinctions, is the only reality. This Reality is nothing but pure consciousness. But in empirical experience we find a variety of things and events, sometimes co-existing in harmony, and on some other occasions contradicting each other. If Reality is One, wherefrom these multiplicities arise? How is to justify the world appearances, which we do experience as real and objective. The Advaitins, therefore, will have to provide evidence for the process by which 'what is Bodiless becomes embodied', and 'what is Pure and indistinguishable Consciousness that is free from any duality, are surrounded by a variety of subjects and objects. The basic problem, therefore, is to explain the process of the embodiment of the Pure Consciousness as the *jīva* and the world. How did the Pure Self lost Its essential nature, how did It get involved in the world of differences, so much so, It has forgotten Itself and wanders in

the territory of the profane. The world-process is due to some Innate Mistake or Transcendental Illusion. It is the Illusion that underlies all our activities, physical and mental.

2. Nature of Illusion

Knowledge of Illusion is the starting point in the understanding of the nature and status of the world. An illusion is stratified by four complex strands: Every illusion takes place on a given substratum (*adhiṣṭhna*). The substratum in itself is no reason for the illusion. Due to some reason the real nature of the object is 'covered' *(*ā*varaa*) and at the same time the hidden object is 'presented' (*vikepa*) as 'another' object. A mere projection of the substratum as another object too would not sufficiently explain the illusory-experience. What is projected is superimposed (*adhysa*) on the substratum. In the stock example of the 'rope-snake' illusion, the 'snake' is presented and is positively identified with the substratum, rope. Thus, a person who is going through the illusory experience of the 'rope-snake' does not at all perceive the rope, but the rope as 'snake'. As long as the illusion persists he 'sees' nothing but the snake.

3. Definitions of Falsity[1]

An analysis of the illusory object reveals the falsity of its existence.

i) The Advaitins characterise the false as– 'that which is different from the Real and the unreal'. The Real is defined as 'that which is uncontradicted (*abdhita*) at all the three times'. In this sense the illusory 'snake' is not a real object, because, it gets sublated at the dawn of the knowledge of the substratum (the rope) on which the 'snake' was erroneously superimposed. On the other hand, the 'snake' is not utterly a non-being (*asat*). Anything that is utterly a non-being, like the 'sky-flower' (*khapuṣpa*), cannot at all enter the

1 Advaitasiddhi gives five definitions of falsity. The first definition of falsity mentioned in this paper is originally given by Padmapāda and the second and the third definitions given here are originally propounded by Prakāśātma Yati. Sadānada yati too gives three definitions which corresponds to the first, third and fourth definitions given in Advaita Siddhi. The fourth definition is originally given by Citsukhācārya in his *Tattvapradīpik*ā. *ABS,* p. 148.

ken of perception. Hence, the false is characterised as 'that which is different from the Real and the Unreal (*sadasadvilakṣaṇa*).

ii) Falsity could also be defined as 'that which is eternally negated in the locus where it appears' (*pratipannopā dhautraikālikaniṣedhapratiyogitvammithyātvam*). The illusory object does not exist, where it seems to exist, in the past, at the present and in the future. This is the meaning of the Upaniṣadic saying, "*neha nānāsti kiñcana*." All the ascriptions given to the 'snake', like colour, shape, size etc, were of the rope. Ontologically the 'snake' was naught; yet it 'appeared' as an object; and this 'appearance' of something that is 'naught' is the specific feature of every illusion; it is an appearance of something, which under normal circumstances should not have appeared.

iii) The illusory object is false because it is 'removed' by the true knowledge of the substratum (*jānanivartyatvam*). The 'removal' of the false object is neither its destruction nor its disintegration: the 'snake' is neither killed nor chased away; it was a creation due to the ignorance of the true knowledge of the rope; with the dawn of the true knowledge of the rope the erroneous perception of the 'snake is rectified. It is the annulment of the state of ignorance by the knowledge of the true state of affairs.

iv) The object of illusion is false because it is the property of being the counter positive (*pratiyogin*) of absolute non-existence (*atyantābhva*) in all its possible loci (*svāśraya*) (*svāśrayaniṣṭhātyantābhāvapratiyogitvam*). Everything has its own loci. If X is searched in all its possible loci, and still not found, then it could be considered as false. Its absolute non-existence is present in all the loci.

The relation that exists between the cause (the rope) and the effect (the 'snake') is *tādtmya*. Any relation pre-supposes two terms. The 'snake' of the 'rope-snake' illusion is illusory – it has only a parasitic existence on the rope, the real term. Thus, one of the terms of the relation is real while the other is illusory, and has existence only as being superimposed

on the real. In other words, it has a 'borrowed' existence – an existence acquired only because of the real term. The illusory has no independent existence; the 'snake' has no separate existence apart from the rope. On the other hand, the rope exists on its own right; it is not affected by ascriptions, false or true, that are given to it; it just continues to be there indifferent to all accusations and praises showered on it. The *tdātmya* relation that exists between the real and the unreal, thus, implicitly means that ontologically speaking there is only one term that is the real existent while the other is merely a superimposition on the real without any essence of its own.

4. The world as false

Thus far we have analysed the structure and the nature of illusion. The more pertinent question now is, can the individual cases of illusion be a starting point to view the world itself as illusory? Can all illusions be of the self-same type? Is there a possibility of positing the world as an illusion on account of individual illusion? The Advaitins consider the world as illusory because it is perceived (*dṛśyatvt mithyā*); because it is inert (*jaḍatvāt*); and because it is limited (*paricchinnatvāt*).

i) The world is false because it is perceived like the 'silver' in the shell.[2] The illusory experiences like the 'snake' on the rope, the 'silver' superimposed on the shell etc, have reality only as they are perceived. Their 'percepi' is their 'esse'. The illusory 'snake' has no existence prior to its 'being perceived'; it does not have any future existence. If the person who 'saw' the snake earlier, returns to the same place a little later and finds only the rope, he would not see the snake at all. Thus, the illusory snake had only an 'apparent' existence when it was perceived to 'exist'. Applying the same logic to the world, we reach the conclusion that the world has 'apparent' existence as long as it is seen as the world.

The Real does not 'appear', and what appears is not Real. The Real is beyond words and expressions (*avṅmanasagocara*). On the other hand that which is expressed in any particular mode through concepts

2 *dṛśyatvāt, śuktirajatādivat*. ABS, p.144

or words, is mere appearance devoid of any intrinsic reality (dṛśya).[3] Anything that is definitely expressed or expressible is false. In this sense everything in the world is expressed and expressible, defined and definable; every language and religion, history and tradition, God and Man, are false. The Real cannot at all be expressed in any way. All expressions of Brahman do not affect Him at all, just as the ascriptions of the illusory snake do not at all affect the rope. Brahman remains indifferent to all distinctions and plurality.

ii) The world is false because it is inert (*jaḍatvt*). *Jaḍa* could mean various things. It could be something that is in Ignorance, or whose existence is due to Ignorance, or that which is devoid of Consciousness (*ajānatva*). Pure Consciousness alone is Real; other than It everything else has no substantial existence (*antmatva*); their existence is dependent on Brahman. In every knowledge situation, the subject is faced with an object – an 'other' – which functions as the object of consciousness. *Jaa* is that which stands as the object of consciousness (*jāna viṣayatva*). Consciousness alone is self-revealing (*svaprakāśatva*), while *jaḍa* is evidenced by consciousness as it is non-luminous (*asvaprakāśatva*). The Real is not an object of consciousness; yet, it remains as the immediate principle of every revelation (*avedyatve sati aparokṣavyavahārayogyatva*). Without positing a conscious principle prior to the world of inert objects, one cannot explain meaningfully the revelatory function in the world. Otherwise the world would be plunged into darkness (*jagadāndhyaprasaṅga*). The Real is not known as an object. If It were to be known by another principle, that principle will have to be known by yet another principle, and so on, landing one in infinite regress. The Advaitins, therefore, maintain that the Real is self-evident and self-luminous; and *jaḍa*, in contrast, is dependent on consciousness for its evidence, besides being inert.

iii) The world is false also because of finitude (*paricchinnatvāt*) – it is limited by time, space and other objects. Due to special limitation

3 *śabdajanya viṣaya vṛttijanyatvameva dṛśyam yadvāsaprakāraka vṛtti viṣayatvam dṛśyatvam*

we could say that an entity is here or there etc. The objects in the world are conditioned by their location in space; they are also limited by time. Because of this we could locate events as happening now, then etc. Objects are also limited by the contents of other entities. The self exists everywhere (*sarvatra*), at all times (*sarvad*ā); which cannot be said of any other entity. Any entity other than the self exists at some time (*kadcit*); is in some place (*kvacit*); is determined by some other entity or entities (*kathañcit*). What is limited in time is subject to destruction at a little later; what is limited in space does not exist at some other space simultaneously; what is limited by other entities is an object of reciprocal negation. Because they are limited they are all false. A limited entity, a finite entity gets destroyed; and therefore cannot be real. Only the self is real, because it remains uncontradicted at all times.

5. The cause of the world

'The cause of the world according to Advaita', is a lively topic that is widely discussed by the Advaitins as well as their critics. It remains still their chief bone of contention. The Advaitins of a realistic bend consider that Brahman *causes* the world, quoting innumerable passages from the Brahma SūtraBhāṣya (BSSB) of Śankara to justify their stand. Śankara, while criticising the Sāmkhyans on their claim that the insentient prakṛti is the cause of the world, takes great pains to advocate his thesis that it is the sentient Brahman, and not the insentient prakṛti, that is the cause of the world. (BSSB, 1.1.5; 1.1.11; 2.1.1; 1.1.9) It is Brahman That is material as well the efficient cause of the world. But if the world is a product of Brahman, then the world would be real. How can Advaita claim unreality to the world?

The world is considered to be unreal, answers Advaitin, only when it is taken to exist independent of Brahman. The world as an effect has no 'being' other than that of the cause, Brahman. The world is not entirely different in nature than Brahman; the differences, the multiplicity, the inertness etc that we experience in the world does not negate its essential oneness with Brahman. Śaṅkara uses the metaphor of gold and ornaments made of gold to bring home this point. He says that a chunk

of gold when changed into various ornaments like bangles, chains etc; and each golden object gains its specific form and qualities by which each is different from one another as well as from the chunk of gold of which they were made; yet, in essence the chunk of gold as well as the various artefacts made of it are the same. Hence, aṅkara concludes, that the effect is of the nature of the cause; the cause, however, need not be of the nature of the effect. (BSSB, 2.1.9)

According to Sāmkhya, *jaa* means that which lacks sentiency, and *cetana* is that which possesses sentiency. But the realistic interpreters of Śaṅkara define acetana as that which does not manifest sentiency; and this does not mean that it is fundamentally insentient in nature.[4] Moreover, since reality is only One, and that is Pure Consciousness, the world cannot but be sentient. The 'apparent' insentient entities giving rise to sentient beings, and vice versa – like cow-dung giving rise to scorpion and human body giving rise to hair, nails etc – are due to the fundamental unity of all beings. (BSSB, 2.1.6). Brahman becomes the world; this becoming does not involve a real change. An entity is said to real change only when it loses its real nature (*svarpan*āś*a*) and gains in stead another *svar*ū*pa*. When Brahman becomes the world It does not abandon Its real nature (svarūpa); the real nature of Brahman is maintained through every sphere of the world, but remains unrecognised.

The realistic interpreters do not deny the existence of the world as such, but its existence independent of Brahman. The false idea that the world is different from Brahman is only a 'notion' and not a 'fact'.[5] At Realisation what is destroyed is not the universe, but the false view of the world. Sadnanda, the author of *Advaitabrahmasiddhi* (ABS), says that the indescribable, beginningless avidyā is the cause of the world. (ABS, 144) Brahman is unchanging (*k*ū*ṭastha*), and is beyond the sphere of causal categories. There is nothing that precedes (*ap*ū*rvam*) Brahman, or succeeds It (*anaparam*), or 'outside' (*ab*ā*hyam*) of It. This Brahman that pervades the entire universe is the cause of Avidyā. (ABS, 145) The realistic thinkers of Advaita blame the post-Śaṅkarite advaitic writers

4 Srinivasa Rao : "*Two Myths in Advaita*," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol IV, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996; p. 267

5 Rao, *art. cit.* p. 270

as deviating from the letter and spirit of Śaṅkara's own teachings. Has there been a real deviation? What is the demand of Advaita logic of non-dualism?

Reality is One. It is unchanging and eternal. To experience this One as Many in this multifarious, diversified world should be due to some reason or cause. Advaita pre-supposes Avidyā as the cause of all illusory appearances of many-ness of the One and Only Real. Ignorance forces one to perceive the One as Many. In the rope-snake illusion, the snake is what the rope. The world, which is an illusory superimposition on Brahman, is nothing other than Brahman Itself. The entire world is Brahman Itself. All the descriptions of the illusory snake are in fact the descriptions of the rope. So too, everything we speak of the world is the superimposed ascriptions of Brahman. In this sense Brahman is the world; and this does not bring Brahman under any real causal category.

Traditionally all the Schools of Indian Thought viewed the world as an effect caused by some entity or other – atoms, prakṛti, myā, Brahman – depending on the School one believes in. Each System of Indian Thought, has also developed some specific Theory of Causality to suit its own understanding of Metaphysics. The Naiyāyikas, who are hardcore Realists, believe in Asatkāryavda, a position where it is proposed that, 'the effect does not exist in the material cause before its origination. If the effect already exists, they contend, then, the production of it is useless'; secondly, 'if the effect is not something new, having its own separate essence and existence, the realism itself would collapse. Asatkāryavda fails to explain the relation between cause and effect meaningfully. A relation is possible only between two existents; it is impossible between two non-existents, or between an existent and a non-existent. If an effect is purely non-existent, then, one cannot possibly suggest that a particular effect is caused by a particular cause. Consequently, if the effect is unrelated to the cause, any and every effect could be produced at random, because there is no essential relation between cause and effect.[6]

6 *Satorhidvayoḥsambandhaḥsambhavati, na sadasatorasatorvā.* quoted in, *Status of the World in Advaita Vēdānta*, Hari Prasad Bhattacharya, Bharata Manīsha, Varanasi, 1979.

The Sāṁkhya System accepts Satkāryavāda as its Theory of Causality. According to this theory 'the effect does exist prior to its production, albeit potentially. The effect is a real transformation of the cause (pariṇāma). The effect, therefore, is not completely different in essence from its cause. Vivaraṇaprameyasagraha questions the very nature of transformation. Is it a rearrangement of the material out of which the effect is produced, like a pot that is a rearrangement of clay; or a change of material into another due to some addition to it, like curds from milk; or a change of condition, like a youth growing into an old man; or a change of form (avasthānatara), like a mast made of wood; or something new due to the conjunction of atoms like dyads, etc; or an appearance of new attributes, like raw fruit getting ripe? Vivaraṇaprameyasagraha says that since Brahman is partless, It cannot undergo any change; besides, Brahman is immutable and eternal.[7]

According to the Sāmkhya Theory of Causal Relations, the cause really changes into the effect; the cause really 'becomes' the effect; *Prakṛti* transforming itself into its effects. There is an essential unity between the cause and its effect. The effect is nothing but the cause in a new form *(virbhāva)*. It is *sat-kārya*, real-transformation – the cause has become the effect really and truly. Advaita follows the *satkāraavāda*. According to this theory, the cause alone is real; its effect is the unreal transfiguration of the cause. Between the two terms of relation, the term cause is significant, while the other term, effect, is 'apparent'. The effect cannot exist without the cause, whereas the cause is a subsisting substance. The cause is unaffected by the effect; it does not get modified, exhausted by the descriptions of the effect. Thus, unlike the Sāmkhya School, the effect – appearance according to Advaita – does not constitute the real, but indicates, or points to, it. Is this world real? It is real as long as we are in Ignorance, and therefore, see it as the world. As long as one is in illusion, the snake is real to him. But ontologically considered, the world is naught – the Upaniṣadic statements, *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*, *Nehanānāsti kiñcana*, indicates this aspect of the Real.

7 *Status of the World in Advaita Vēdānta*, p. 151

6. Levels of Appearance

The Non-dualistic System of Advaita eschews everything else as real and considers even that which confronts one as object of one's experience as unreal. The Real is Brahman, the Non-dual Consciousness. Advaita cannot accept anything other than Brahman as Real; so much so, even the perception of illusion, which illusion itself is false, is said to be false. The oft-quoted dictum of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "Unreal the world is, illusory it is not", seems to give the world a certain amount of reality. He seems to consider the world as having a lesser reality than Brahman. There is no gradation in Reality according to Advaita. If it is real it is the Real; otherwise it is unreal. Giving the world a greater reality than the illusory experiences like the superimposition of the snake on the rope, arises from the ignorance of the logic of Advaita. Ontologically the world is naught. Strictly speaking there is only two categories: the Real and the unreal. The Real (pāramrthikasattā) is Brahman. However, the unreal has its shades of differences that are based, not on the higher or lesser unreality, but purely on their durability and practicality. The normal experience of the objects of the world is more durable than that of illusory objects. The shades of the unreal are classified as, i) imaginary objects (*alīka*); ii) illusory objects (*prātibhsika*) and iii) empirical objects (vyāvahārika). Absolute no-existence (*alīka*) is only a figment of imagination. Though it could be expressed through language (*vikalpa*), it never appears in the ken of one's experience. For instance, one can meaningfully express the idea of a golden mountain or the horns of a hare; but they do not have any existence in all the three times, past, present and future. The illusory objects (*prātibhsika satt*ā) is not a mere figment of imagination – it has an objective ground on which it appears. The illusory object has no reality of its own; but has a parasitic existence, an existence dependent entirely on its substratum. The snake of the rope-snake illusion, 'exists' purely because of the rope. The snake is superimposed on the rope. The illusory snake is presented to the perceiver, though the life-span of the illusory snake lasts only as long as it is being perceived. Before it is perceived, it was the rope, and when the true knowledge of the substratum dawns on the person under illusion, he sees it as the rope, which it ever was. Similarly, all

the illusory as well as dream objects exist, or appear in one's mental experience, as they are perceived and as long as they are, perceived. Illusory objects are personal and private to the perceiver.

Empirical objects (*vyāvahrikasattā*) too, are unreal in the ultimate analysis. Yet, they serve the needs of our practical life. The difference between the *vyāvahārika* and the *prātibhsika* is based on their durability. Ontologically both are of the same order of unreality. Illusory objects are personal and private to the perceiver; they 'exist' only when they are perceived and at the dawn of the knowledge of the substratum the illusion is removed. Empirical objects, on the other hand, have a longer period of 'existence' – they are removed only at Brahman-realisation. Until then the world process is 'taken' to be real.

The Realists question the very possibility of having the Cause-effect Relation between the World and its cause if the World is proposed to be false (mithyā). Causal relation is possible only between two real entities. The Naiyāyikas define Cause as: "That which invariably precedes the Effect."[8] Now, the cause is called sat, because 'sattā' inheres in it. It is not sat by itself, because cause and sat are not identical. Hence, when sattā is not included under cause (sat), then, cause is proved to be asat. The same argument raised by the Realists boomerangs on them, because the cause of the World being thus proved to be asat, and the effect, the World, is considered to be real – a Cause-effect Relation between them is not possible as one of the terms compared is non-existent. Sriharṣa says that what is necessary for the causal relation is just the preceding and succeeding presence. It is useless to discuss on what precedes is true or false, because the causal relation has nothing to do with it. (ABS, 49). This shows that though one cannot prove a real cause-effect relation yet they are 'taken as true' in our empirical sphere of existence.

One should trust the common sense experience, because our direct experience tells us that the objects of the world are real; moreover, they are proved by Valid Means of Knowledge, like Perception etc. Everyone accepts some pramāṇa to prove the World, for rejecting them would

8 *Kāryaniyatapūrvavṛtti kāraṇam.* Annam Bhatta*, Tarka Samgraha,* Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1988, p.26

be contrary to our experience. Are pramāṇas valid by themselves? A closer scrutiny reveals the appalling nature of the pramāṇas. In Indian Philosophy, the Sāmkhya System and the Schools of Prabhākara and Bhaṭṭa accept the self-validity of the pramāṇas (svata pramāṇa). A pramṇa, if it is valid, should be valid by itself; that is, a pramāṇa should carry conviction, an authority by which it can affirm what the state of affairs is; one need not look for a second factor to validate the pramāṇa. Perception, one of the Means of Knowledge, is taken as self-evident. Can all the perceptual experiences give us right knowledge? There are cases of illusion, (eg.mirage taken for water), doubts, beliefs etc., where one questions the self-evident nature of perception. Hence, other Schools of Indian Thought accept parataḥ pramāṇa, a thesis which advocates that a pramāṇa is not valid in itself, but validated by another pramāṇa. It is an external validation. The Naiyāyikas say, every pramāna is neutral; it is neither true nor false by itself; truth or falsity of a pramāṇa is adjudged externally. Even this position does not fare any better. If a pramāṇa is to be validated externally by another pramāṇa, which itself is to be validated by yet another pramāṇa… leading to infinite regress. Prataḥ pramṇa leads to anavasthā, while svataḥ pramāṇa is doubtful. (ABS, 150).

With regard to the pramāṇas, the approach of the Advaitins is very pragmatic – they are accepted only at the empirical (vyāvahrika) level, without any role at the Absolute (pāramrthika) level. Śruti alone is true on matters pertaining to the pāramrthika level; hence, in any case of contradiction between pramāṇa and ruti, Śruti is to be preferred. Śruti too falls away with the realization of Brahman, for it too is false!

The World (prapañca) is accepted, though unreal, at the empirical level according to the Advaitins. The Realists may, therefore, accuse the Advaitins of violating the Law of Contradiction: How could the Advaitins bestow the World with a pragmatic (vyāvahrika) existence, if the World is unreal? That is, the World is categorised as naught as well as taken as existing, albeit empirically. 'X' and its absence cannot co-exist – no entity can exist and not-exist simultaneously. According to the author of Advaitabrahmasiddhi, non-existence (abhāva) and

its pratiyogin could co-exist under certain conditions. For instance, the illusory experience of silver on the shell continues to exist till the realisation of the substratum, the shell. In reality, the silver (rajata) does not exist on the shell; what exists (there) is the 'absence' of silver. The silver, however, has a superimposed existence on the shell in illusion. Hence, in illusion there is a co-existence of silver and its absence (pratiyogisahiṣṇu) on the shell. (ABS, 151).

7. The Perception of the Falsity is False (*Mithyātva Mithyātva*)

Is the perception of the falsity of the world itself false? Up to now we have considered the arguments that according to Advaita the World is false. Is the perception of the falsity of the World itself false or true? If we accept that the falsity of the World itself as false, then, the World, being its pratiyogin, should be true; for, in one and the same entity two contradictory entities cannot co-exist. If the falsity of the World is false, then, its opposite – satyatva – should be attributed to the World. On the other hand, if the falsity of the World is true, then, we should accept, at least two reals – Brahman and the falsity of the World. Such a position would destroy the non-dualistic (Advaitahni) stand of the system. Moreover, if a second entity besides Brahman is accepted as real, then, there could be more than one such real; because there is no logical justification to stop with just one more real – there could be a second real or more.

The Advaitins argue that even when falsity of the World is accepted as false (*mithyā),* the *satyatva* of the World is not established. Because, of the two contradictory properties, where *niedhyatāvacchedaka* is not common to both – the rejection of the one implies the existence of the other. But if *niṣedhyatāvacchedaka* exists in one of the two contradictory properties, then, the rejection of the one does not mean the existence of the other. This needs a further explanation: '*niṣedhya'* means that which is to be rejected; '*niṣedhyatāvacchedaka'* is the property that functions as the limiter of something to be rejected; for instance, if *paṭa* is the *niedhya,paṭatva* is the *niṣedhyatāvacchedaka*. To reject *paṭa* alone, there needs to be only one *niṣedhyatāvacchedaka*, while to reject *paṭatva* and *ghaṭatva*, there needs to be two separate

*niṣedhyat*ā*vacchedaka*; hence, they are mutually exclusive. Returning to our point of discussion: Advaita proposes one *niedhyat*ā*vacchedaka* for *mithyatva* (falsity) and *satyatva* (reality) for the World. What we have to keep in mind is that the '*satyatva'* attributed to the World by Realists is the *mithy*ā*tva* of the Advaitins. Hence, both being of the same category, one *niṣedhyat*ā*vacchedaka* rejects both the properties – since *mithyatva* inheres in *satyatva* as well as in *mithy*ā*tva*. Thus, the rejection of the falsity of the World does not establish the reality of the World. (ABS, 156).

Leaving apart the technicalities what does it mean to say that the perception of the falsity of the world is false? Falsity that we perceive is not a separate entity apart from the world. It is not like a Cheshire Cat of *Alice in the Wonder Land* where the smile of the cat remains even when the cat disappears. Falsity we perceive is part of the world, which is false, and in Brahma-realization the world disappears. Falsity being part of the world disappears along with the process of the cancellation of the world. The perception of the falsity of the world has no significance in itself.

Let us argue this problem from another angle. The contention that two opposite qualities cannot be attributed to the same subject holds good only when the different qualities are mutually exclusive. For instance, silverness and non-silverness cannot exist simultaneously. The rejection of one is the affirmation of the other; that is, if one is false, the other has to be true. But, when the qualities are not mutually exclusive, the rejection of the one does not affirm the other. For instance, 'cowness' is not 'horseness'; yet they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, if one is false, say, with regard to the elephant, the other need not be true of the elephant. 'Cowness' and 'horseness' are rejected in the elephant (*gaja*). The horseness and cowness are rejected in the elephant, not as '*avatva*' or as'*gotva*', but as '*gajatv*ā*tyant*ā*bhavavy*ā*pya*'; that is, whichever universal pervaded by the absolute non-existence of elephantness (*gajatva*). This will help us to bring together both these entities that have the *atyant*ā*bhva* of *gajatva* under one category, and one *niedhyat*ā*vacchedaka* is sufficient to reject both of them.

8. Causal-Efficiency of The World (*Arthakriyākāritva*)

It is our belief that the objects of our empirical experiences are true and valid because of their causal efficiency (*arthakriyākāritva*). I can make use of a table for keeping books; while a table that exists only in my dream or imagination is incapable of producing any efficiency. I can make ornaments out of a chunk of real silver, while the 'mistaken' silver (of the shell) is incapable of such a function. Water from a tank is effective in nurturing plants in the garden or a field; while a mirage cannot quench the thirst of any one. With empirical objects, the Realists say, one is capable of conducting the affairs of the world; while with imaginary or illusory objects one cannot do so. Hence, the Realists claim that empirical objects are real, because of their practical efficiency (*arthakriyākritvāt*). (ABS, 156).

The Advaitins counter this position saying, that mere causal efficiency is not sufficient to prove the reality of the World, because then, experiences like dream, illusion, which too have causal efficiency would be real. A person who had a frightening dream of a snake, would shout out for help, would sweat, would breathe faster, and would often become restless, just as in any such frightening experience in real life. There are people, who, during their sleep, converse, climb trees…and more interestingly, all these activities are done as if they were real. The 'water' encountered in a dream is not available for a bath; yet it has efficiency in the Dream State. Causal efficiency is different in different spheres of life. The objects of the Waking State have their efficiency in the Waking State, while the objects of the Dream State have their efficiency in the Dream State. But, what is experienced in the Dream State is experienced as 'false' (*mithyā*) in the Waking State, and what is experienced in the Waking State is experienced as 'false' in the Dream State. They are mutually inconsistent. Each has its own respective sphere of 'reality'; transferring experiences from one sphere to another would lead to contradiction.

However, there are cases when dream experiences have their effect in the Waking State. A child who had had some horrifying dream of a snake would continue to be frightened in the Waking State. Good

dreams are desired again and again, while bad dreams are shunned. The Realists argue that it is only experiences that are real in the Dream State while the objects of the dream experience are unreal. The Advaitins say, the very experience itself is unreal. The experience as well as the objects are superimposed ones. The dream objects are superimposed on jīva sākṣi, hence, private, while the objects of the waking state is superimposed on Brahman, therefore, it is public. Ultimately both these are unreal.

Conclusion

According to Advaita Creation is not real. It is superimposition (*adhysa*) of the non-real phenomenal world on Brahman, the Real. Dissolution is the reverse of the process of creation. It is a process by which one perceives the substratum of illusion. Once again resorting to the 'rope-snake' illusion: perceiving the snake on the rope is *adhyāsa*; and perceiving the rope instead of the snake is de-superimposition (*apavāda*). (Vedānta Sāra, 31). Dissolution of the world means realising the Real and the One Substratum of the entire world-process. The real is non-contradictory and exists all the time. The unreal is non- existent at all times. The false is neither real nor unreal. The false appears, but not real. The does not appear and if it appears it cannot be called real. The world appears, so cannot be real.

THE INFLUENCE OF HEIDEGGER ON THE THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF RAHNER

Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil MSFS

Abstract: *Among twentieth-century Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner (1904–1984) stands out as a towering figure whose theological project bridged the gap between classical scholasticism and modern existential philosophy. Although Rahner is often associated with transcendental Thomism and his grounding in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, it was his engagement with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger that decisively shaped the contours of his theological anthropology and method. This article explores in depth how Heidegger's existential philosophy influenced Rahner's concepts of transcendental subjectivity, freedom, being, and the supernatural existential. It argues that Rahner's genius lay in integrating Heideggerian insights into a Christian theological framework, thereby laying the foundations for a contemporary theology that could speak meaningfully to modern humanity.*

Introduction

Karl Rahner has been described as the most influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, whose ideas impacted not only theology proper but the broader ecclesial atmosphere, especially during and after the Second Vatican Council.[1] Rahner's intellectual formation

1 Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 1. According to Harvey D. Egan, "Not only did Rahner write on almost every significant theological topic, but he also entered into dialogue with atheistic, Buddhist, Jewish, Marxist, Muslim, Protestant, and scientific thinkers the world over. His unanswered questions have provided fresh points of departure for a host of theological thinkers. Add to this his significant impact upon the Second Vatican Council, his fourteen honorary doctoral degrees, and the large number of doctoral students he directed, and one can see why he is aptly called "the quiet mover of the Roman Catholic Church" and "the Father of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century." Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (eds.) *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings*, Crossroad, New York, 2000, xi. See also Padraic Conway and Fainche Ryan (eds.), *Karl Rahner: Theologian for the Twenty-First Century*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010.

included deep engagement with the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Maréchal, and significantly, Martin Heidegger. Johann Baptist Metz, himself a distinguished theologian and Rahner's student, remarked: "Karl Rahner has renewed the face of our theology. Nothing is quite as it was before him. Even those who criticize him or reject him still live on his insights, his acute and sensitive perceptions in the world of life and faith."[2]

The starting point of Rahner's philosophy and theology can be traced back to the system of St. Thomas Aquinas. Apart from Thomas Aquinas, there are philosophical affinities with Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and especially with the transcendental Thomism of Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Maréchal.[3] Karl Lehmann is of the opinion that Rahner's work has not merely a distinct philosophical dimension but represents so to speak a proper epoch of philosophical thinking.[4] This is apparent in most of his writings especially in *Spirit in the World* (*Geist in Welt*)[5] and

2 Johann Baptist Metz, quoted in Weger, Karl Rahner, 1.

3 See K.Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 13-14. J.A. DiNoia notes, 'the broadly Kantian construal of Aquinas' philosophy - 'transcendental Thomism', as it has come to be called - advanced in the writings of the two Jesuit philosphers Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915) and Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944), had a decisive impact on Rahner's thought." J. A. Dinoia, "Karl Rahner," in D. F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, vol.1, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 185. According to Stephen J. Duffy, "Rahner got from Maréchal a philosophical direction and from Heidegger, not a specific set of views, but a style of thought (*Denkstil*). Rahner was to weld the metaphysics of Thomas to Heidegger's fundamental ontology." S. J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville: Glazier/Liturgical, 1993), 265. When Rahner was studying philosophy at the University of Freiburg, he attended M. Heidegger's lectures. As Rahner writes later," I might very simply and modestly acknowledge that although I had many good professors in the classroom, there is only one whom I can revere as my teacher, and he is Martin Heidegger." K. Rahner, "Preface: On Martin Heidegger," in T. Sheehan, *Karl Rahner: The Philosophical Foundations*, xi.

4 K. Lehmann, "Philosophisches Denken im Werk Karl Rahners," in A. Raffelt (ed.), *Karl Rahner in Erinnerung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1994), 11.

5 *Geist in Welt* was originally Rahner's philosophy dissertation, completed in 1936. Unfortunately, this dissertation was rejected by his director Martin Honecker on the ground that it was not an accurate interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. In *Geist in Welt*,

in *Hearer of the Word* (*Hörer des Wortes*).[6] It was through the Belgian Jesuit philosopher Joseph Maréchal that Rahner became familiar with Thomism. Rahner himself acknowledges his indebtedness:

> In the third year of my philosophical studies in Pullach I read with extraordinary eagerness and with great care the fifth volume by Joseph Maréchal, S.J., *Le point de départ de la métaphysique*. I made long excerpts from it which, of course, I no longer have. During this reading, I believe, I encountered Thomas for the first time in a more personal way that fascinated me; this was, of course, mediated by Maréchal's method. I certainly no longer recall very clearly, but it is entirely possible that my dissertation on Thomas originated with this reading. [...] To the extent that this Maréchalianism[7] stems from

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Rahner explicates the relation between being and knowing. It is in the analysis of a Thomistic text (*Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question 84, Article 7) in which Rahner shows the relationship between conceptual and perceptual modes of knowing in the light of J. Maréchal's application of the Kantian critical-transcendental epistemology to Scholastic philosophy. See F.P. Fiorenza's Introduction to *Spirit in the World* in K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (SW) trans. W. Dych (London, Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1968), xix-xlv. Hereafter it is referred as SW. In the words of T. Sheehan, "Rahner spends over 400 pages pulling out of this brief text the whole groundwork of Aquinas' metaphysics, and, what is most striking, he retrieves from the passage a transcendental turn to the subject as a new foundation for metaphysics." T. Sheehan, *Karl Rahner: The Philosophical Foundations*, 1. K. Lehmann is of the opinion that *Geist in Welt* offers a good insight into the depth of the spiritual forces and dynamics at work in Rahner's theological thinking. See K. Lehmann, "Karl Rahner: A Portrait," in K. Lehmann and A. Raffelt (eds.), *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 3.

6 It contains the fifteen lectures which Rahner delivered at the Salzburg summer school in 1937. It is presented as a sort of philosophy of religion or "fundamental theology." J. H. P. Wong summarizes its main theme as follows:

a) "being is 'luminous' (*gelichtet*); b) man is open to being; being can be disclosed through sensible 'appearance' in history and in words. The 'luminosity' and appearance of being indicate that being is symbolic for itself and for others; it can be known through its symbol. The human person's openness to being through its 'appearance' points to the fact that the human person is the existent who is able to perceive the symbolic significance of realities, including that of being as such." J. H. P. Wong, *Logos–Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Las-Roma, 1984), 82-83.

7 G. Panthanmackal explicates Maréchalianism as follows: "According to Maréchal, Kant was a critical idealist as he was not consistent in his own transcendental reflection on the *a priori* conditions of human knowledge. For Kant the mind's *a priori* unification of the object of its affirmation was in terms of matter and form alone. He has fitted together statically the sensations, the forms of space and time,

> Thomas and to the extent that Maréchal again and again tries to prove his thought through Thomas, I can certainly say that Thomism formed my philosophy and, at a step removed, my theology.[8]

In the wake of Kant's transcendental approach, but moving beyond the latter's distrust of metaphysics, Maréchal attempted to show the possibility of metaphysical knowledge as a condition for the possibility of a human person's judgements.[9] At bottom, Maréchal was convinced that Kant did not regard all conditions of possibility at work in the process of knowledge. His position is founded too exclusively on a formal and static concept of knowledge rather than acknowledging the

the schemata of the imagination and the categories to form the purely immanent object of experience. Kant forgot that knowing was an operation, a movement, a dynamic motion as a tendency toward an end. The only possible end of an intellectual movement is unlimited Being. This intellectual movement transcends every limited object in the very recognition of its limitedness and thus preapprehends the unlimited Being. Hence if Kant had been coherent in his own method, he would have realized that the existence of the unlimited Being is an a priori condition of the possibility for every object of the speculative reason. That would have brought him to idealism." G. Panthanmackal, *One in Many: An Investigation into the Metaphysical Vision of Karl Rahner,* p. 27, n. 65.

8 K.Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of his Life,* in P. Imhof and H. Biallowons and trans. H.D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 43. Rahner turns to Thomas to provide a stimulus for his own thought in the contemporary situation. Referring to himself, Rahner writes: "The author [...] would not know of any other reason for which he could be occupied with Thomas than for the sake of his philosophy and that of his time." SW, p. lii. As regards Maréchal's influence, Rahner's friend and confrère Emerich Coreth, S. J. testifies thus: "Er (Rahner) nannte gern J. Maréchal "meinen Kirchenvater." E. Coreth, "Vorwort," in G.Panthanmackel, *One in Many: An Investigation into the Metaphysical Vision of Karl Rahner*, (Bangalore: Indian Institute of Spirituality, 199)3, xxi. According to J. H. P. Wong, J. Maréchal has not only influenced Rahner with his philosophical works but also with his spiritual writings, especially those concerning mystical experience. See J. H. P. Wong, *Logos–Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 102.

9 See J. Farrelly, "Man's Transcendence and Thomistic Resources," *Thomist* 38 (1974), 451. At the start of Rahner's career the reference to the concrete world and the importance of the acceptance of experience were established and defended on a theoretical, formal level. The relationship between the transcendental and experiential in Rahner is to be understood in the scheme of the relationship between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. E.Vacek says, "Rahner's attitude toward the world has evolved over the years from an ambivalent to an enthusiastic acceptance of the world." E. Vacek, "Development within Rahner's Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 42 (1975), 43.

role of the dynamic finality in the process of objective knowledge.[10] Thus Kant has failed to perceive the dynamic aspect of human knowing. The transformative dimension of Rahner's theology owes much to his philosophical engagement, particularly with Heidegger, whose existential analysis of human being provided Rahner with methodological tools for rethinking traditional theological concepts in a contemporary context.

2. Rahner's Encounter with Heidegger

Rahner's philosophical studies at Freiburg under Martin Heidegger were pivotal. Though Rahner remained a committed Catholic theologian, his intellectual encounter with Heidegger was an intellectual turning point, enabling him to transition from classical metaphysical categories to a philosophy of existence centered on human subjectivity and historicity. Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time, 1927) sought to re-awaken the question of the meaning of Being (Seinsfrage), arguing that metaphysics had long neglected this most fundamental issue.[11] Rahner was impressed by Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* (the human being) as being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein), characterized by temporality, historicity, freedom, and the existential structure of being-toward-death (Sein-zum-Tode).[12]

In Rahner's own words: "Even when I was later studying theology, I continued to feel the influence of my philosophical training. Without this philosophy, I would never have arrived at my own theological thinking."[13] While Rahner could not embrace Heidegger's secular existentialism as it stood, he saw in Heidegger's method a powerful

10 See J. Marechal, *Le Point de départ de la metaphysiqu*e, vol. 5: *Le Thomisme devant la philosophie critique*, Brussels: L'Edition Universelle, 1949; J. Donceel (ed. and trans.), *A Maréchal Reader*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, pp. 79 ff; G. A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Centuary* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), 256.

11 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

12 Joseph Wong, *The Theology of Karl Rahner: A Study of the Concept of the Supernatural Existential* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 13.

13 Karl Rahner, in Theological Investigations, vol. 3 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 7.

resource for articulating a theological anthropology rooted in human experience and openness to the transcendent.

3. Existential Structures and Transcendental Method

3.1. Heidegger's Existential Analytic

Heidegger's philosophical breakthrough lay in shifting the focus from abstract metaphysics to concrete existence. Dasein, for Heidegger, is unique because it understands its own Being and asks questions about it. Existence precedes essence because human beings are defined by possibilities rather than static natures.[14] Central to Heidegger's thought is the concept of transcendence. Dasein transcends itself toward possibilities, toward Being itself, and ultimately toward that which remains concealed (the mystery of Being). This transcendence is not spatial but ontological.[15]

3.2. Rahner's Transcendental Theology

Rahner adopted and modified Heidegger's existential approach into what he termed a "transcendental theology." While Kant had asked about the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, Rahner asked about the conditions of the possibility of revelation and faith. Rahner defined the "transcendental" as the human subject's a priori orientation toward the infinite horizon of Being—a structure that makes knowledge, freedom, and religious experience possible. He writes: "A question is posed on the transcendental plane when it asks for the a priori conditions that make knowledge of an object possible… The subject… turns back to reflect upon himself and examines in himself, as subject, which conditions permit him to make this object his own."[16] Heidegger's influence is evident here: Rahner learned from Heidegger the importance of starting theological reflection from the structure of human existence itself, rather than from abstract metaphysical postulates. Rahner's *Spirit in the World* (Geist in Welt) and *Hearer of the Word* (Hörer des Wortes) reflect this methodological shift.[17]

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14 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 9.

15 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 12.

16 Karl Rahner, "Philosophy and Theology," in Theological Investigations, vol. 6 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 67.

17 Karl Rahner, *Geist in Welt* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1957); *Hörer des Wortes* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1941).

4. Being and Presence: A Heideggerian Ontology in Rahner

4.1. Being as Presence-to-Self

Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics centered on its failure to ground the meaning of Being in the structures of existence. Instead of treating Being as a static essence, Heidegger insisted that Being is disclosed in the temporal and historical existence of Dasein.[18] Rahner appropriated this insight. For him, Being means being-present-to-itself (Bei-sich-sein). The degree to which a being is present to itself corresponds to its capacity for knowledge and freedom. Rahner's philosophical anthropology thus weds Thomistic metaphysics with Heideggerian existentialism. In Hearer of the Word, Rahner writes: "…from the start, in our dynamism toward being as such, we grasp single objects as moments of this unending movement of the spirit; we see them right away under this horizon of being as such, on account of which we are always open for the absolute being of God."[19] This passage reveals Heidegger's imprint in Rahner's thought: existence is fundamentally a dynamic movement, not a static state.

4.2. Homogeneity of Knower and Known

Rahner, like Heidegger, insists on the unity between the knower and the known. For Rahner, knowledge does not simply involve assimilating external realities but is an event of self-presence in which the subject transcends itself toward Being. This echoes Heidegger's notion of Dasein's transcendence: "For human beings the ontologically first and fundamental case or paradigm of a being and of its fundamental properties is found in the being himself who knows and acts."[20] This "return to the subject" is Heideggerian in inspiration, though for Rahner it ultimately serves a theological end.

5. Supernatural Existential: Heideggerian Vocabulary in Theological Context

One of Rahner's most original contributions is his concept of the "supernatural existential" (das übernatürliche Existential), a term

18 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 7.
19 Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes*, 42.
20 Rahner, *Geist in Welt*, 98.

directly borrowed from Heidegger's philosophical vocabulary. For Heidegger, "existentials" describe the fundamental structures of human existence, such as freedom, anxiety, and temporality.[21] Rahner reappropriates this notion to speak of the ontological condition embedded in human existence that makes the acceptance of divine self-communication possible.

5.1. From Heidegger to Rahner

In his essay *Ein Weg zur Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Natur und Gnade*, Rahner first formulated the supernatural existential. It is supernatural because it arises from God's free self-gift; it is existential because it permeates human existence as such.[22] Rahner's insight is that the human person is structurally open to God. This openness is not merely potential but actualized as a supernatural existential: "Transcendental experience… is the subjective, unthematic, necessary and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject's openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality."[23] Such language owes much to Heidegger's insistence that Dasein is always oriented beyond itself toward the horizon of Being.

5.2. Anonymous Christianity and Existential Openness

Rahner's theology of the "anonymous Christian" also draws on Heideggerian insights. Rahner argued that all humans, by virtue of the supernatural existential, are oriented toward God, even if this orientation remains unconscious or implicit.[24] This universal openness parallels Heidegger's notion of existential transcendence toward the horizon of Being, though Rahner transforms it into an openness toward divine revelation.

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21 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 31.

22 Karl Rahner, "Ein Weg zur Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Natur und Gnade," in Schriften *zur Theologie* vol. 1 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954), 297–333.

23 Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 38.

24 Rahner, *Theological Investigations* vol. 6, 390.

6. Freedom and Existential Decision

6.1. Heidegger on Freedom

Martin Heidegger conceives freedom not primarily as the capacity for choice, but as the ontological "letting-be" of beings in their being. In *Being and Time*, freedom is bound to *Dasein's* openness to Being, an existential condition that precedes ethical or political interpretations[25] It is through freedom that truth (*aletheia*) emerges, for the clearing (*Lichtung*) in which beings are disclosed depends upon Dasein's openness[26] In later works, Heidegger emphasizes freedom as the event (*Ereignis*) in which Being grants itself, making human freedom a response to the call of Being rather than a subjective possession[27] Thus, Heidegger departs from liberal-voluntarist models, locating freedom in the ontological horizon rather than in will or autonomy. This radical shift frames freedom as a primordial condition of possibility for any relation to beings or truth.[28]

6.2. Rahner's Theology of Freedom

Rahner similarly defines freedom as the capacity for definitive self-determination. Yet for Rahner, this freedom has a theological horizon: it is always freedom before God. "Freedom, in its original nature, is the freedom of the yes or no to God and, therein, the freedom of the subject with respect to itself."[29] Rahner's theological anthropology integrates Heideggerian existential freedom into the framework of human response to divine grace. Human freedom thus becomes both a philosophical and a theological category—a decisive existential yes or no to God.

6.3. Existential Structures and Guilt

Rahner also shares Heidegger's insight into the co-determined nature of human freedom. Just as Dasein is thrown into a world not of its own

25 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 133–134.

26 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 210–212.

27 Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), 74–76.

28 William McNeill, The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ēthos (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 58–60.

29 Rahner, Grundkurs des Glaubens, 99.

choosing, Rahner acknowledges that human freedom is historically conditioned and intertwined with communal history—including shared guilt.[30] This makes Rahner's theology of freedom deeply existential and historically conscious.

7. Heidegger, Rahner, and the Turn to the Subject

Rahner's entire theological project reflects the Heideggerian turn to the subject. This turn does not imply subjectivism in the sense of relativism but rather emphasizes the subject's transcendental openness to Being - and, in Rahner's theological adaptation, to God. Karl-Heinz Weger notes that for Rahner, the transcendental method has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension.[31] Horizontally, it examines human cognitive structures; vertically, it opens toward the Absolute. Heidegger's existential analytic provided Rahner with the philosophical justification for this move.

8. Critical Reflections

While Rahner's use of Heidegger has been praised for making theology relevant to modern existential concerns, it has also drawn criticism. Some argue that Rahner's theology becomes overly anthropocentric, risking a reduction of revelation to human self-understanding.[32] Others, however, see in Rahner's Heideggerian synthesis a powerful means of affirming the universality of God's salvific will and the intrinsic dignity of human subjectivity.

Conclusion

The influence of Martin Heidegger on Karl Rahner was profound and multifaceted. Heidegger provided Rahner with philosophical tools to articulate a theology grounded in human subjectivity, existential freedom, and openness to transcendence. Yet Rahner did not simply adopt Heideggerian existentialism wholesale; he baptized it, transforming existential analysis into a theological anthropology centered on God's

30 Rahner, "Zum theologischen Begriff der Konkupiszenz," in Schriften zur Theologie vol. 8 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1967), 204–210.

31 Weger, Karl Rahner, 38–39.

32 William V. Dych, Karl Rahner (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 67–68.

self-communication. In Rahner's hands, Heideggerian thought became the groundwork for a theology that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to the existential questions of modern humanity. As Paul D. Murray notes: "Rahner's true lasting significance for contemporary Catholic theology comes down to the way in which he showed in his life what it means for theologians to commit themselves to the radical risk of having faith in the wintry seasons of the Church."[33]Rahner's dialogue with Heidegger remains a significant chapter in the history of modern theology, and its implications continue to shape theological reflection in the twenty-first century.

33 Paul D. Murray, quoted in *Dych, Karl Rahner*, 92.

FAITH AS LEAP AND COMMITMENT
A Study Based on Søren Kierkegaard

Biju Rockey Pallippadan, VC

Abstract: *Kierkegaard's concept of the leap of faith signifies a profound and often irrational commitment to something beyond the scope of reason and logic, particularly in religious belief, exemplified by the absolute trust in God despite the absence of empirical proof. While Kierkegaard explored the idea of "leaps" in his philosophical works, the specific phrase "leap of faith" was more commonly used by others to describe his theories on religious commitment. The leap is the movement from the ethical stage, which is governed by social norms and reason, to the religious stage, where faith and a personal relationship with the divine take precedence.*

Introduction

Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, and religious author who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher. He wrote critical texts on organized religion, Christendom, morality, ethics, psychology and philosophy of religion. He showed a special interest for metaphor, irony and parables. Much of his philosophical work deals with the issues of how one lives as a "single individual", giving priority to concrete human reality over abstract thinking, and highlighting the importance of personal choice and commitment. In this short articlelet us see Faith as leap and commitment in Kierkegaard.

1. Kierkegaard`s Concept of Faith

Faith according to Kierkegaard is the full realisation of the relationship between the human self and God, "that the self in being itself is grounded in transparently in God.[1] In the first of the *Edifying Discourses*, "The Expectation of Faith" Kierkegaard presents a fourfold characteristic of faith:

1 Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, 132.

> It was the new glory of faith that no man can give it to another; (2) but that what is highest, noblest, most scared in man that every man has; it is inherent in him; (3) every man has it if he wills to have it; (4) and this is the glory of faith that it can only be had on this condition; therefore it is the only unfailing good, it can only be had through being constantly acquired, and can only be acquired by being constantly developed (or more correctly "brought forth").[2]

If a man does not possess it "there is but a single expression which explains his failure that he did not, will it."[3] If he loses his faith, he alone is responsible, no one can else can deprive him of it.[4] Faith is not only the highest good but it is potentially and equally available to all. It is a good in which all can share.[5] Faith is the quality by virtue of which a man is identical with every other man. The universality of faith is of course based upon the assumption that faith is immanent or inherent in all men. And again faith is something which cannot be communicated from one man to another. "One man can do much for another but he cannot give him faith."[6] Faith is furthermore a quality which "makes a man more lonely, than do the greatest sufferings."[7]

2. Faith as Immediacy after Reflection

Faith is not regarded as a form of cognition. It is not an intellectual observation but an expression of the will. There is in Kierkegaard's concept of faith as well as in his concept of choice a pronounced tendency towards voluntarism. At the same time Kierkegaard maintains that faith and the new immediacy with God is a divine gift. Faith, says Kierkegaard, is a transcendent point of departure.[8]

By the term "immediacy after reflection" Kierkegaard means exactly the "repetition", namely, the restoration of the personality to its perfect integrity. However, the immediate consciousness of God must be

2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Edifying Discourses*, trans., David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, vol. I-IV (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958).15.
3 Søren Kierkegaard, *Edifying Discourses*, 17.
4 Søren Kierkegaard, *Edifying Discourses*,30.
5 Ibid., 10.
6 Søren Kierkegaard, *Edifying Discourses.*, 13.
7 Ibid., 10.
8 Mbiku Deogratias, "Religiosity in Kierkegaard,37.

completely destroyed by the consciousness of sin before there can be any question of a second immediacy of God. Only when the individual has found himself before God can he arrive at faith and the mystic union with God in Christ. The "reflection" is here the process by which the consciousness of sin completely destroyed every possibility of finding God in the immediate experience of life. Once again, Kierkegaard appears to reject all possibility of arriving at faith through a rational experience as a form of cognition.[9]

3. Kierkegaard's Concept of 'Leap of Faith'

Kierkegaard's concept of a "leap of faith" refers to a subjective and passionate commitment to something, particularly religious faith, that transcends reason and logic. It's a move from a purely rational understanding to a realm where faith, passion, and a willingness to embrace the absurd are central. This leap is not a blind acceptance, but a conscious choice to embrace the unknown and paradoxical aspects of faith, particularly in the face of uncertainty. In Kierkegaard's thoughts faith indeed is one of the most significant and crucial themes. It is on faith that the entire edifice of his religious thought is founded. But his own rhetorical and ironical style of expressing his ideas often leads to misunderstanding of his thought and misinterpretation of his intention. He has freely used works like 'madness', 'paradox', or 'passion' to characterize faith which may lead not so sympathetic readers to conclude that faith is not only unintelligible or meaningless but sheer absurdity – in ordinary meaning of the term and not in the responsible existential sense. In order to understand the concept of faith and its place in Kierkegaard's dialectics of religious experience one need to probe into his overall understanding of the nature of philosophical reflection. Kierkegaard's concept of the leap of faith is linked to his understanding of human existence. He describes different stages, including the aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The leap is the movement from the ethical stage, which is governed by social norms and reason, to the religious stage, where faith and a personal relationship with the

9 Mbiku Deogratias, "Religiosity in Kierkegaard" (Pontifical Urbaniana University, 1981), 37.

divine take precedence.[10]

4. Objectivity and Subjectivity in Relation to Faith

In an attempt to thematize the concept and our understanding of faith it may be necessary to introduce his distinction between the objective and the subjective way of thinking. Kierkegaard formulates his understanding of philosophical thinking by categorizing it as subjective and objective. The intellectual background against which his fundamental polemics concerning the nature of subjective and objective reflection are situated is Hegelian philosophy. In the latter objectivity and the universality is the most important or rather overarching theoretical constructs.[11]

For Kierkegaard the role of objective thought in logic, mathematics or sciences is unquestionable but insignificant for the one whose main concern is to understand man's existence. What is important is his religiosity (for Kierkegaard Christianity) and truth as it relates to the concrete individual in his existence which is inalienable from his subjectivity. Therefore we scarcely find any discussion of formal a priori disciplines or of natural sciences which concerns merely material or physical phenomena.[12]

For Kierkegaard, inwardness of the existing individual is subjectivity and therefore the existing individual is the subject. Whereas the objective reflection which is adequate for formal logic, mathematics and historical knowledge, makes the existence or non-existence of the subject completely irrelevant.[13] Kierkegaard uses the term "subjectivity" to emphasize the will as the vital organ for spiritual development. The essential aspect of subjectivity is that, in resolution and choice, one takes a risk. This is the absolute decision. Every instance of subjectivity involves the will, though every act of the will need not involve subjectivity. Subjectivity may be a sub-category of the activities included by will, having to do with the activities of the spiritual life.[14]

10 Mbiku Deogratias, "Religiosity in Kierkegaard,37.

11 S. A Shaida, "Kierkegaard's Ontology of Faith," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. April – July 2&3 (2002): 254.

12 Ibid., 255.

13 Shaida, "Kierkegaard's Ontology of Faith," 256.

14 Gabriel, *Subjectivity and Religious Truth in the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard*, 91.

Kierkegaard says, "The truth is subjectivity." Thus, to him subjectivity is indicated by the intensity of passion with which one holds to an object. This intensity of passion is subjectivity and inwardness.[15]

5. Faith as Passion

De Silentio and *Climacus* agree that faith is a special kind of passion. As such faith is not a matter of detached cognition or reflection. Religious faith is neither equivalent to knowledge about the facts of a religion nor the ability to defend proofs for God's existence, though it undoubtedly contains some epistemic component. Faith as a passion has an affective component, an inner sense that one best understands when one experiences or feels it for oneself.[16]*Climacus* holds the concept of passion in high regard. He says, "Passion is existence at its highest."[17] Further he says, "Faith is indeed the highest passion of subjectivity."[18] "There is no stronger expression for inwardness than – to have faith."[19] To have faith or to have passion for something is to be impressed by that thing, personally and intimately affected in a way that arouses care, concern and an appropriate response.

The one who lacks passion for existence tends to approach life and its decisions with an indecisive, even blasé attitude. In *Two Ages* Kierkegaard writes, "The single individual (however well-intentioned many of them are, however much energy they might have if they could ever come to use it) has not fomented enough passion in himself to tear himself out of the web of reflection and the seductive ambiguity of reflection."[20] The one who reflects in this disconnected way, floats through life without serious commitment, while the person with passion, approaches what he understands to be true, good, and right, with earnestness and care. De Silentio writes, "The conclusions of passions are the only dependable

15 Ibid., 98.

16 While both de Silentio and Johannes Climacus personally lack the "highest passion" of faith, they certainly are passionate about the concept and getting it right, as is exemplified by their deep understanding of faith.

17 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 197.

18 Ibid., 132.

19 Ibid., 210.

20 Bernard Bykhovski, *Kierkegaard*, 69.

ones – that is, the only convincing ones."[21] Faith, therefore, is a passion distinct from and significantly higher than the breed of philosophical reflection in de Silentio's sights because it is concerned and approaches its object with conviction and decisiveness.

6. Faith and the Absolute Paradox

According to Kierkegaard, Christian faith is a faith in the incarnation, the fact of the God-man, which he sees as the "absolute paradox."[22] Here Kierkegaard affirms that the Absolute Paradox reveals the radical transcendence of God and the heterogeneity of the divine and the human. The incarnation is a unique and unrepeatable event. It is the particular historical moment in which the universal, eternal God freely appears in the form of a particular, temporal individual.[23] "The God-Man," Kierkegaard states "is the unity of God and an individual man." [24] Kierkegaard says, any attempt to explain paradox, "is …tantamount to reducing the term paradox to a rhetorical expression, to something which the worshipful speculative philosopher asserts."[25] Therefore Kierkegaard argues that only for those who have faith is possible to appropriate the paradox completely as the truth of the God-man event with absolute certainty.

A way to distinguish the paradox of God-in-time from other ordinary objects, then, is what Climacus calls the way of "eminent" or true faith in the paradox. This true faith is different from ordinary faith in that the former—true faith—can move from uncertainty to certainty regarding the event. According to Climacus, this form of true faith can resolve the paradox of God-in-time because it responds to the paradox in full certainty about it. The importance of faith in paradox can also be known when Kierkegaard says that "Paradox exists only for faith."[26] In faith one comes to believe fully in the paradox as God's historical revelation in time. It resolves the paradox's problem of logical contradiction.

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21 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 100.
22 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 194.
23 Taylor., Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel & Kierkegaard, 131.
24 Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans., Walter Lowrie (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 84.
25 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 197.
26 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 189.

7. Faith Does not Nullify Anxiety

Faith does not extinguish anxiety, but rather overcomes it. “When salvation is posited, anxiety, together with possibility, is left behind. This does not mean that anxiety is annihilated, but that when rightly used it plays another role.”[27] Whereas anxiety under the dominion of sin entangles a person ever more deeply in sin, ultimately causing that person to lose the consciousness of freedom, but anxiety under the auspices of faith becomes a redemptive power bestowing freedom.[28] A characterizing feature of faith according to Kierkegaard is the ability to anxious in the right way, while the absence of anxiety would be a sign of inhumanity or of a destroyed personality. “That there may be men who never experience anxiety must be understood in the sense that Adam would have perceived no anxiety had be been merely animal.”[29]

“Faith that extinguished anxiety would at the same tome extinguish the person, who according to Kierkegaard is a synthesis of body and spirit. According to Kierkegaard, however, the disposition of the Christian faith consists in allowing anxiety – which is not a defect, but rather a constituent part of our humanity[30] to become fruitful, and in helping us in dealing with anxiety in a new way. The Christian faith – thus Kierkegaard’s probable meaning here – overcomes anxiety by courageously living through it. Even though Kierkegaard does not employ the term “courage” in this context, his statements can nonetheless be interpreted to mean that faith is a mode of courage. Faith is the courage to be in anxiety.[31]

Conclusion

In essence, the leap of faith is a conscious act of belief, commitment, and trust in something beyond the reach of reason or logic, a fundamental aspect of Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy. Faith is described as a leap into darkness. It provides the ambience for certain amount

27 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*,53.
28 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 155.
29 Ibid., 52.
30 Ibid., 52.
31 Ibid.

of personal freedom, arousing from anxiety. The co-relation is much in question in the modern philosophical thoughts as there arise more tensions and worries in modern pragmatic situations. So, the critique of Kierkegaardian understanding of the co-relation among the three provides the basic platform for a philosophical endeavour to solve these stressful events. Thus, we can say that the co-relation among faith, anxiety and hope in the philosophical writings of Søren Kierkegaard indicates that faith heals anxiety and leads to a person to an authentic freedom or a person to be authentic.

RELIGION OF THE GAROS OF NORTHEAST INDIA
Influence of Christianity

Aloysius Hemrom, SDB

Abstract: *Meghalaya State is inhabitated by three main indigenous tribal groups, viz., Khasis, Syntengs-Pnars and the Garos. The Garos, a matrilineal Mongoloid group, belong to the larger Tibeto-Burman family being cousins with the Bodo-Kacharis, Dimasas, Hajongs, Rabhas, Meeches, etc. Non-tribals use the nomenclature 'Garo' but the tribe calls itself a'chik mande = hillmen. Our aim is to present briefly but analytically and anthropologically the primitive religion of the Garo Tribe called Songsarek and the influence of Christianity. Due to the advent of Christianity in the 19th century, a sizeable percentage of the Garos have embraced this new religion which in turn has greatly affected their religious beliefs and practices. Today they belong mainly to two adherents of faith: Songsarek, the tribal primitive or primal religion, and Christianity (Baptists, Catholics of Latin Rite, Adventists). Both the groups however still follow the clan and sub-clan systems and the customary laws. Hence, the narration will invariably raise some pertinent questions as to how far are the Garo Christians/Catholics inculturated as 'Garo Tribal Christians' especially in the context of postmodernism? Or has Christianity become a positive transformative way of a new life for them or merely a way of convenience?*

Historiographers, anthropologists, ethnographers and social scientists of postmodernism are still fascinated and mesmerized by the great ethnographic and geographical diversity of the land of Northeast India which is home to a number of enviable tribal groups who belong predominantly to Mongoloid race migrating to this beautiful region at different times from different directions.[1] Moreover, Northeast India is

1 P.A. Augustine, "Message", *Tribal India's Traditional Wisdom and Indigenous Resource Management*, ed. G,K, Bera & K. Jose, (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2014), v. As per estimates there are more than 370 million self-identified indigenous groups in some 70 countries of the world and 70% are found in the Asia-Pacific region. India alone has some 461 ethnic groups recognized as 'scheduled tribes'. They are India's indigenous peoples. In the mainland, they are called as 'adivasis.'

reckoned as one of the twenty-six 'biodiversity hotspots' in the world due to anthropogenic threats.[2] The Linguistic Survey of India 2011 has identified about 420 languages (not dialects) living in the "seven sisters" of Northeast India, and most of them are tribals.[3]

In the background of Christian and Indian culture, our immediate interest of reflection deals with one of the important matrilineal Mongoloid tribal groups of Meghalaya, namely, the Garos of the Tibeto-Burman family (who call themselves *a'chik mande* = hillmen) who today belong mainly to two adherents of faith: *Songsarek*, the tribal primitive or primal religion, and Christianity (American Baptists 1863, Roman Catholics of Latin Rite 1930 and the Adventists1954).[4]

There is no caste system among them although they are divided into exogamous sub-tribes, clans and sub-clans.[5] Garos are matrilineal (taking clan titles from the mothers).[6] *Mahari* is a smaller group within

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With an estimated population of 84.3million, they constitute 8.2% of the total population.

2 Forest Survey of Northeast India: There are 51 forest types, 60 out of 110 species of bamboos, 25 out of 56 species of canes, etc. The list can be endless. It is an accepted fact that traditional indigenous lands and territories contain some 80% of the planet's biodiversity. Yet, it is obvious that the indigenous peoples are among the world's most vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged groups. P. Biswas, "Homelands in the Mountains and Rivers: Re-identification of the idea of 'Northeast India'", *Journal of Northeast Indian Cultures,* 1(2014)2, 11-24.

3 It is quite sometime back that the Central Government of India has made the 'seven sisters' adopt Sikkim as their 8th sister. UNO on 13 Sept 2007 made the 'declaration of the rights of the indigenous people' thus: 'Indigenous peoples have rich and ancient cultures and view their social, economic, environmental and spiritual systems as interdependent. They make valuable contributions to the world's heritage thanks to their traditional knowledge and their understanding of ecosystem management.'

4 Playfair, *The Garos*, 8. There are many conjectures regarding the origin of the name 'Garo'. In the southern portion of the district (also in Mymensingh of Bangladesh), there exists a sub-clan called *Gara* or *ganching*. The Europeans and the Bengalis had their first contact with them and called them '*gara*' which gradually corrupted to '*Garo*' applying to the whole tribe.

5 D.N. Majumdar, *The Garos*, (Guwahati: Lawyer's Bookstall, 1956), 3-4. Playfair, *The Garos*, 65.

6 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 134, 140. Playfair in his *The Garos* (2nd reprint), Appendix A, (193-194) lists names of some of the sub-clans of the Garo exogamous septs. Garo society is matrilineal but in actual practice, the husband is the decision-maker together with the *mahari*. In a council, the males play a dominant role. Today

a *ma'chong* having a common relationship.[7] Traditionally, the youngest daughter (*nokmechik*) is privileged to inherit the family property. Males at puberty are trained in the village bachelors' dormitory (*nokpante*) to learn and face life (customs and traditions, art of cultivation, various arts and cultures, games, use of weapons, hunting, song and dance having socio-religious characteristics).[8] A village is usually governed by a *nokma* (chief) or a *sirdar* (headman), who presides over the village council (or both present in a village council).[9] *Nokmas* are originally proprietors of land called *aking* and the office is held in the female line by a particular clan (*ma'chong*). An *aking nokma* may have several villages with a *sirdar* each.[10] *Nokma* is both the head of the village as well as of the spiritual matters (although there is a village priest, *kamal*). With the help of the leading heads of different families of the *aking*, he settles disputes, punishes, governs, administers and keeps contact with other *nokmas*. This was the traditional Garo polity from ancient times.[11]

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there are also some independent exogamous sub-clans like *Ebang* (very rare)*, Areng* and *Shira*. Playfair, *The Garos*, 71. Burling, *Rengsanggri*, 164. M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 141.

7 Majumdar, *The Garos*, 14-15. Playfair, *The Garos*, 73. R. Burling, *Rengsanggri: Family and Kinship in a Garo Village*, (Tura: Tura Book Room, [1963] 1997[2]), 173.

8 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 171, 172. Playfair, *The Garos*, 183. Semeri A. B. Sangma, *Rites of Passage in the Garo Oral Literature*, (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2012), 81. Pianazzi, *The Garos*, 7. D. R. Sangma, *The Traditional Dances of the Garos*, (Shillong: Singhania Printing Press, 1996), 129. *Nok* = house, *pante* = bachelor. Although no such facilities were provided for young adolescent girls, they were not deprived of gaining knowledge, art and skill to be good homemakers. As they helped out their mothers and village-women, they learnt the art of home-making. Working in the jhum-fields also became learning 'fields' for the girls. For sleeping, they would go to their friends' or relatives' houses.

9 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 50, 61, 78, 107.

10 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 61. Four types of *nokmaship*: i) *Gamni Nokma* – a rich man only having no power or authority but has influence due to his riches, ii) *Gana*: rich man who acquires the title through the *gana* ceremony; has no political power, iii) *Kamal*: village priest, iv) *A'king*: political head of a village.

11 Playfair, *The Garos*, iv, v, 55, 58, 60. M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 66, 79, 162. Burling, *Rengsanggri*, 223. Pianazzi, *The Garos*,18. The creation of a *sarbarakar* and *laskar* (both Hindi words) by the British (David Scott, 1786-1831, the architect of British domination in Northeast India 1802-31) undermined greatly the Garo traditional polity. D. R. Sangma, in his *The Traditional Dances* has the following dances: i) traditional aspects of the Garo dances 1-14, ii) dances connected with agriculture 14-54, iii) dances in sacrificial ceremonies 55-106, iv) dances in the

The analysis of *Songsarek* Religion (handed down by oral traditions in myths, legends, folklore) brings out its religious aspects: beliefs and practices, festivals and ceremonies. The term means "pertaining to the world of nature".[12] It is a belief system in the existence of a benevolent Supreme Being called *Dakgipa Rugipa Stugipa Pantugipa* or *Tatara Rabuga Stura Pantura* – the Creator God (requiring no propitiatory sacrifices). There is also belief in the existence of a multitude of benevolent and malevolent inferior *mites/spirits* together with 'constellation *mites*'.[13] *Mites*, who are immortal, are present everywhere and in everything and some are objects of dread, fear and superstitions and need to be appeased periodically. Creation is attributed to some, to others the control of natural phenomena and the destinies of humans from birth to death (rites of passage, marriage rite and rituals, cremation rites and rituals, ancestor worship, priesthood) and they need periodical appeasement by sacrifices to win their good will (usually performed at various socio-religious festivals, the biggest being the *Wangala* festival to honour *Saljong* = sun-god).

The Garos believe in numerous transmigrations, do not have concepts, like sin-merit-heaven-hell, but believe in the 'abode of the spirits' after death (a sort of purgatory) where they do penance till their reincarnation.[14] Sin, for the Garos, is causing sorrow, suffering and hardships to others and not offering appeasement to the *mites*. One is morally good if one does not hurt the feelings and sentiments of others and is regular in his

mangona 107-118, v) dances in the ceremonial social gatherings 119-138, and vi) dances in honour of supernatural powers 139-147. Drinking and feeding is indispensable in all traditional ceremonial dances.

12 S.R. Marak, *Liberation in the Garo Religious Tradition,* (New Delhi: Lakshi Publishers, 2013), 8. There is a contention whether *Sonsgarek* is a Garo term or a Bengali one meaning 'worldly', 'domestic'. Christians criticized it as non-spiritual, worldly and of a lower kind.

13 This has led many scholars and researchers (Garos, Non-Garos) to wrongly appellate the tribe as 'animists, backward race, ignorant, uneducated, uncivilized, inferior, etc' M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture,* 220. Playfair, *The Garos*, 80. S.R. Marak, *Liberation*, 6. *Mite* is an inclusive term meaning gods, goddesses, lesser spirits and imps. P.R. Marak, *The Garo Tribal Religion*, (Delhi: Anshah Publishing House, 2005), 21. For this section on the Garo Religion, I have relied on Playfair, *The Garos*, 88-129, and M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos*, 220-253.

14 Playfair, *The Garos*, 88. M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 226.

sacrifices to *mites*.[15] Daily Garo-life is also regulated by a numerous code of laws which are fully binding and can be summed up in three terms: *asimalja* ("absolute donts"), *dakmalja* ("donts" - moral, civil, criminal and penal codes) and *nima* ("not alloweds", daily etiquette laws).[16] Moreover, every Songsarek is bound by religious customary laws: i) to observe the days of public sacrifices, ii) *Saana Kritani* is the practice of charity towards those in misfortune (especially relatives) by contributions, being present at sacrifices and offer help to drive away any other misfortune, iii) *Mangona*, ceremonies performed for the benefit of a departed soul requires the presence of every member.[17]

In the actual practice of *songsarek* religion, there are some variants regarding some details in some clans and sub-clans, otherwise it represents the most popular religious beliefs and observances. Postmodernism has brought about many changes today: the British rule, spread of Christianity and the introduction of English education and the new agricultural techniques (their age-old traditional method of *a'sua*, *a'a* = ground, *sua* = burn = 'slash and burn', jhum/shifting cultivation), especially of wet-rice cultivation. In a way, two parallel Garo societies are in vogue today, viz., the *Songsareks* and the Christian society but both still follow the clan and sub-clan systems and the customary laws of the tribe. A reflection of this sort will invariably raise some questions as how far are the Garo Christians/Catholics inculturated as 'Garo Tribal Christians" especially in the context of new evangelization? Has Christianity seeped into their blood or just remained on the skin level?[18]

15 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 228. Interestingly, T. Sinha in his book, *The Psyche of the Garos* (p.48), collected as many as 230 names of Garo *mites* but still says that the list is not an exhaustive one, as cited by M.S. Sangma, 227.

16 G. Costa, "The Garo Code of Law", *Anthropos* 49 (1954) 1041-66. The oral traditional laws have been collected and published as 'Garo Customary Laws' by various authors. The mites will punish anyone who does not observe such laws.

17 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 186. K.K. Kar, "The Tribes of North-East India", in *Tribes of North-East India: Biological and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Sarthak Sengupta, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2012) 1-20.

18 D. Jala & P. Mukhim, "Contribution of the Catholic Church towards Education in Northeast India", *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1990*, ed. S. Karotemprel, (Shillong: VIP, 1993), 338-343. P.D. Varghese, "The Church's involvement in the Healing Ministry in Northeast India", *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, 355-59. P. Panachikkal, "Impact of Christianity on the Garos", *The*

Hence, a critique sums up the reflection on the religion of the Garos in the following lines:

I. Christianity vis-a-vis Songsarek Religion of the Garos

The beginning of 19th century saw the great impact of Christianity and western culture and education on the Greater India of the British Raj and the Garo Tribe as well, especially on the *Songsarek* Religion. Christianity introduced a new faith, a new education, a new skill, indeed, a new way of life in every way.[19] Scholars generally say that the Christian missionaries have destroyed tribals cultures which is of course debatable. Now a trend however is emerging among the tribal Christians to rethink the nature of their Christianity whether it has made them 'tribal-christians' or 'christian-tribals'.

It is true that British colonization is a thing of the past, but there is undeniably a 'subtle internal colonization' in the name of development and progress that is undermining the whole tribalism of the Garos.[20] There is a rat race of the so-called 'development ideology' of 'catching-up' with the latest globalization trends.[21] Wati Longcher has rightly emphasized thus:

> In the dominant "catch up" development model, the criterion of judging human society is economic. It undermines the cultural and moral aspects of human society and projects the image of western society as the goal of civilization. When this "catch up" theory is applied to human society, the logic is clear. The more we are developed industrially, the more we are higher up the ladder. The

Catholic Church in Northeast India, 248-263. G. Kottupallil, "A Historical Survey of the Catholic Church in Northeast India from 1627 to 1969", *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, 31-75.

19 F.S. Downs, "Import Substitution: Reflections of the Indigenization of Ecclesiastical Conflict in Northeast India", in C. Becker, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1915*, revised edn by S. Karotemprel, (Shillong: Becker Institute, 2007), 84-95. R. Dutta & P.S. Dutta, "The Status of Religion in Tribal Areas of Northeast India", *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, 429-437. G. Palamattam, "Church and Development", *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, 394-409. D.N. Majumdar, "Christianity as a factor of change in the Garo Society," *Religion in North-East India*, ed. Soumen Sen, (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1993), 57-67.

20 S.R. Marak, *Liberation*, 101.

21 S.R. Marak, *Liberation*, 102.

> tribal people are industrially backward and therefore are considered as inferior. Even in the realm of religion and culture, the tribal religion and culture are looked down upon.[22]

This is the 'paradigm of catch up model' that the Garos in a way are forced into it today undermining holistic cultural values having eco-friendly and significant liberative motives. This model chokes the Garo culture and spirituality to contribute their mite in mastering their own human destiny. Hence, we shall attempt categorizing the 'impacts' under the following sub-headings: a) *Songsarek* Religion's Neutrality at the Advent of Christiantiy, b) *Songsarek* Religion's Fears about Christianity, and c) *Songsarek* Religion's Positive Outlook towards Christianity, i.e., Christianity has done good to the *Songsareks*.[23]

a) *Songsarek* Religion's Neutrality at the Advent of Christianity[24]

i) Contemporary Indian History attests that western culture and religion in Bengal and other parts of India had resulted in organized reform movements; it was not so in Garo Hills. The Core (*dakbewal* = traditions) of the Songsarek Religion basically remained unchanged; there was no re-evaluation or re-organization of it. The cognitive and expressive needs of the Garos in the traditional set up were fully met by Songsarek-cosmology with its magio-religious rites. Songsarek-spirituality is eco/geo-spirituality which always considers harmony and reverence for God-nature-humans. The Garo primal worldview

22 A. Wati Longcher, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview and Modernity* (Jorhat: N. Nirmala, 1995) 157.

23 Soumen Sen (ed.), *Religion in Northeast India*, (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1993), v. S.A. B. Sangma, *Rites of Passage,*12. Burling, *Rengsanggri*, 27. J.L.R. Marak, *Balpakram: The Land of Spirits*, (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2000), "Mythological Heroes, Heroines and Their lands", 71-101. L.R. Marak, *Myths and Archetypes in Garo Folk Narratives*, (Tura: NEHU, 2012), 95; the study has the following: "Mapping the Garo (*a'chik*) Traditions in Folk Narratives," 93-144, "Myths and Archetypes and the Garo (*a'chik*) folklife," 145-236 [unpublished Ph.D. Thesis].

24 Earliest writers like Playfair and Burling do not use the term '*soul*'. Even M.S. Sangma is in the same line. While, Semeri Alva B. Sangma uses '*soul*' instead. As per tribal philosophy-theology, it would not be out of place to use '*soul*' and '*spirit*' side by side when referring to the 'spirit' of humans (*janggi-silchi*). S.R. Marak, *Liberation*, 71. Playfair, *The Garos*, 2nd reprint, 60, 102. M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 227.

heritage, in which nature, man and divine exist interrelatedly and interdependently, still holds good in their culture. It helps revive the harmonious existence and growth, in symbiotic relationship, between God, nature and man to arrest the influence and power of globalization today.

ii) Songsarek-re-incarnation in the same *ma'chong* is still prevalent.

iii) There is a belief among the younger generation that education and conversion are the same thing. To get good education in Christian schools, they change religion, but as soon as they pass out, they relapse into Songsarek.

iv) Garo society enjoys matrilineal system, hence the status of Garo women is quite high compared to the women of patrilineal society in India.

v) Songsareks love to wear their hair long and tie a knot at the back of the head.

vi) Songsarek-kinship remains one of the most durable aspects of Garo culture among all, be they Christians or non-christians.

b) Songsarek Religion's Fears about Christianity

i) Christianity advocates love, unity and dignity. It has however created mistrust and division primarily due to its inherited fragmented denominationalism (Baptists, Adventists, Catholics). Garo integrity is threatened due to the ideological and doctrinal differences among the denominations causing chaotic state of the spiritual environment in villages together with the contemporary religio-cultural and socio-political life.

ii) There is a feeling that Christianity has eroded indigenous cultural values and natural freedom by the emphasis of 'Christian character'. Some elements of the Garo culture connected with Songsarek religion were replaced. Christianity did not demand such replacements as such but the early missionaries together with the converts felt that certain cultural elements should be abandoned, e.g., traditional Garo arts – song and music, dance, musical instruments, ornaments, bamboo and wood-carving, house-building, preserving the sacred

grove, use of herbal medicines, rites of passage, etc, have been replaced.[25]

iii) Ideology of development has created a 'Garo elite' who are led by mindless consumeristic culture. Mother-earth is no more respected but to be exploited and enjoyed indiscriminately for human consumption. Poorer sections of the tribe thus remain dispossessed of land, water and forest resources.

iv) Traditional beliefs in ghosts, spirits seem to be discarded as 'superstitions'.

v) Songsarek ethos is a vision of a continuum of the cosmos and postmodernism has fragmented this ethos for the sake of so-called development and progress. It has further desacralized nature, world and God with such replacements as sacred, profane, secular, worldly, history, etc. Mystery aspect is downplayed in a tribal's life while his problems are pretentiously blown up.

vi) On becoming Christians, they were told to give up various rituals since they were considered 'evil'.

vii) Christianity is influencing some families to abandon matriliny and adopt patriliny. This has made some girls break away from married partners.

viii) The American Baptists have been very rigid in disapproving the use of alcohol by the converts. Tea has become a symbol of Christian hospitality. Nevertheless, when a Christian becomes a drunkard, others jeer at him saying that 'he has become a songsarek'. Or, if one cannot restrain the temptation of drinking, he becomes a songsarek and unfortunately, this is quite frequent. This does not mean that all Garo-christians are like this. There are truly convinced Christians as well.

25 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 167, 170. D.R. Sangma, *The Traditional Dances,*129. Playfair, *The Garos*, 47, 59. A owner has to beat/touch the drum first, then others can use it. *Nagra* is sacred and cannot be just taken out of the *nokma*'s house. Every drum is 'consecrated' by a sacrifice. First, it is placed upon plantain leaves, a fowl is killed, its blood is smeared on it and feathers are stuck to the drums by means of the blood. Among the plains' Garo, they use a large drum called *Dama* and the other *mildang* of earthenware. Burling, *Rengsanggri,* 69. Dance is allowed in this festival. In the earlier festivals, it is improper to beat drums when the rice is growing. And without drums, dance is not possible.

ix) Christian hymns, invariably of western tune, substitute traditional Garo music.

x) With the advent of Christianity, *nokpantes* were the victims, due to its association with songsarek religion. With little understanding of the ethos of the tribals, school-cum-churches became centres of learning where young men find refuge in the catechist's or school teacher's house playing a parallel role of *nokpantes*. In the absence of nokpantes, youngsters are finding easy substitutes today by wasting time in the markets, buying cheap trinkets and substance abuse. Another major setback is the rise of insurgency and militancy demanding for "Garoland".

xi) Traditional ornaments and dressing have been given up by Christians. They have been sold away at the time of conversion.

xii) Christianity came as direct threat to songsarek, in a way, to replace it. This brought in lot of changes in their physical appearances, habits and manner, their mental outlook, spiritual life and their attitudes to life and other fellow-beings.

xiii) Christianity is based on pure spiritual life together with personal cleanliness and decency – cutting hair, regular bath and personal cleanliness. While the Songsareks sported long hairs.

xiv) Christianity has affected the traditional rules of marriage, divorce and remarriage. It does not permit polygamy. Songsarek son-in-law who has been chosen to succeed to the property (nokkrom) has to marry his widowed mother-in-law in order to complete the inheritance. Christianity abhors this.[26]

xv) Songsarek is facing a multi-faceted alienation – individual, social and cosmic – due to postmodernism and globalization.

xvi) The attitude of the Garos in general towards outsiders (especially plainsmen) is one mixed with fear, contempt and suspicion. This is mainly due to a lack of close understanding between them. Inspite of English education, attitude towards 'outsiders' is that of hostility.

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26 M.S. Sangma, *History and* Culture, 192. Every Garo is bound by the Garo Customary Marriage laws of exogamy and *a'kim* (effect of a first marriage even if one partner has died or run away; here the *mahari*'s power comes into play).

Moreover, plainsmen look down upon tribals as ignorant, uncouth and barbaric.

xvii) Songsarek eco-spirituality is at stake today.

xviii) Many see Christianity as adversely affecting Garo household. There is lack of adjustment in the traditional institutions have affected the society.

xix) Songsareks follow marriage by capture. Christianity does not allow this or not follow songsarek's rites and rituals of marriage. Christian-marriage is solemnized by a pastor (priest), rings, and vows and it holds indissolubility of marriage.[27]

c) Songsarek Religion's Positive Outlook to Christianity

i) Regarding the positive outlook of Songsarek Religion to Christianity, one would not be far from the truth if one holds the view that Christianity has struck deep roots in the Garo ethos and brought about transformation in this postmodern age (e.g., head-hunting, widow-burning, etc, are stopped for good). It has become an integral part of a larger process of tribal change – political, social, economic, cultural and religious.[28] Songsarek's characteristics of openness, friendly and tolerance facilitated conversion of the Garos to Christianity.

ii) Christianity is found in large numbers in the areas adjoining the plains, while interior areas are still songsareks. There is still a growing attraction among the Songsareks to join into the mainstream of the Garo society. Today, majority of the literate Garos claim to be Christians which has given them dignity and integrity. Garo Christian Youths are fired by a new nationalism of liberation theology to create 'Garoland' (*A'chik A'song* - comprising of Garo Hills and other Garo inhabited areas in Goalpara, Kamrup and Bangladesh as well) and thus there is a mushrooming of numerous underground

27 Christian marriages are governed by the Indian Christian Marriage Act under which divorce can be obtained after undergoing court proceedings, but this will involve automatic expulsion from the church.

28 F.S. Downs, *Christianity in Northeast India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1983), 3, 280, 165.

liberation movements who have taken up the 'gun-culture'.[29] Songsarek religion with its myths, symbols, rituals, dances, ete, are being 'deconstructed' so as to make them 'more ecological' – being close to land, water, hills, valley, forest, animals and so on.

iii) Today's postmodern Garos attest that it is Christianity rather than British administration that was the primary factor in creating a sense of tribal identity, i.e., tribalism. Hence, Songsareks are not hostile towards Christians. They think Christianity as an inevitable result of the change of time. Most of the villages have a mixed population of Songsareks and Christians. In village affairs, no distinction is made between Christians and Songsareks. An important view is that Christianity was seen by the tribals as a means for coping with the traumatic changes introduced by the establishment of British rule which radically affected existing social structures. Christianity with its educational and medical services has become a symbol of participation in a larger world of culture and interaction. In a span of 162 years (starting from 1863), Christianity has become a major religion of the Garos.

iv) The importance of a written language (use of a standard script) cannot be downplayed in any society. Today's Garo language uses the Roman Script. The American Baptists used at first the Bengali script for the Garo language. Trial and error method however made them switch over to the roman script using the A'we dialect, thus standardizing the Garo language and literature (First Garo Dictionary in 1873, first Garo Grammar in 1875, followed by primary school books published by Mr Stoddard, Garo New Testament in 1875, Rev. Philips' Garo Hymnbook, Four Gospels in Garo in 1904. By 1924, most of the Old Testament was written in Garo. This has brought about a sense of identity among the clans that has been 'dialectically' isolated and divided in the past.[30]

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29 M.C. Behera (ed.), *Tribal Religion: Change and Continuity*, (New Delhi: Commonwealth, 2000). The relevant articles herein are: S. Manish, S. Sharma & J. Sarma, "Tribal Religion: Change and Continuity," 93-101. B.S. Behera, "The Myriad World of Religion of the Tribals of Northeast India," 196-212. N. Das, "Tribal Religion in Northeast India – Changing Syndrome," 213-220.

30 *Census India 2011*: "Literacy rates 2011": Meghalaya, persons 75.48, male 77.07, females 73.78. B.L. Mawrie, *Tribal-Christian Spirituality: A Quest for Identity*,

v) Mission schools provided the common ground and context for all the clans to meet, interact and communicate through the medium of one language. Gradually the pupils also learnt the international language of English by which they could communicate with other tribal pupils of the schools. This was the second Christian impact that contributed to the tribalism of the Garos.

vi) Christianity provided the Garos with an ideology, providing a basis for new relationships of universalism. Christianity was relevant to one and all.

vii) Evangelists, catechists, preachers and school teachers were the first agents of 'tribal solidarity'. They instilled into the Garo tribals that belonging to a Church meant belonging to a bigger organization. There was new consciousness of tribal as distinct from village or clan identities. For centuries, Garos lived in isolation and in hostility with the plains' people. Christianity brought among them tolerance and made them a peace-loving tribe. Quality of life too improved.

viii) Education is an important area of impact where the influence of the Christianity (both Catholics and other denominations) is recognized and highlighted. Songsarek myths, legends, folklore are being re-interpreted dynamically especially the creation myths, the place of humans in the cosmic order, being rooted strongly to one's land, habitat and environment. One's liberation or rebirth is always in terms of culture, motherland and environment. Songsarek socio-religious festivals have a ceremonial aspect. Christianity can hardly co-exist with such sacrifices to the *mite* and the feastings thereof. Instead, some replacements have been made by Christianity: Sunday services, Sunday schools, prayer meetings, youth meetings on week days, *sobhas* (annual local church large gatherings), parish day, conventions, pilgrimages, etc.

(Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2011). C. Marak (ed.), *Garo Literature: Documented and Translated into English by C. Marak*, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002, 2005 reprint), 3. Playfair, *The Garos,* 8, 26, 84-87, 195-202: Appendix B: "Comparative Grammar of the Kachari and Garo language".

Conclusion

The ancient *a'chik mandes*' splendid isolation was broken by the Hindu zamindars and the Mughals. The British Rule with its Christianity and education brought relief to the *Songsareks*. David Scott brought relief by introducing Christianity and education and with spiritual force brought no fewer than 121 Garo independent chiefs to agreement with him. In a way, he laid the foundation of good government and influence among the Garos and other hill tribes. *Songsareks* having no defined philosophy and no promise of better life after death could not resist the strong force of Christianity. As of today, some 45% are Christians of various denominations. The *Songsarek* belief in the existence of spirit in man and transmigration of souls resemble Hinduism, whereas story of creation of the world sounds biblical.

In the face of today's postmodernism and globalization, it would be naïve to revert to 'pre-scientific consciousness.' As is true in any tribalism, one needs to go with the signs of the times by learning to adapt, to remold, to learn from the past, to purify one's tribal value-system and recover the symbiotic relationship with nature, God and other humans.[31] This will lay the foundation to a 'tribal spirituality' (in line with the biblical foundations): eco-logical, eco-spiritual, eco-sophical and eco-theological. This will be a tribal spiritual paradigm wherein one does not study nature but breathes it, one does not look for God in it but experiences it, one does not make logical or theoretical complications of sacred-profane-religion-culture-mundane-terrestrial-spirit-matter because everything is sacred. This sacrality of nature will create a Garo liberative culture in their own eco-spiritual environment. The present world is in crisis due to an ecological imbalance resulting in global warming. As of today, we can opine that the Garos have adjusted themselves in a satisfactory manner to the challenges of the modern age, they have preserved the basic and the valuable aspects of their

31 M.S. Sangma, *History and Culture*, 263-266. Burling, *Rengsanggri,*312-22. D.N. Majumdar, *The Garos*, 22. S. A.B. Sangma, *Rites of Passage,*198. M.S. Sangma, "Impact of Christianity on the Garos", *Impact of Christianity on Northeast India*, ed. J. Puthenpurakal, (Shillong: VIP, 1996), 242-47.

culture.[32] The British nor the Christians managed to bring about radical changes in the family concept and structure, their clan system, laws of marriage and divorce, laws of inheritance of property, lineage system and in the feeling of a distinct racial identiy. In a way, we can say that the "Garo-ness" has remained with the tribe.

Last but not the least: the 'outsiders' (non-garos) have no right whatsoever to engulf the cultures and languages of the tribals. Everyone has a 'right to existence', a right to preserve his culture and one should never judge other cultures by our own standards. We can however facilitate them to adapt to postmodern context. It should not be the policy of ours or the government to keep them backward as in the ancient of days. They also have the right of benefits of the postmodern developments.

32 Wati Longchar, "Liberation or Assimilation: An Indigenous Perspective", *JTS*, XXIV, n.1-2 (Jan-Jun, Jul-Dec 2019), 1-19. Yang Kakao Vashma, "Tribal Theology: Issues and Challenges", *JTS*, XXIV, n.1-2, 20-36.

QUESTIONS: MEANING AND DEPTH
Insights and Implications of Questioning Our Answers

S. Stephen Jayard

Abstract*: The ability to question is obviously one of the strong manifestations of our rationality. But unfortunately, we are not able to answer all the questions that we face; for, we do come across mysterious elements in Mathematics, unanswerable and irrational questions in Logic, unfathomable questions in the world of science, bottomless queries in the Cosmology, uncomprehensible Interrogations in Philosophy and above all some perennial questions about meaning and meaningfulness in life. Precisely because complete and absolute answers are not available for all such questions, we need to be cooperative to share our finding with others, be open-minded to introspect into ourselves and be humble to learn from one another. Failing to question the answers, no matter how long-cherished, attractive, comfortable and pleasing the answers might be, will land us in many problems; it will be detrimental to individuals, groups, nations and nature; it can stall the real and holistic growth and developments for humanity. It is in this context, that this essay seeks to affirm one basic thesis that we, individually and collectively, need to be prepared to "question our answers". After presenting a basic analysis of questions in general, briefly highlights some of the unanswered and unfathomable questions in the worlds of logic, sciences and ethics. The need to question our answers is discussed, because as history of science shows more robust growth in science takes place only when the traditional answers are challenged. Finally, a clarion call is made to everyone to be prepared to 'question one's answers, because of the existential and undeniable facts of our 'incomplete nature' and 'certainty of uncertainty'.*

Introduction

Question – A small word but its meaning and depth is very big. We can define human beings in many ways for instance they are the only beings that know how to laugh; though other creatures may be able to express their joy and satisfaction, the ability to law belongs only to human

beings. Similarly, only human beings, because of their rationality, can ask questions. Because of this questioning nature they like to measure and comprehend the vast dark universe up above and they go deeper and deeper into the microscopic world to find out the basic building blocks of life.

To question is one of the deep manifestations of the reasoning power of human beings. In fact, a child begins to questions even before it begins to speak. It expresses its questions by various gestures and expressions on the face, like smiling, frowning, a serious look, and so on. We can understand someone better from the questions that he or she asks rather than from the answers he or she gives. From our childhood we are taught to answer questions; exams and interviews, daily interactions and casual conversations, reaffirm the dire need of answering questions. We are made to think that answering questions is very important. But we forget that sometimes we have to question our answers also, especially when the questions are very fundamental and existential. The attitude of questioning answers is very necessary for any group or Nation or a race. When this attitude is missing, the individuals or the groups become static and tend to become arrogant. They are not ready to interact with others to share their knowledge and opinions to correct if they have any mistakes; further, they also become very short-cited in the approaches.

It is not surprising to see Philosophy and Metaphysics are wrestling with uncomprehensible queries from time immemorial. It goes without saying that genuine dilemmas are plenty in the realms of Ethics and Morality. Questions related to the profound longing for meaning and meaningfulness are replete in our lives and absolute answers to them are unfortunately always elusive. Interestingly, there are several unanswered and unanswerable questions, from the world of sciences as well. The most intriguing fact of life is that even in the domains of Mathematics and Logic, which are said to be the precise and accurate sciences, are also stumble in certain areas where they are not able to proceed further.

1. Questions - A Basic Analysis

Curiosity and the ability to question are important manifestations of human rationality. There are various kinds of human knowing; it begins with the knowing through every day common sense experiences, interpersonal interactions, explanatory-scientific methods, self-knowledge (interiority), philosophical, religious and theological reflections and so on; there also with mathematics-logic, artistic, aesthetic, scholarly ways of knowing**.** Bernard Lonergan, a French-Canadian philosopher and theologian, creates a single structure of knowing: It begins with our basic experiences (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, feeling) – from these, *one asks questions* (what, why, how, where & when); they lead to insights (understanding); *further question* (like, Is it so?) is raised by which we judge facts. Now another question emerges (like, what good should I do?), which enables one to judge values and choose appropriate actions. Experiencing, Understanding, Judging Facts and Judging Values & Choosing are four fundamental stages of human knowing. But interestingly, one can find *appropriate questions at every stage*, leading to the next. Thus, it is made clear, how questions play an extremely important role in our existence.[1]

A question is basically a request for information, understanding, or clarification. But philosophers see more into a question; it's more than just a sentence ending in a question mark—it's a linguistic and cognitive act aimed at uncovering truth or prompting reflection. There is a branch in philosophy, known as erotetics (in Greek *erōtētikos*, means "questioning"), that analyses the nature, function, and significance of questions themselves. It explores *what it means to ask*, *why we ask*, and *how questions shape knowledge, understanding, and communication*. Philosophy seeks to understand the motivations and purposes behind questioning, whether it's to seek knowledge, challenge assumptions, or explore different perspectives. A question is basically intentional (tires

1 See: Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green & CO., 1957); *Method In Theology* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1971) and Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, eds., *Insight – Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1992).

to elicit information or to create a thought); it can be *open* (demands explanation) or *closed* (expects yes or no answers); it can also be *factual* (asking '*what is')* or *conceptual* (asking *what something means).* There are *f*oundational questions, which explore the assumptions behind other questions (like, 'What does it mean to know?').

Philosophical analysis of questions is important because good questions lead to better answers and meaningful insights; they shape our understanding of the world. There are some philosophical questions about questions themselves like, "What kind of speech act is a question? Can a question be true or false? Are rhetorical questions 'real'" questions?" Further, philosophically more fundamental question is, 'Why do we ask questions at all?" - This question obviously touches upon human curiosity, limits of knowledge, the role of uncertainty, doubt and wonder in thought. Questions are essential not only for formal analyses of logic and language theories, but also for creating genuine curiosity; they can challenge power structures or moral norms. Questions are actually treated as tools - *epistemic tools* which lead to knowledge, *ethical tools*, which uncover moral truths or inconsistencies and *ontological tools*, which help us explore what exists or could exist. When the questions change the answers also change. While questions can be liberating as they pave the way to critical thinking, self-discovery and intellectual progress, there are some sections of people, who dread questions because certain questions can challenge authority, disrupt consensus, or destabilize identity. That's why questioning is often discouraged in rigid systems (political, religious, or cultural).

2. Logically Unanswerable Questions

Even Logic and Mathematics, which are said to be pure and precise sciences, encounter situations and factors where they have to stumble for accurate and unambiguous answers. Logic alone will not be enough to answer them, because they may contain contradictions, or they may be self-referential; they may violate the rules of our rational discourse. Among many other things they may make us realize the limits of reasoning. Some simple examples: "This sentence is false." It is known as a *Liar Paradox*, because, if the sentence is true, then it is false (as it

says), but if it is false, then it must be true. It is a paradox because there is no consistent truth value. “Can an omnipotent being create a rock so heavy it cannot lift it?”. If that being can create such a rock, it cannot lift it (so, not omnipotent) and if it cannot create such a rock, then it's not omnipotent either. Here, the concept of omnipotence becomes *self-contradictory*. “If a barber shaves all men who do not shave themselves, does he shave himself?”. It is known as a *Barber Paradox*; the difficulty here is, if he shaves himself, he shouldn’t (because he only shaves those who don’t shave themselves) and if he doesn’t shave himself, he must (because he shaves those who don’t shave *themselves*). It is called as a *self-referential paradox*. “Can logic prove that logic is valid?” It is circular because it uses logic to prove logic, which will be like using a ruler to measure itself. So, *the foundational validity of logic can only be assumed within itself.* Such questions don’t just baffle, but they also play a crucial role in philosophy, mathematics, and logic. They reveal a *dark reality*, which we often tend to take for granted, like the limitations, inconsistencies, or hidden assumptions in our thinking patterns.

There are also illogical questions which violate logic, coherence, or meaningful structure in some way. They can involve contradictions, conceptual misunderstanding, category errors, even meaningless constructions, ill-formed syntax or mixture of things that don’t go together. Some examples: “What is the smell of Friday?” – Since days of the week don’t have any smell, it is a category error; the question mixes incompatible concepts. “If a square circle exists, how big is it?” It involves a logical contradiction, as one cannot make a square circle and therefore the question is built on a false premise. “How loud is silence?” It is self-contradictory because silence is the absence of sound, so it cannot be loud by definition. “If nothing is impossible, is it possible for something to be impossible?” It is self-refuting, as it plays with a contradiction embedded in everyday language. Such questions enlighten us on the need to be aware of confusion, lack of clarity, category mistakes, not only in logic or philosophy but also in our daily conversations.

3. Unanswered Questions in the Realm of Science

As every other enterprise, science also has its own perennial questions. Within science, every branch or domain of science has its own intriguing questions; for example, "How does the amount of sunlight affect plant growth?" (Physics), "What type of food affects the lifespan of fruit flies?" (Biology), "How does the concentration of a solution affect its boiling point?" (Chemistry), "What is the effect of different amounts of air movement on plant growth?" (Earth Science) and so on. Let us have a little more elaboration on two fundamental issues:

a) *Notion of Life – Still a Mystery!* - In spite of all our researches and developments in our Genetics and Molecular Biology life still persists to be a mystery! Perhaps we can never understand what (human) life is, as long as we are "caught" up in the contours of life itself; perhaps, we may have to soar up, or go 'beyond' life, so to say, to understand what life is and that is never possible. If one is able to do that perhaps one cannot communicate to others about it, as others are still entangled in the web of life! Erwin Schrodinger, a quantum physicist wonders, in his book, *What is Life*? (1944), lists out 125 questions which cannot be answered by modern science; for instance, 'How and where did life on earth arise?'' – and still more intriguing question is, 'What is that life?' Similarly, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, a Hungarian Nobel Laureate and biochemist, in his *The Living State: With Observations on Cancer* (1972), confesses that in his search for the secret of life, he arrives at lifeless atoms and electrons, but somewhere down the process, life has escaped through his fingers. Yes, we all know that dozens of minerals, salts and chemicals are essential for life and the ratio of their combination is also very crucial for the holistic health of our body; but the most fascinating fact is that all these chemicals are "*lifeless*" in themselves, but still, they are necessary to make life possible!

Medical sciences make us aware of two types of death: *Somatic Death,* concerning the stoppage of respiration, circulation of blood and brain functions, and *Molecular Death,* involving the death of different organs, at different times; while liver dies rapidly, heart takes sixty minutes and cornea takes six hours to die. There is obviously a time-gap between

these two types of death; all living beings will undergo these two types of death. Similarly, it is not yet clear whether a virus is a living or a non-living organism, as it manifests the characteristics of both and that is the reason why some scientists consider it as a missing link between non-life and life. Questions about life, thus, are endless!

b) *Matter Ceasing to be Material* - Contemporary science questions the classical understanding of 'reality'. The new discoveries and observations, both in the macro and the micro worlds, challenge the dogmas of scientism and they "radically alter the status of knowledge and the place of the knowing subject".[2] *The mysterious nature of matter:* Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty and Bohr's principle of complementarity suggest that the actual nature of reality escapes our complete understanding, because, "The elementary particle is neither a wave nor a corpuscle but a 'thing' that combines the two images".[3] Therefore, at that level, matter ceases to be 'material' and "Matter has lost its substance".[4] *The Mystery of the 'Fine-tuning'*: The study of biotic coincidences and the anthropic principles seems to suggest that the universe has been very meticulously fine-tuned to be ready to receive conscious human beings; being convinced of this Freeman Dyson asserts that "the universe knew we were coming"[5] and Paul Davies declares that "We are truly meant to be here".[6] Fine-tuning in the universe, though may not be a proof, but a strong indicator for an intelligent design behind the universe; for instance, the initial density of the universe had to be meticulously fixed to an accuracy of 10^{-60} and this precision is like an archer hitting a one-centimetre-square target placed fifteen billion light-years away.[7]

2 Thierry Magnin, "Moral Philosophy – A Space for Dialogue between Science and Theology", in *Science and the Search for Meaning – Perspectives from International Scientists*, Jean Staune, ed. (PA, USA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 140.

3 *Ibid*., p. 146.

4 Trinh Xuan Thuan, "Science and Buddhism", in *Science and the Search for Meaning – Perspectives from International Scientists*, Jean Staune, ed. (PA, USA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 181.

5 Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (NY: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 250.

6 Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 232.

7 Trinh Xuan Thuan, "Science and Buddhism", p. 184. [Note: One light year is the distance travelled by light in one year's time; by travelling the distance of about

Several scientists-turned theologians, like John Polkinghorne, Arthur Peacock, Ilya Prigogine etc.,also find something more to the evolution process than mere chance. They have gone beyond reductionism and are open to mystical and metaphysical overtones in their approach to reality. Even great minds, like Einstein, are also convinced that such fine-tuning in the universe cannot be the outcome of a mere chance.

4. Questions Leading to Moral Dilemmas

Ethics is another important domain, where, very often, easy and absolute solutions are not available. Ethically unanswerable questions are those that do not have clear, universally agreed-upon answers, because they involve deep conflicts of values, principles, or perspectives. It is difficult to apply ethical reasoning in a definitive way, because we have different ethical systems (utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, etc.), which can lead to opposing conclusions; or the situation involves irreconcilable trade-offs or unknown consequences or perhaps the question touches on fundamentally subjective or culturally relative values.

For instance, Rem Edwards presents many such unanswered ethical questions – they are about the formal expression of the ethical duty to enrich ourselves and others, about contraception, euthanasia, distinguishing between duty and supererogation-going beyond the call of duty, whether axiological ethics can generate concrete moral rules or distinguish between adequate and inadequate moral rules, whether axiology can make a place for human rights and adjudicate conflicting rights and very importantly whether formal axiology can decide upon the proper place of 'marginal human beings' (foetuses, the gravely retarded, the irreversibly comatose) and animals.[8]

There are many questions involving moral dilemmas; for instance, 'Is it ever justifiable to sacrifice one innocent person to save many others?';

300,000 KM per second, it covers about 9 trillion KM in one year; so, the one cm target is at the total distance of 135 X 10^{21} km!]

8 Rem B. Edwards, "Ten Unanswered Questions" in Rem B. Edwards, ed., *Formal Axiology and Its Critics*; Published by (Amsterdam: Brill, 2021). See: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv20dsb9p.9. Accessed on 17 May, 2025.

‘Should a doctor prioritize saving a young patient over an elderly person, when resources are limited?’;‘Is it ethical to tell a lie to protect someone’s feelings or save a life?’; ‘Do animals have the same moral rights as humans?’; ‘Is it ethical to create artificial intelligence that could suffer?’; ‘When does a foetus acquire moral status?’ - Answering such questions really gets tough, or even impossible, because different ethical systems, religious beliefs and social practices will have different ways of approaching these issues; or there may be conflicts between two values, say, honesty and compassion; or different cultures may give different emphasis to different aspects of the questions. They may require subjective judgments about priorities or definitions of harm/good. Obviously, no empirical data can resolve the core moral conflict. Given such a situation one is forced to be cautious in answering these questions and diligent in questioning those answers!

5. The Need to Question our Answers

When we find answers to our questions, we are happy and satisfied. But it is the questioning of those answers that ensures that the answers remain relevant, true, and just. Growth and development in any area, be it personal, scientific, or societal, depends not on certainty, but on the willingness to challenge the answers. It is the courage to question our answers ensures the real growth and maintains the spirit of curiosity. As humans are evolving their rational powers of grasping, ways of thinking and analysing also develop. They realize the need to look at their own positions critically. Religion, or any knowledge enterprise, evolves through internal critique, reinterpretation, and encounters with new realities. Reformations, new denominations, pluralistic theologies, and deeper spiritual insights are the results of their readiness to question their long-cherished answers. In the modern world, as we have an abundance of information, swift conclusion and algorithmic certainty, the need for questioning our answers has become more crucial. Over the centuries we do find huge changes and significant transformations due to questioning age-old doctrines, dogmas, practices, interpretations, rites and rituals. These shifts typically arise from philosophical reflection, historical research, internal reform, or cultural change.

Romila Thapar vehemently argues how important are the dissenting voices and questioning minds for the genuine growth of a society. Due to vested interests, the dissenting voices are brutally 'silenced'. Any society does need a space to voice out freely and critique fearlessly, but, as she laments, "that space has shrunk and the intellectual parameters have narrowed".[9] She even points out that there are subtle, but deliberate, ways to keep people illiterate. Even basic education does not reach millions of our children. She opines that "Some suspect that the acute shortage of schools and the poor condition of those that exist may be deliberate policy, arising from the fear of a citizenry that is not only literate but educated";[10] but on the other hand, there is a huge effort to open more techno-parks, universities, IITs and IIMs, which always cater to the elite of the society.

Here are some reasons as to why the answers must be questioned:

a) *Answers Are Not Always the End* – Answers often seem like closure, providing us with a sense of security and completion. However, treating answers as final truths can be dangerous. Science evolves not by clinging to past conclusions, but by revisiting and revising them. What was once considered as a fact was only overturned through persistent questioning; b) *Preventing Complacency and Confirmation Bias* – When we accept answers uncritically, we can become a prey to confirmation bias, looking only for evidence and information that support our current views. Our hitherto-answers have to be questioned in the context of new evidence and alternative viewpoint. This intellectual humility and openness are very essential to acquire wisdom; c) *Fostering Deeper Understanding* – Constantly checking or questioning our answers leads us to deeper comprehension of the issues. It gives us conceptual clarity and not just easy answers to pass over difficult questions; d) *Adapting to Change* – Our society is fast changing. It is so dynamic that social norms, technologies, climates, and economies shift rapidly

9 Romila Thapar, "To Question or Not to Question? - That Is the Question," in Social Scientist, November–December 2014, Vol. 42, No. 11/12, pp. 3-16, p. 3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24372899

10 *Ibid*., p. 14. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24372899.

and we need to keep pace with them. Questioning our answers makes us adaptable and resilient in encountering the changes; e) *Encouraging Dialogue and Diversity* – To avoid polarization in the domains of politics, ethics, cultures and economic principles, we need to question our answers. Welcoming dissent paves the way for dialogue, empathy and holistic progress.

Similarly, in the matters of faith and religion it is not uncommon to find people to get dogmatic in their claims and beliefs. Their convictions are so deep that, often, they are not ready to revisit them. But when new situations arise and pluralistic tendencies grow more and more, the religious fundamentalism and fanaticism are challenged. The followers of religion are forced to question their own answers, no matter how old and strong they are. Further, religion in order to be relevant in the modern society, it must deal with the issues that the people face in today's world. Religion must make efforts to deal with the contemporary questions. In the matters of religion, as Ivan Strenski argues in his thought-provoking paper, 'Why It Is Better to Know Some of the Questions than All of the Answers', our research and teaching must hold on to 'problem-questing' orientation, which will satisfy us that "although we don't have all the answers about religion, we do have a lot of good questions!"[11]

As pluralistic understanding of religion and its dogmas emerged slowly and steadily, many theologians and philosophers of modern time showed the need for inter-religious dialogues, religious tolerance, and rethinking of exclusivist doctrines. All religions began to focus more on what united them rather than on what divided them.

6. Questioning Answers and Growth of Science!

History of science shows that science constantly grows, but it grows more, when the long-valued answers are questioned, rather than when fresh questions are answered. Science is full of incidents, where long-

11 Ivan Strenski, "Why It Is Better to Know Some of the Questions than All of the Answers", in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2003), pp. 169- 186. See: URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23550022. Accessed on 17 April 2025.

cherished ideas were challenged, revised, or even overthrown. This humble, yet daring, approach of questioning answers is very essential for science and it is what makes science what it is! Here are a few concrete examples:

a) *Understanding of Motion*: According to Aristotle, motion is of two types, natural and violent. Both are different in nature, where the former refers to the motion of an object towards its natural place and the latter is the motion away from its natural place; for natural motion, there is no need for any force, as the natural motion happens spontaneously and naturally, whereas a violent motion is possible, only when there is an external force and the object must be in touch with the source of force. For instance, for earth (matter) and water, the natural place is the center of the earth and they move towards it quite spontaneously without any force, while fire and smoke move spontaneously away from the earth. What was actually in the mind of Aristotle was the notion of gravity. But when Newton's three laws of motion appeared in the 18th century, Aristotle's understanding of motion, which was accepted for about two thousand years, was strongly challenged. Newton established that there was no difference between natural or violent motion; it also showed that both the states of moving and resting of an object were not of different categories but two sides of a coin; for, according to Newton's first law of motion, an object, if an object is moving, it continues to move, along the straight line in an uniform speed, and if it is resting it continues to rest unless an external force acts upon it. With this new discovery of Newton, physics and astronomy saw incredible growth.

b) *Notion of Gravity* - As Newton challenged Aristotle's idea of motion, Einstein challenged Newtonian understanding of gravity. For Newton, gravity was a physical force existing between any two objects and if the objects are very big, say, like the earth and the moon, the gravitational force between them would be very strong. But Einstein, with his theory of Relativity, demonstrated that gravity was a kind of geometrical force, arising due to the curvature of spacetime (General Relativity). For Newton, time and space were

distinct and absolute reality, while for Einstein time and space were not absolute and they made one continuum. Einstein's contribution is very significant because Newton's laws fail at high speeds and near massive objects.

c) *Shifting from Geo-centrism to Heliocentrism* - From the ancient Greek Philosophy, the theory of geo-centrism, known as Ptolemaic model (Earth is the center of the universe, earth does not move and all planets, including the sun, go around the earth!) was well-accepted. But Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler (16th - 17th centuries) challenged that old belief and, with the help of new scientific observations and advanced mathematics, proved the theory of heliocentrism. In fact, in the ancient times also, there were philosopher-scientists, who proposed heliocentrism model of the universe; for instance, Pythagoras, an ancient Ionian Greek philosopher and mathematician of the 6th century BC, Aristarchus, an ancient Greek astronomer and mathematician of the 3rd century BC and Aryabhata, the first of the major mathematician-astronomers from the classical age of Indian mathematics of the 5th century CE – all were convinced of the heliocentric model. But, unfortunately, the then scientific community did not take them seriously and so humanity had to wait for several centuries to accept heliocentrism. If only had they taken those Greek philosophers seriously and worked on them, how much more our cosmology and astronomy would have flourished, down the centuries, in the right direction! That is the dangerous consequence of not questioning our 'precious' answers!

d) *One Gene = One Trait Model* - Gregor Johann Mendel (1822 – 1884), an Austrian biologist and mathematician, an Augustinian monk, experimented with pea plant breeding and came out with three principles of inheritance to describe the transmission of genetic traits. He proposed that one gene controlled one trait and it was a remarkable discovery, because before him no one ever knew that genes were existing. His extraordinary discovery made a great impact in the world of Biology and led to the development of new experimental methods. However, the Molecular Biology and

Genomics of the 20th century proved that the traits are often the result of multiple genes, epigenetics, and gene-environment interactions. With this, the scientific community moved away from Mendelian simple genetics to the modern complex genetics, challenging 'one gene = one trait' model. These new genetics changed how we understand diseases, inheritance, and personalized medicine.

e) *Static Universe Giving Way to the Expanding Universe* - Even in the beginning of the 20th century, the scientific community believed that the universe was static. The understanding of the universe was also largely confined to our milky way galaxy, but Edwin Hubble (1889–1953), an American astronomer, discovered the universe beyond our galaxy. With his proof for the existence of other galaxies, the fields of extragalactic astronomy and observational cosmology achieved tremendous growth.

7. "Incomplete" – The Final Lesson / Word?

Kurt Gödel, the Austrian logician and mathematician, in the context of his *Incompleteness Theorems* (1931), established the idea that incompleteness is an unavoidable feature of formal systems. The argument is: Any sufficiently powerful formal mathematical system cannot be both complete and consistent and there will always be true statements that cannot be proven within the system itself. It disturbed many mathematicians and philosophers as they were convinced that mathematics could be a self-contained, logically complete system. But we need to get reconciled with the fact that total certainty or completeness is impossible.

Mathematics is, of course, *consistent*, but *not complete* or certain in the usual sense of the terms. It is consistent under specific constructions and assumptions. It is consistent so it cannot prove a statement and its opposite (A and non-A). However, it is not complete, because a system can be complete, if every true statement within its framework can be proven. But in any sufficiently powerful and consistent formal system (like arithmetic), there are true statements that cannot be proven within that system. So, mathematics is inherently incomplete: there are always

truths that lie beyond the reach of formal proof. Similarly, though Mathematics is said to be the most 'certain' of all disciplines, it can only be 'partially certain'; for, within a given system of axioms (e.g., Euclidean geometry), if the logic is correct, then conclusions follow. By this, Mathematics can obtain only its apparent certainty. But the choice of axioms and whether they describe the "real world" is not guaranteed. That's a philosophical choice. So, even Mathematics has limits. One can't use a system to guarantee its own reliability; if the system could prove that it is free of contradictions, it would be inconsistent and thus certainty has boundaries and truth goes beyond proof.

Buddha's well-known parable about the blind men and an elephant is very effective in proving how diverse sets of people argue their views; as each blind man, touching upon different parts of the elephant like, tusk, trunk, tail, ear, leg, argues for a different understanding of an elephant! Similarly, people, rooted in diverse cultures, traditions and dogmas argue for their own claims. With this parable Buddha makes it clear that all our understanding of reality is always 'biased' and 'incomplete'. All these instil in us a deep sense of humility in our knowledge pursuits, as we realize that humanity, collectively and individually, is will ever be *INCOMPLETE*!

Concluding Remarks

Many things we need to assume in life and relationships. Philosophy of Science increasingly makes us aware that, even in science, assumptions and axioms play an important role to make their existence possible. Nowadays scientists increasingly realize that their own researches and investigations, inventions and discoveries are not even conceivable without certain assumptions and maxims, which are beyond mathematical/logical proofs or rational justifications. John Brockman has compiled papers, written by various thinkers and scientists on a range of topics within science, philosophy, and culture. They address the belief(s) they hold to be true without any definite proof; and without those belief(s) their research would not be possible. With this, they

highlight the essential gap between scientific knowledge and deeply held belief.[12]

Even Stephen Hawking, who was very anti-philosophical and atheistic in his approaches to life, agreed that there were fundamental questions in life. When we analyse them, we can easily understand that they are very much in philosophical in nature, and therefore, cannot be finally and absolutely answered. In his *The Grand Design—New Answers to the Ultimate Questions of Life*, we read: "We each exist for but a short time, and in that time explore but a small part of the whole universe… [p]eople have always asked a multitude of questions: How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator?"[13]Although he was against philosophy and claimed that philosophy is dead, all these answers cannot be answered without philosophy. According to him, scientists are the torch-bearers of truth, but we need to realize that the torch may be with the scientists but 'battery' in the torch is philosophy!

Helen Couclelis is convinced of 'the certainty of uncertainty'. She demonstrates how uncertainty is an inherent aspect of complex knowledge, particularly in the domain of geography. By analysing the very nature of knowledge, she argues that that there are aspects of knowledge that are unknowable, not due to imperfect information, but because of intrinsic limitations in our understanding. These imperfections arise not just from empirical limitations but from logical principles that govern how knowledge is constructed and interpreted. She contends that uncertainty is not merely a flaw to be eliminated but an intrinsic property of complex knowledge systems. Recognizing and accepting this uncertainty can lead to more robust and realistic geospatial analyses. Not only in geography, but in other domains also

12 John Brockman, ed., "What We Believe But Cannot Prove - Today's Leading Thinkers on Science in the Age of Certainty" (NY: Harper Perennial, 2006).

13 Stephen Hawking and L. Mlodinow, The*Grand Design* (London: Bantam Press, 2010).

uncertainty cannot be avoided due to several factors, like: a) *Limits of Knowledge and Observation*– Though we may use precise tools or methods, we can never fully capture the complexity of the real world and there's no single "true" map of the world; b) *Epistemological Limits* – Some amount of uncertainty is baked into the *way we know things*—not just the data we collect. Every method of knowing like, empirical, formal, experiential etc., has its own built-in imperfections that can't be overcome just by gathering more data. Thus, 'Uncertainty is certain' because the world is inherently complex but our tools are inherently limited; all the knowledge that we obtain will always be partial.[14]

To conclude this essay, I think, the remarks of Michio Kaku, a cofounder of the string field theory, are very apt: "There will always be things that are beyond our grasp, that are impossible to explore (such as the precise position of an electron, or the world existing beyond the reach of the speed of light)… We are not at the end, but at the beginning of a new physics. But whatever we find, there will always be new horizons continually awaiting us."[15]***Does it not imply that we always need, not only to ask questions, but also to question our answers?***

14 Helen Couclelis, "The Certainty of Uncertainty: GIS and the Limits of Geographic Knowledge", in *Transactions in GIS*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2003), 165-175. See:https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9671.00138. Accessed on 25 March, 2025.

15 Michio Kaku, *Physics of the Impossible* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 303.

REGINA, ANCILLA, SOCIUS
Imageries of Relationship between Philosophy and Theology

Kurian Kachappilly Joseph, CMI

Abstract: *This paper explores the evolving relationship between philosophy and theology through the lens of three symbolic imageries, regina (queen), ancilla (handmaid), and socius (partner), each representing distinct paradigms of interaction. These metaphors are not merely ornamental; they reflect underlying epistemological and historical dynamics that have shaped the disciplines' mutual engagements across centuries. Tracing the intellectual trajectory from the suspicion of Tertullian to the integrationist vision of Aquinas and the harmonizing affirmation of Pope Francis, the study highlights how shifts in metaphor signal deeper transformations in the understanding of knowledge, authority, and the search for truth. By examining key voices such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, the paper invites a critical re-evaluation of how philosophy and theology might today be envisioned not as adversaries or hierarchically ordered, but as dialogical partners, mutually enriching in the shared human quest for meaning and wisdom.*

Introduction

There has been an age-old debate among philosophers and theologians on the relationship between philosophy and theology. The relationship between philosophy and theology has historically been defined by a constellation of images and metaphors that function not merely as rhetorical devices but as epistemological models. Among the most evocative imageries are *regina*, *ancilla*, and *socius*, respectively meaning 'queen', 'handmaid', and 'partner' (companion). These images articulate shifting paradigms in the mutual positioning of these disciplines within intellectual and cultural history. The evolution from sovereignty (*regina*) through servitude (*ancilla*) to partnership (*socius*) reveals a dynamic interplay of autonomy, subordination, and dialogue, inviting renewed reflection on their proper integration.

Tertullian's suspicion of philosophy, famously asking "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"; Augustine's argument that Christians should "spoil the Egyptians," appropriating the useful elements of pagan learning for the purposes of divine truth; Anselm's definition of theology "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*); Aquinas' remarks, "The philosopher and the theologian consider the same things under different lights;" and Pope Francis' statement: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth," are significant milestones in the matrix of the relationship between philosophy and theology.

1. The Imagery of *Regina*

The Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras of Samos is credited with the coinage of the term "philosopher." He was asked, if he thought he was a 'wise man'. His answer was: "No, I am not; I am merely a lover of wisdom (*philos*+*sophia*)." The philosophers, who came after him were not so humble, labelled it as the "queen of the sciences." The imagery of *regina* was not without reasons. Greek philosophers, in general, believed that philosophy was "the study of just about everything." Philosophy, as love of wisdom, is often defined as "a search for ultimate reality and an attempt to say what it is." Pythagoras, for example, considered wisdom (*sophia*) as the organon 'to reach God and to attain the ends of life'.[1] In the works of Plato and Aristotle, philosophy assumes a sovereign role, not only epistemologically as the most universal form of knowledge but also politically and ethically as the guide to the well-ordered soul and society. Plato's ideal of the "philosopher-king" and Aristotle's assertion of metaphysics as "the first philosophy" affirm the regality of philosophy as the queen of sciences.

In Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher is conceived to be the ruler because he contemplates the eternal Forms, especially the "Form of the Good."[2] In the allegory of the cave,[3] Plato contrasts the world of

1 W.L. Reese, ed., "Pythagoras," in *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought*, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993, 470.

2 Plato, *Republic*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed., Edith Hamilton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, Book VI, 509b–511d.

3 Plato, *Republic*, Book VII, Part I, 514a – 521d.

opinion and shadows with the world of true knowledge, and states that the philosopher, who turns his soul toward the light, attains the vision of the Good, and thus is fit to rule/lead. The famous declaration "Until philosophers rule as kings, or kings become philosophers [...] cities will have no rest from evils," clearly establishes the normative role of philosophical insight in guiding society.[4] Furthermore, Plato claims that philosophy is the highest form of love, *philo-sophia*, the love of wisdom. In the *Symposium*, Socrates describes the "Ladder of Love," the ascent from bodily beauty to the contemplation of absolute Beauty, an ontological and epistemological hierarchy culminating in the philosopher's vision.[5]

Aristotle, following Plato, preserves the sovereignty of philosophy by establishing it as "the first philosophy", the science that studies "being as being."[6] In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle sates: "It is the mark of the philosopher to be able to study all things because wisdom deals with the first causes and the most knowable objects."[7] For Aristotle, the most sovereign form of life is the contemplative life (*bios theoretikos*), which he considers the highest and most divine. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes: "Such a life would be superior to man; but not in so far as he is man will he live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him."[8] The philosopher participates in the divine precisely through contemplation of immutable truths. This makes philosophy not only the queen of knowledge but the normative mode of existence for the highest human capacities.

The idea of philosophy as *regina* had enduring influence on Christian thinkers, like Augustine, who adapted it to a theologically-inflected metaphysics. While he eventually subordinated reason to faith, Augustine never abandoned the Platonic view that philosophical

4 Plato, *Republic*, Book V, 473c

5 Plato, *Symposium*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed., Edith Hamilton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, Section 10, 210a–212b.

6 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed., Jonathan Barnes, New Jaret: Princeton University Press, 1984, I.2, 982a–983b.

7 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.2, 982b.

8 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Book X, 7, 1177b.

wisdom was essential to understanding divine truth.[9] Thus, the imagery of *regina* persisted even when the *regina* would later become the *ancilla* in the Christian Middle Ages.

2. The Imagery of *Ancilla*

Philosophy reigned supreme until Christian era, when the theologian Clement of Alexandria demoted philosophy from the "queen" of the sciences to the "handmaid of theology."[10] Some other scholars attribute the saying "handmaiden of theology" to Peter Damien, who was an adversary of liberal arts. In both cases, the term "handmaid" (*ancilla*) was meant to make philosophy subservient to theological truths.[11] Aquinas followed Peter Damian in arguing that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology (*ancilla theologiae*): "Other sciences [philosophical sciences] are called the handmaidens of this one: 'Wisdom sent her maids to invite to the tower'" (Proverbs 9:3).[12]

The Enlightenment philosopher John Locke also regarded philosophy as a handmaid, but to the sciences. He said that the job of philosophy is to clarify assumptions, concepts and definitions, and interpret, analyse and synthesize the results of the sciences.[13] Moreover, Locke observed that many philosophers may agree that philosophy is a handmaiden, yet there are areas in which it still holds claim to the throne, most notably in logic and, despite the best efforts of theologians, ethics and metaphysics.

As *ancilla*, the main contributions of philosophy to theology are twofold: a description of the instrumental uses of philosophy, and the identification of the intrinsic role of philosophy as material to theology. In the first place, philosophy is needed in order that theology might be a science at all. Science is a body of knowledge that has its own

9 Augustine, *Confessions*, New York: Random House, 1950, VII.17–21.

10 Titus Flavius Clemens, *The Stromata*, London: Bottom of the Hill Publishing, 2012, Chapter 5.

11 Leslie Toke, "St. Peter Damien," in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 11, New York: R. A. Company, 1911.

12 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans., Blackfriars. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970, 1.1.5.

13 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, London: E.P. Button. 1961, 34.

set of principles and, on the basis of these principles, derives further conclusions, as in mathematics, biology, etc. Now, while the principles of the science of theology are known by revelation, the further conclusions that flow from these principles are derived with the help of philosophical reasoning. For example, the conclusion that Christ has two natures (human and divine) is not directly revealed to us.

The second service that philosophy renders to theology is that it allows a deeper penetration into the truths that are already known by revelation. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine argues that Christians should "spoil the Egyptians," appropriating the useful elements of pagan learning for the purposes of divine truth, just as the Israelites took gold from Egypt during the Exodus.[14] A common way that philosophy aids theology and deepens our understanding of revealed truth is through the "doctrine of analogy." Take, for instance, Augustine's use of the doctrine of analogy to explain the Trinity, suggesting that the human mind, with its functions of memory, understanding, and will, could serve as a model for grasping the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[15]

The third way that philosophy comes to the service of theology is built upon the fact that truths known by sound philosophy and truths known by revelation alone cannot contradict each other. St. Augustine used to say that true philosophy is one with true religion and true theology. For, if philosophy is the "love of wisdom," absolute wisdom is God himself. Anselm's classical definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding") encapsulates the dialectic of trust in revelation coupled with the use of reason to deepen that faith. In his *Proslogion*, Anselm uses philosophical reasoning, the ontological argument, to demonstrate God's existence, illustrating that reason can deepen and explicate faith without supplanting it.[16]

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14 Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, II.40.60

15 Augustine, On *the Trinity*, tans. A.W. Haddan, Oregon, USA: Monergism Books, 2018, Pt. 1, V. 5. 191-193.

16 Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, eds. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 82–104.

Finally, it ought not to be thought that the utility of the perennial philosophy remains confined to the academia. For good or for bad, philosophical ideas have practical consequences in the way people live their lives. For this reason, Leo XIII designed his great encyclical *Aeterni Patris* on the importance of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as a social encyclical: "The most illustrious Fathers of the Church […] were wont neither to belittle nor undervalue the part that reason had to play" (Leo XIII, 1879, Art. 3), as is summed up by the great Augustine when he attributes to this science "that by which the most wholesome faith is begotten […] is nourished, defended, and strengthened."[17]

The imagery of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae* summarizes a defining characteristic of medieval intellectual life: the harmonization of classical reason with Christian revelation. Through the iconic figures, like Augustine and Aquinas, philosophy was not diminished but elevated by its service to theology. The scholastic synthesis reminds us that rational inquiry, when ordered to faith, becomes a vital partner in the human search for divine wisdom.

3. The Imagery of *Socius*

Though philosophy may be regarded as the handmaid of theology, yet, being a handmaid does not imply that philosophy is inferior or simply a mere servant to theology. After all, the two need each other in order to serve humanity properly. What is, therefore, proposed is that philosophy and theology are partners; one cannot exist in isolation; each enables the other, taken together it makes a whole word of sense.

The very first question Thomas asked in his *Summa Theologiae* is: What need is there for any science other than those which make up philosophy?[18] The question only makes sense, if one knows those philosophical sciences, like Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics. In short, in order to do theology, Aquinas argues, one must first have done philosophy.

17 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book XIV, I, 3,
18 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1.

As partners, faith (theology) and reason (philosophy) have been seen as two ways of approaching the same reality, God. In the early third century Tertullian spoke of the complementarity of reason and faith, of natural and revealed theology: "God must be first known from nature and afterwards recognized from doctrine; from nature by his works and from doctrine by his revealed words."[19] In the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas maintained that there are philosophical reasons that make the acceptance of God's existence unavoidable: "When an effect is more apparent to us than its cause, we come to know the cause through the effect. From effects evident to us, therefore, we can demonstrate what in itself is not evident to us, namely that God exists."[20] He argued that the facts of movement, causation, contingency, and teleology, implying a Prime Mover, First Cause, Necessary Being, and Final Cause respectively lead one to the God of faith, the same God as in religion, though approached differently.[21]

Saint Bonaventure's well-known "metaphor of two books" beautifully captures the relation between theology and philosophy. According to Saint Bonaventure, the same God expresses his will in and through "the Book of Scripture" and "the Book of Nature."[22] He further held that though the speaker is one and the same, viz. God, the mode of language used in the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature is different.In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II also recognizes the fact that "the Book of Nature, when read with the proper tools of human reason, can lead to knowledge of the Creator"(John Paul II, 1998, Art. 9). The opening statement of *Fides et Ratio* is very relevant: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth" (John Paul II, 1998, Art. 1).

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19 Tertullian, *Contra Marcionem*, in *The Complete Works of the Church Fathers*, ed., Philip Schaff, Kindle Edition, I, 18.

20 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 2, 2.

21 Maritain followed Saint Thomas in affirming the ability of reason to reach God. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Man's Approach to God*, Latrobe, Pennsylvania: The Archabbey Press, 1960, 22.

22 J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to The Works of Bonaventure*, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964, 78.

4. The Method of Both/And

Despite the differences between philosophy and theology, Aquinas contends that they do not contradict each other (as some people think), rather they are related like the gifts of nature and grace. Grace, Aquinas says, does not destroy nature but perfects it. Moreover, both philosophy and theology deal with God, but the philosopher can only infer that God 'exists' and cannot by reflecting upon the objects of sensation understand God's essential 'nature'. There is, nevertheless, a coalescence of the object of philosophy and theology since they are both concerned with truth.[23]

The distinction between 'existence' and 'actuality' (nature) may be important, in so far as it is related to the difference between metaphysics and religion. While metaphysics (reason) has an *a priori*, modal aspect concerned with the necessary existence of an absolute and all-encompassing Reality; religion (faith) arises as a unitary response to Reality as it concretely exists and to the actuality of life as a whole. The proofs and arguments are concerned with 'existence', while religion or faith is a response to what is 'actual.' Hartshorne clearly shares the concerns of the Christian ideal of "both-and" and states very emphatically that "the philosophical absolute is not the Biblical God."[24]

Hartshorne further illustrates the necessity of adopting the principle of "both-and," by bringing out the distinction between the God of philosophy (articulated in modal language) and the God of religion (described in model language). What his claim amounts to, is that we can know the God of philosophy, who is "anyone's God," but not the God of religion, who is your God and mine." He himself means what this statement means: "Since God is infinitely responsive to each creature, 'my God' is far from being identical with the God of creatures in general [...] It is the same individual, but not the same individual in the same state."[25] Concerning "your God and mine" all talk is confessional, but not concerning the God of creatures in general. Thus the "both-and"

23 Thomas Aquinas*, Faith, Reason and Theology*, trans. Armand Maurer. Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987, 82.

24 Charles Hartshorne, "The Dipolar Conception of Deity," *Review of Metaphysics* 21/2 (1967), 278.

25 Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, La Salle: Open Court, 1989, 132.

approach recognizes, and safeguards "mystery" in God, locating it in God's concrete actuality.

According to John Paul II, theology is, "is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*." The first principle describes the way theology takes the content of revelation and makes it "its own." The second involves the response of theology to "the demands of disciplined thought" (John Paul II, 1998, Art. 65). With regard to the *auditus fidei*, a theologian is called upon to explain the concepts contained within revelation. To do so, he must make use of the philosophical systems which gave rise to these concepts. Furthermore, in order to explain them, he must also make use of philosophies which will allow him to interact with his audience. The *intellectus fidei* involves the systematization of the body of divine truths. This allows for theological truths to be coherently and intelligibly arranged so that they may be explained and defended via argument. Theology must build upon pre-existent philosophical truths in order to articulate itself.

Indeed, God is known to us by faith, and it enables us to grasp the precise meaning of the famous aphorism *credo intelligam* ("I believe in order to understand.").[26]However, as Maurice Nedoncelle observes, philosophy is not shut off from the believer's deepest convictions; it inevitably translates them. He believed that the opposite formula *intelligo ut credam* ("I understand in order to believe.") also has its truth: the previous use of the reason leads us towards the Word and disposes us to recognize it by faith. But the second maxim, he says, is not fully clear except in the light of the first.[27]Thus, as Pope John Paul states, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."

Conclusion

The imageries of *regina*, *ancilla*, and *socius* are not mere historical accidents; they function as hermeneutical tools by which the evolving

26 Saint Anselm, *Proslogion*, Chapter 1.

27 Maurice Nedoncelle, *Is there a Christian Philosophy?*London: Burns and Oats, 1960, 40.

relationship between philosophy and theology can be interpreted. While each image reflects a legitimate phase in their relationship, the contemporary intellectual context -pluralistic, dialogical, and interdisciplinary- calls for the *socius* paradigm. In a fragmented intellectual culture, the method of both/and -philosophy and theology- offers a witness to the possibility of integrated wisdom. As *socii*, they journey together, not in hierarchical servitude or rivalry, but as co-seekers of truth in service of humanity and the transcendent mystery.

Pope John Paul II thinks that the imagery of *socius* is needed for both sciences: "The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason 'mutually support each other'; each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique and a stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding" (John Paul, 1998, Art. 100). The *socius* imagery thereby captures the contemporary aspiration for a dialogical synthesis without collapsing the distinctiveness of either discipline.In contemporary context, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of "suspicion and recollection" (Ricoeur, 1967, 10-15), David Tracy's emphasis on the "analogical imagination" (Tracy, 1981, 3-5), and Georg Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989, 302) provide interpretive keys to understanding the interrelationship between philosophy and theology, highlighting their complementarity, methodological tensions, and shared concerns and interests.

Part - II

BELIEVING

The Realm of the Divine - THEOS

THE RELEVANCE OF KARL RAHNER
In the Indian Theological Endeavors

Clement Valluvassery-Paily

Reminiscence

My acquaintance with Prof. Dr George Panthanmackel MSFS, began in Innsbruck (Austria) in the early 90s. When I jot down these lines, I remember that the presence and the academic endeavors of Karl Rahner (1904-1984) in Innsbruck definitely added to the fame and name of University of Innsbruck, especially to its Faculty of Theology. Thus, the sweet reminiscence of my acquaintance and friendship with Dr. George Panthanmackel is linked in an indirect way to Karl Rahner too. As I met Fr. Panthanmackel in Innsbruck, he was pursuing his doctoral studies residing at the International College Canisianum, and I was a seminarian doing basic theological studies. I gratefully chew the cud of the moments we could spend together in Canisianum with students from different parts of the world deliberating now and then on both philosophical and theological topics. Thus, though I did not have the privilege to be a student of Dr. George Panthanmackel in the formal sense, he *is* my teacher, for I could learn a lot from him. I am so happy to be a part, though in a modest way, in the *Festschrift* being published in honour of Rev. Dr. George Panthanmackel.

Overture

Twelve and four decades passed since the birth and death of Karl Rahner respectively.[1] He is still one of the brightly shining stars in

1 Karl Rahner (1904-1984) was a Jesuit priest. He was born on March 4, 1904 in Freiburg in Breisgau (Germany). He entered the Jesuit Order in 1922. After the completion of the conventional academic path, that is, the studies in Philosophy and Theology he was ordained priest in 1932. He was sent for specialization in Philosophy in Freiburg in Breisgau. Martin Heidegger was one of his professors. He switched over his path from philosophy to theology. He bagged doctorate in theology in 1936 from the University of Innsbruck. During the National Socialist era in Austria (1938-45) he served at the Pastoral Office in Vienna and later in a parish in Baveria (Germany). 1945 onwards he taught Dogmatics, first in Pullach (Germany), then in Innsbruck (Austria). 1954 onwards he published his Theological

the sky of intellectuals. His vast oeuvre covers various theological and philosophical disciplines, including spirituality, anthropology, fundamental theology, pastoral theology and dogmatics. Since the scope of this article does not permit a detailed handling, I refer here mainly only to two topics of his contributions, namely 'Grace' and 'Anonymous Christianity,' and that too in nutshell and modestly. Both these themes are interconnected and they have special relevance in the multi-religious context of India.

Rahner is basically inclusive and integral in his theological thinking, and the starting point of his theological endeavors is the experience of human being. This approach has definitely a universal appeal, and it appeals to Indian sensibilities in a substantial manner. Rahner views the human-being as one who stands before the ground of the absolute mystery who is God. He sees the human-being as a question. According to Rahner the unity between philosophy and theology cannot be disregarded, for a believing Christian as a reflective person reflects upon the whole of his existence. In the Rahnerian view there exists both philosophical and theological objectivity, and in the life of human-being both realities enter from outside into a unity at least in principle. It is characteristic of this unity that in the appropriate place explicit reference is made to theological data which possibly cannot be reached by a secular philosophy as such. Rahner suggests that to begin with we must reflect *first of all* upon human-being as a universal question which s/he is for him/herself. The question, which human-being *is* and not only has, must be regarded as the condition which makes hearing the Christian answer possible.[2] In '*Spirit in the World*,' Rahner writes: "Man questions. This is something

Investigations. As a theological advisor (*peritus*) he played a vital role in the new and progressive viewpoints brought about at the Second Vatican Council. From 1964 to 1967 he was Professor of Christian Philosophy and the Philosophy of Religion in Munich, and from 1967 to 1971 Professor for Dogmatics at the University of Münster (Germany). He returned to Innsbruck in 1981. At the age of 80, he left for his eternal abode on March 30, 1984. His physical body was laid to rest in the Crypt of the Jesuit Church in Innsbruck.

2 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith - An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych, New York 1999, 11.

final and irreducible… Man questions necessarily… this necessity can only be grounded in the fact that being is accessible to man at all only as something questionable (*fragbar*), that he himself is insofar as he asks about being, that he himself exists as a question about being."[3]

For the human-being, to question is essential. It makes him/her different from all other beings. However, questioning does not bring the human-being outside of himself or herself but, rather, within. Rahner writes, "The question about being as a transcendental question consciously turns upon itself, looks and questions itself, it reveals itself as a knowledge of man about his questioning essence: he is already with being in its totality (*beim Sein im ganzen*): otherwise, how could he ask about it?"[4] In other words, Rahner argues that the human person is able to recognize a broader context within which the question has been asked and thus is open to "more" reality. That is, in the act of knowing any particular thing, the human-being is already 'beyond' the immediate object and has an awareness of the whole range of possible objects, or being as such. Rahner points out that a human-being, "insofar as he experiences himself as conditioned and limited by sense experience, and all too much conditioned and limited, he has already transcended this sense experience."[5] The transcendence of the human-being is "always orientated towards the holy mystery."[6] It is by this that the questioning human-being experiences his or her finiteness and "reaches beyond this finiteness and experiences himself a transcendent being, as spirit," as a "being with an infinite horizon."[7] Rahner writes that "the infinite horizon of human questioning is experienced as a horizon which recedes further and further the more answers man can discover."[8] This transcendental experience, the being "whom we call 'God' encounters man in silence, encounters him as the absolute and the incomprehensible."[9] According to Rahner the human-being is wrapped in the absolutely incomprehensible mystery that we call God.

3 K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William V. Dych, New York 1994, 57.
4 K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William V. Dych, New York 1994, 57.
5 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 20.
6 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21.
7 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21.
8 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21.
9 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21.

In Rahnerian view, Christianity is nothing other than the genuine explication and true interpretation of what resides in the ultimate depth of the human-being. Rahner is convinced that God's forgiving and transforming love as revealed in the history that is both salvific and secular reached its high point in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Rahner, the ground of the finiteness that human-beings experience is the very ground by which they transcend.

In Rahnerian view, "to transcend means to surpass, to go beyond or above and one might expect 'transcendental' to have something to do with that which goes beyond or rises above something."[10] It is because that the transcendence of the human-being is always orientated towards the holy mystery, which "explains why our questions never cease, why we eventually must ask ultimate questions, and why we are never satisfied totally with anything in this life."[11] For Rahner, mystery is "the horizon which cannot be mastered and which masters all of our understanding, and which allows the other to be understood by being present to itself in its silence and in its incomprehensibility."[12] This relates to Rahner's view on the transcendental nature of human beings and it is at the heart of Rahner's theology.

Rahner states, "Man [as a being is] mystery in his essence, his nature… beings who are referred to the incomprehensible God. But this reference, which is our nature, can only be conceived and understood when we allow ourselves freely to be grasped by the incomprehensible."[13] Thus, for Rahner "our whole existence is the acceptance or rejection of the mystery which we are, as we find our poverty referred to the mystery of the fullness."[14] One must keep in mind that the mystery is not something to be discovered so that it ceases to be a mystery. Rahner writes, "mystery is our nature, because the transcendence which we

10 K. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, New York 2004, 32.

11 H. D. Egan, "Theology and Spirituality," in: *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, New York 2005, 19.

12 Cf. K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 217.

13 Cf. K. Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, More Recent Writings, trans. Kevin Smyth, London 1966, 108.

14 K. Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, More Recent Writings, trans. Kevin Smyth, London 1966, 109.

are and which we accomplish brings our existence and God's existence together: and both as mystery."[15] These and the similar thoughts of Karl Rahner stand close in a certain way to *Advaitic* thinking patterns.

Grace as 'Supernatural Existential'

In one of his early essays titled "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace" Rahner writes: "God wishes to communicate himself, to pour forth the love which he himself is. That is the first and the last of his real plans and hence of his real world too."[16] According to Rahner God's grace is not a rare gift for a few chosen ones but a gift that God gives bounteously, almost 'wastefully.' No one can merit this grace, but all are open to receiving it. Each one is precious to God, who abounds in grace and love. God offers his grace to *all* people. Because the offer of grace is relevant for every person from the very start, Rahner calls it 'existential' (He adopted the term 'existential' from Martin Heidegger[17]). However, as mentioned above, humans cannot claim a right to this grace or achieve it on their own merit. Therefore this existential is 'supernatural.' Here Rahner links his insight with the traditional terminology of the theology of grace. Human beings are radically open for God's grace. They stand inescapably in the line of this offer of grace, though this grace does not belong to human nature. This

15 K. Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, More Recent Writings, trans. Kevin Smyth, London 1966, 109.

16 K. Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," in: *Theological Investigations* Vol. 1, God, Christ, Mary and Grace, London 1961, 310.

17 Existentiell and existential are key terms in Martin Heidegger's early philosophy. Existentiell refers to the aspects of the world which are identifiable as particular delimited questions or issues, whereas existential refers to Being as such, which permeates all things, so to speak, and cannot be delimited in such a way as to be susceptible to factual knowledge. In general it can be said that "existentiell" refers to a "what," a materially describable reality, whereas "existential" refers to structures inherent in any possible world. In other words, the term "existentiell" refers to an ontic determination, whereas "existential" refers to an ontological determination (Ontic refers to what is, and what can be observed and measured in some way. Ontological is about what it means to be – the theory or experience of a thing). The distinction between "existential" and "existentiell" is important; the first one (in Heidegger's meaning) is an ontological expression, the second one is a personal mood. "Existential" means the foundation of human living/thinking in the "being" (in German: *Sein*), "existentiell" means how I feel and how I see my life.

is what Rahner communicates with the term 'supernatural existential.' All human experiences, searches for meaning, daily life, etc. always take place in the space of this existential and are underpinned by it; still God's grace does not smother humankind's freedom.

In Rahnerian understanding when God gives us his grace, he communicates himself to us. The highest form of grace is God himself. Rahner therefore speaks of "uncreated grace": only God is uncreated, everything else he created. If God himself is the highest form of grace, then this is uncreated grace. God himself gives himself to us and thereby changes who we are. This is the uncreated grace through which the other, created, gifts of grace become possible.

The Concept of 'Anonymous Christianity'

Rahner's idea of "anonymous Christianity" is closely related to his concept of the "supernatural existential." As we have seen above, the concept of the "supernatural existential" posits that all humans possess an innate orientation towards God, a grace that exists as an existential condition of human nature. Rahner's "anonymous Christianity" represents an inclusive position within the spectrum of theological responses to religious diversity. Those who hold an exclusive position are particularly concerned with the ecclesiological implications of the notion of "anonymous Christianity." The question, what the point of proclamation, sacramental reception, mission, conversion or church membership is, if the salvation can also be anonymously attained by all, even by non-Christian, is valid. However, when one becomes fully aware of the context of Rahnerian thoughts, this question disappears. Rahner never intends, with his teaching on the legitimacy of pre-Christian religions, to make any concessions to the claim of absoluteness of Christianity.[18] The legitimacy of pre-Christian religions applies only under the condition of the "not yet" Christian. Even after the encounter with the Gospel, if they reject the same, they deprive themselves of the status of a legitimate pre-Christian religion.

18 Cf. K. Rahner, „Das Christentum und die Nichtchristlichen Religionen," in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Einsiedeln, Band V, 142; „Das neue Bild der Kirche," in: Band VIII. 339.

Rahner's concept of 'anonymous Christianity' is not patronizing. In order to grasp this properly one must consider Rahner's epistemological standpoint and his intention. He does not present the idea of 'anonymous Christianity' as neutral or phenomenological description of religions, but as a dogmatic reflection from the perspective of the Christian faith of Roman Catholic tradition, addressing an intra-Christian question. It is not the non-Christians, but the Christians who are the addressees of his deliberations. Rahner provides an impetus to think further through his theology of religions. When Nishitani, the head of Kyoto School, asked him how he would react if Nishitani called him an 'anonymous Zen-Buddhist,' Rahner replied: 'Of course, you are permitted and must do that from your standpoint; I feel only honoured by such an interpretation.'[19] This response indicates the possibility of mutual appropriation.

Rahner is convinced that God's wish is for the salvation of *all* people. In this conviction Rahner differs from all other approaches of the past and the present which are of the opinion that God's grace is meaningful only if it is bestowed upon a selected minority. Rahner always returned to the message of the scripture: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all" (Titus 2:6).

Conclusion

The relevance of Karl Rahner still remains non-faded owing to his inclusive and integral approach to theology, which is open for further pondering and development. Rahner was fully aware of the historicity of all dogmatic formulations. So as a highly gifted thinker who grasped the original intention of the dogmatic sentences developed them further so that the Christian convictions become plausible for the contemporaries. This is definitely the mission of every theologian. Rahner neither rejected nor parroted the traditional standpoints outright, but advanced them to the next stage. He realized and stressed the importance for respecting the dogmas, and at the same time he was fully aware that

19 Cf. K. Rahner, „Der eine Jesus Christus und die Universalität des Heils," in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Einsiedeln, Vol. XII, 276; Bernhardt, Reinhold, „Karl Rahner's Theology of Religions," in: *The Living Word*, Oct-Dec 2024, Vol. 130, No.4, 301-321.

they could not be just preserved like museum pieces, for faith is living reality, based on the experiences. Rahner writes:

> The thought of earlier generations, even if it has had results in the form of conciliar definitions, is not a sort of couch for the thought of later generations. Definitions are much less an end than a beginning. A Hic Rhodus. An opening. No real achievement is ever lost to the Church. But theologians are never spared the task of prompt renewal. Anything which is merely conserved, or which is merely handed down without a fresh, personal exertion beginning at the very sources of Revelation, rots as the manna did. And the longer living tradition is interrupted by mere mechanical handing down, the more difficult it may become to restore contact again.[20]

Rahner masterfully combines dogmatic and spiritual theology. What is meant here is not just a juxtaposition of 'devout contemplation' into to the systematic reflections, but the intellectually challenging discourse which is ultimately based not an idea, but on a *person*, in whom Christians believe. Rahner published prayers, meditations and sermon, in which he spoke of a concrete faith in Jesus Christ, along with his systematic theological and philosophical reflections. Here we find a kind of intellectualism, inspired by devotion but without abandoning critical thinking. Such a combination is unavoidable in the theological endeavors so that theology may not be reduced to mere intellectual gymnastic. Without an iota of doubt one can say that throughout his whole career, Rahner sought to achieve a rapprochement between theology and spirituality.

Sincerely saluting this towering personality, I conclude this short essay with the words of Karl Rahner himself which he delivered in his last public appearance:

… All theological statements—even if this is manifest in a variety of ways and degrees—are analogical statements. … We talk about God, about God's existence, characteristics, about three persons in God; we speak of God's freedom, of God's binding will, and so forth. Of course,

20 K. Rahner, „Über den Versuch, eines aufrisses einer Dogmatik," in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Band I, Einsiedeln 1954, 18; Cf. K. Rahner, „Chalkedon – Ende und Anfang?," in: *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, Band III, Hg. Von A. Grillmeier u. H. Bacht, Würzburg 1954, 3-49.

we need to proceed in this manner; we cannot simply keep silent about God. Indeed, it is only after we have first spoken that it is possible – really possible – to be silent. But in such discourse we usually forget that any statement made about God is legitimate only to the extent that it is always simultaneously negated. It is a question here of enduring the uncanny suspension between affirmation and negation as the true and only fixed term of our knowledge. In so doing, our theological assertions descend into the silent incomprehensibility of God's very self. Our theoretical statements then share the same existential destiny as we do, namely, that of a loving, trusting self-surrender to the unfathomable reign of God, to God's merciful judgment and sacred incomprehensibility.[21]

21 Rahner's address was delivered at a conference of the Katholische Akademie, held on February 11–12, 1984, in honour of Karl Rahner's 80th birthday. It was published in German in: *Vor dem Geheimnis Gottes den Menschen verstehen: Karl Rahner zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Lehmann, Munich 1984, 105–19. The English translation first appeared in Theological Studies 61 (2000), 3–15.

DIVINE LOVE
In the Teaching of Francis de Sales

Baviri Suresh Babu, MSFS

Abstract: *Love is the most precious and fundamental gift of human life. It is a profound and multifaceted reality that manifests in diverse forms: divine, romantic, familial, platonic, and even self-love. Its meaning varies according to persons, relationships, and situations. Spiritually, love refers to caritas—the love of God, which is the highest form of love. Socially, it may refer to love of family, friendship, or one's partner. Within Christian spirituality, love as a virtue unfolds in three dimensions: love of God, love of neighbour, and love of self. This article focuses exclusively on the love of God, namely, Divine Love, with particular reference to the teaching of St. Francis de Sales, the "Doctor of Love."*

Introduction

Love is indeed the most valuable and the most significant fruit we can have as humans. It is a profound and multifaceted emotion, which takes various forms such as divine, romantic, familial, platonic or even self-love. "Love" also has many meanings depending on the persons, relationships and situations. In spiritual sense, it refers to "charity", that is, love of God, the highest form of love. But in social context, it could mean love of other human beings, or love of family members, or inter-personal love, or passionate love for one's partner, or love of friends. In spirituality, though love as a virtue is three-fold- Love of God, Love of Neighbour and Love of Self, in this article, we shall deal solely about the Love of God, i.e. Divine Love.

1. Meaning and Definition of 'Love'

The root word for 'love' is derived from the Proto-Indo-European term '*leubh,*' which means care or desire. The other root words are in Latin, '*libet'* and in Old English '*lufu,'* meaning "deep affection or being very fond of something."[1] In Greek, the terms used to mean love are

1 https://www.britannica.com/topic/love-emotion

'*eros*,' '*philia'* and '*agapé'* or '*agapao*.' Here, 'eros' refers to the strong feelings one has towards another human being, especially between man and woman, it is more romantic love; 'philia' refers to love of friendship between two persons; and '*agapao'* or '*agapé'* refers to a totally self-less love unlike the other two – *eros* and *philia*, which are self-based.[2]

Love is a deep, tender and ineffable feeling of affection and solitude towards persons. It implies a deep personal attachment for another. Indeed, love is a virtue of the heart. For, St. Thomas Aquinas, "love is the first movement of the will and of every appetitive faculty tend towards good and evil."[3] St. Francis de Sales defines love as "a movement and outpouring of the heart towards the good."[4] Human heart rejoices when it finds the highest good, that is God Himself. In fact, the ultimate end of every human being is God Himself, who alone can give us the perfect happiness as well as the perfect peace. Not only we approve and delight in God when our heart finds the good that it seeks but also "embraces Him and makes Him our own,"[5] since He is our highest possession. Thus, love is "the satisfaction in and the movement of flow of the will towards the object of love."[6]

2. Different Forms of Love

St. Francis de Sales speaks of different forms of love, namely, Love of Benevolence and Love of Concupiscence. While love of benevolence is selfless love, love of concupiscence is selfish. In the former love, one who loves expects no benefit from the one loved but in the latter, one loves something, without expecting any reward. If one who loved possesses the good that is desired and one who loves takes pleasure in the good that is possessed, then it is gratifying love; but if one who is

2 George Panthanmackel MSFS, *God of Love: An Investigation into Transcendent Love in the Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 2011, Pp. 2-3.

3 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Qn. No. 20, art. 1.

4 Saint Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, tr. by Antony Mookenthottam, MSFS, Armind Nazareth MSFS, & Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil MSFS, SFS Publications, Bangalore, 2012, Book V, Ch. 1, p. 229.

5 TLG, V, Ch. 1, p. 230.

6 TLG, I, Ch. 7, p. 38.

loved does not possess the good that is desired by the one who loves, then it is called love of desire. The Doctor of Love further describes that if the love of benevolence is one-sided and lacks response from the person loved, then it is only simple benevolent love; but if it is mutual, then it is called love of friendship. When we love someone without any preference to others, then it is simple friendship; but if one prefers over others, then such friendship is known as affection. Furthermore, if one does "not prefer a friend to others by this affection, it is simple affection"[7] but if one prefers a friend over many others, then it is called deep affection. It is eminent friendship, when one esteems a friend greatly but "still it can be compared and ranked as proportionate with others"[8]; but "if the eminence of this friendship is beyond comparison and proportion, above all others, then it is called incomparable, supreme and super-eminent affection."[9] In fact, it is love or "Charity which due to the one only God." Here, the point to be noted is that the word Charity refers exclusively to "the love of God as the highest and supreme affection."[10]

3. Divine Love According to St. Francis de Sales

3.1. The Terms 'Love' 'Affection' and 'Charity' Clarified

In Catholic tradition, both the terms, 'charity' and 'love' are used interchangeably. The term 'love' is not anyway less holy than the term charity. Both indicate affection and holy affection depending on the context of the term used. Though love means 'affection' in human context, love refers to much "greater fervour, greater effectiveness and greater activity than affection."[11] St. Francis de Sales insists: "'Love' being more excellent, was rightly given to charity since charity is the highest and most eminent of all loves."[12] When we speak about divine love, it directly implies love of God, which is two-fold: God's love for humans and human's love for Godhead.

7 TLG, I, Ch. 13, p. 62.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 TLG, I, Ch. 14, p. 63.
12 Ibid.

3.2. God, Who Loves Us First, Commands Us to Love Him

3.2.1. Longing to Love God Is Natural

God, who loved us first, implanted in us His own love. Hence, by this natural desire that was infused in us by the Divine, we humans seek to love and be loved. We are specially inclined to love the Divine Goodness above all things, besides the good in general. This desire to love God above everything is not only natural to us, human beings, created by God of love, but also supernatural since it corresponds "to the nature adorned, enriched and honoured by original justice,"[13] which proceeds from a special favour of God Himself. Hence, the Psalmist rightly acclaims: *As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God*.[14]

St. Augustine rightly affirms: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." In the same tone, St. Francis de Sales too emphasizes: "We recollect ourselves in God because we long for Him, and we long for Him in order to recollect ourselves in Him… Make a thousand different movements of your heart, to rekindle yourself love for God, and to rouse yourself to an ardent and tender affection for this divine Spouse."[15]It is because of this deep longing that we have within our hearts to love God, that we cannot but think of Him, seek Him, long for Him and speak of Him.

According to St Francis de Sales, those who love God, however busy they may be, they would always make ceaseless efforts to love God entirely in all circumstances. Even a slightest thought of the love of God would make them return to the Lord to love and experience God's ever-loving presence, giving least importance to anything else in this world. He explains it thus: "Nothing that is corrupt can attract the bees: they rest only on flowers. In the same way, your heart cannot be at rest except in God alone. No creature can satisfy it."[16] He also further

13 TLG, I, Ch. 16, p. 68.
14 Psalm 42:1-2.
15 St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, tr. by Fr. Antony Mookenthottam, Fr. Armind Nazareth, Fr. Antony Kolencherry, SFS Publications, Bangalore, 2016, Part II, Ch. 13, p. 107.
16 IDL, V, Ch. 10, p. 317.

adds: "God does not will that our heart finds a resting place anywhere like the dove which Noah sent from the ark (Gen 8:9), so that it may return to its God from whom it went forth. How beautiful is our heart by nature."[17] The point to be noted is that though human beings have this natural desire to love God, the ability to love God above everything is something supernatural, i.e. by God's grace. However, "God's grace in no way compels us to love Him, but only impels, leaving us free even to reject his promptings."[18] And, it is due to this freedom God bestows on us out of His love for us, we run the risk of losing love for God in this life by our sins.

3.2.2. We Must Love God with Our Entire Self

According to the Holy Scriptures, the first commandment of God is: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,[19] with all your soul, and with all your strength.[20] St. John the Evangelist writes: God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.[21] Again, he writes in his First Letter: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of god and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love… God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them[22] (1John 4:7-8, 16b). St. Paul declares: But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ…[23]

The above Scriptures reveal to us that God, who loves us limitlessly, commands us to love Him with all mind, heart and soul. For, God is love and love is the nature of God, whom we are called to love with our entire body, mind and heart. Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we are obliged to love Him before everything and above all others. Indeed, we receive God's love in our relations with

17 Ibid.
18 George Panthanmackel, MSFS, *God of Love*, p. 1.
19 St. Augustine, *Confessions* (Cf. Lib 1,1-2, 2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5).
20 Deuteronomy 6:5.
21 John 3:16.
22 1 John 4: 7-8, 16b.
23 Ephesians 2: 4-5.

Him, and we experience God's love in our relationship with others. St. Francis de Sales is of the opinion that God, who is the author, Lord and end of human being is highly "lovable and worthy of esteem above all things by inclination and natural disposition."[24]

3.3. All the Love We Have for God Has Its Origin in God

As a matter of fact, as human beings, we have nothing of our own that we can boast of. In the words of St. Paul, the Apostle, *what do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?*[25] *Yes, indeed, everything we seem to possess is from God, and even the supernatural and holy love that we have for God is from God Himself. We must humbly accept always and be grateful to Him, who loves us and invites us to love Him in the first place. God is love* (1 Jn 4:8) and He loves us eternally. He invites us to enjoy His unconditional and limitless love. As St. John, the Evangelist, vividly states: *God so loved the world* (Jn 3:16) to the extent of sacrificing His own Son for the remission of our sins so that we can all be saved and be welcomed into His eternal abode to enjoy life eternally for which we are created in His own image and likeness. The Apostle of Savoy emphasizes: "The love of humans for God has its origin, its progress, and its perfection in God's eternal love for humans."

3.4. God Assists Us with His Graces to Love Him above All and Above Everything

Charity is one of the theological virtues, because it is God who infused in us the desire to love Him. However, we must note that unless God assists, we can love God entirely with our whole person, since we are all vulnerable to various temptations. Our sinful nature continues to weaken our will to love God above all and everything. In fact, this first commandment reveals to us, how passionately God loves and earnestly desires for our love. And what is more consoling is the fact that God "does not leave any living person without an abundance of all the means necessary for practicing this commandment."[26]

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24 TLG, I, Ch. 16, 68.
25 1 Cor 4:7
26 TLG, II, Ch. 8, p. 99.

St. Francis de Sales insists that even God sent His only Son Jesus to save us all so that we can love Him eternally.[27] Hence, God comes to our aid in living this first Commandment of God which obliges us to love God with all our heart, soul and strength. God, in His infinite goodness, constantly assists us with His grace so that we can the much-needed progress in our desire to love Him, provided we are willing to cooperate with Him. St. Francis de Sales assures us: "He will lead us with all loving kindness from good to better, to the supreme love, which our natural inclination urges us on. It is certain that for him who is *faithful in little things* (Mt 25:21, 23), and who has done what is in his power, the divine kindness never denies His assistance to make progress more and more."[28]

4. Divine Love Rewards us with Eternal Life in Heaven

Divine Love or the Love of God is the cause of our life in God. God, who is love, invites us to share in His love and become sharers of His love. In fact, it is one, who longs for the love of God and loves God above all and above everything, will receive heaven as a great reward. We must therefore long for such love which offers the ultimate end of our life as humans. Indeed, it is only God who can give us perfect peace and happiness. Nothing in this world can offer us what our hearts truly desire, neither persons nor riches. St. Francis de Sales points out: "Even death cannot sadden the heart of the one who knows that his supreme love is living. It is enough for the soul, that loves Him, whom it loves more than itself is filled with eternal goods. It is because it lives more in God it loves than in the body it vivifies."[29]

Nothing can be compared to the love of God. The Saints chose to die for the love of God because there is more joy found in the love of God than all that the world can offer. That's why, Jesus himself says: If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life, will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."[30] St. Francis de Sales firmly insists that it doesn't matter whether he lives or dies but what matters most for him was to love God entirely in his life now and forever. In his

27 Cf. Ibid.
28 TLG, I, Ch. 18, p. 73.
29 TLG, V, Ch. 3, p. 241.
30 Mathew 16: 24-25.

opinion: "Divine love gives us interior joy and consolation with great peace of heart, which is preserved in adversity by patience."[31]

Conclusion

The love that human beings have for the Divine has its origin as well as perfection in God's eternal love for human beings. According to St. Francis de Sales, "though there are many paths to holiness, the best way to holiness is nothing but loving God above all things, and with single mind."[32] The most holy charity is not only a virtue and a gift from God Almighty to humans but also a fruit and also a beatitude. To state in the words of the Gentleman Saint: "As a virtue, it makes us obedient to the exterior inspirations which God gives through His commandments and counsels… As a gift, charity makes us docile and responsive to interior inspirations… As a fruit, it gives us an extreme relish and pleasure in the practice of the devout life… As a beatitude, it makes us receive the affronts, calumnies, revilings and insults which the world heaps upon us as the greatest of favours and a special honour."[33]

Divine love, which is the virtue of all virtues, gift of all gifts, fruit of all fruits of the Holy Spirit, rules in our hearts as it subjects all the other loves and tames the sensual passions. It draws us closer to God and to the merits of eternal reward. St. Francis de Sales, the Doctor of Divine Love, opines: "The one who has the love of God, in some abundance, shall have neither desire, nor fear, nor hope, nor joy, but for God, and all his moments shall be at rest in this one heavenly love."[34] To conclude, one who loves God entirely enjoys inner freedom and so will do everything out of love. For, divine love consists, not merely in feelings and emotions, rather "in the resolution of the heart to abide in God, united everything with the will of God."[35]

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31 TLG, XI, Ch. 19, p. 616.

32 Fr. Baviri Suresh Babu MSFS, *Growing in Holiness: Guiding Ordinary People to Extraordinary Holiness Through the Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales*, SFS Publications, Bangalore, 2019, P. 99.

33 TLG, XI, Ch. 19, p. 618.

34 TLG, XI, Ch. 20, p. 619.

35 Antony Kolencherry "Love: Be-All And End-All, St. Francis de Sales' Vision of Holiness for Every Person", in Antony Kolencherry (ed), *Love: Be-All & End-All: A Compendium of Salesian Spirituality*, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2022, p. 231.

LOVE IN INDIAN MYSTICISM
Bhakti and the Notion of Divine Love

John Peter Vallabadoss, OFM Cap

Abstract: *Mystical saints of Bhakti tradition have explicitly expressed through their songs, themes of love, devotion, belonging and commitment to the Lord God, giving rise to romanticism towards the Divine, Divine Love and Divine as Love. Having popularized human emotions and illustrated concrete human love towards the personalized Divine, bhakti shows that devotion to the Divine love is possible due to human dimension of love where a devotee can get connected with one's own experience of longing, desire, separation, romanticism and unconditional surrender. Loving devotion to the Lord serves as a case for affectivity as cognizing principle, paving a foundation for a new approach and form of spirituality, revealing the truth of reality of the Divine as Love and establishing a living relationship with the Divine. The article analyses the mystical journey from devotion to the Lord and loving the Divine, to conceiving God as Love enumerates various dimensions of love in the mystic saints of bhakti tradition and analyse whether mystical love is the means or the end itself.*

Introduction

Bhakti movements, one of the remarkable features of medieval India, has strengthened the religious bonds of belonging and commitment to the Lord God. Themes of love and devotion are explicitly expressed in *bhakti* outpourings in forms of songs giving rise to romanticism towards the Divine. Even though classical Indian religions and philosophies contained elements of love, in terms of intellectual enquiry or in the mysticism of oneness with the Absolute love, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions have popularized human emotions and everyday concerns of the ordinary people. *Bhakti* popular literatures illustrate concrete human love towards the personalized, *anthropomorphized* Divine. Devotion to the Divine love is possible due to human dimension of love where a devotee can get connected with one's own experience of longing, desire, separation, romanticism and unconditional surrender.

Bhakti tradition leads even to conceiving God as Love, as in Śaiva tradition. The present study enumerates various dimensions of love in the mystic saints of *bhakti* tradition and analyses whether mystical love is the means or the end itself.

1. Transcendent in the Tangible

Emerging and flourishing in the monotheistic Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions, love towards the Divine who is One, supreme and transcendent and immanent, is more expressed concretely than symbolically. Devotees often prefer the literal to the symbolic. Form is tangible and objective, whereas metaphysical thought is cognitive, intangible and subjective. Form is limited by space and time but transcendental world of ideas is without limitation. Representing reality that is transcendental, existing beyond the senses, beyond beginning and end is through concrete objects representing the stability and stillness of spiritual reality. If *bhakti* tradition tries to bring down the high ideals of metaphysical thinking into concrete form, mysticism realizes the potentials of form in reaching the ideal. Devotees need form to understand and seek the formless; through *sagu<a* (forms) is realised the *nirgu<a* (formless). For instance, in Śaiva *bhakti,* devotion to Lord Śiva is through *linga* form which is more than a phallic symbol, beyond the conventional titillation, formless and limitless Divine in the form of personal image, carved or natural. Adoration of an idea of formless and limitless, in the form of worship of *linga,* represents abstract sense of Love. Humans conceptualise the idea of infinity and communicate abstract idea using words and symbols, with imagination.[1] Humans imagine a world beyond limited nature when experience through perception is incomplete, inaccurate, unreliable and deceiving. Imagination defines humanity of its developing a vision, defining a world view and unseen future, creating unknown world, mystically connecting with the Divine.

Love in Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions calls for absolute loving surrender to the Lord who though Supreme and Transcendent makes Himself accessible to His devotees through His various incarnations.

1 Devdutt Pattanaik, *Seven Secrets of Shiva* (New Delhi: Westland, 2011), 15.

The descent of the Divine, *avatāra,* as understood especially in Vaiṣṇava tradition happens from time to time entirely for the great Love that God has for the suffering humanity in danger of being overwhelmed by the ocean of chaos or of perishing from the attacks of the wickedness. Viṣṇu is conceived to be in five forms: the transcendent (*para*), the grouped (*vyūha*), the incarnated (*vibhava*), the immanent (*antaryāmin*), the idol (*arcā*).[2] The ultimate goal of different forms that the Lord takes out of Divine Grace is nothing but an expression of Love for the bonded souls and of His redemptive power for liberation of the souls. Even the creation is due to His *līlā,* play of God out of His primeval need to love and be loved. God is *rasa,* the aesthetic sentiment as well as *rasika*, enjoyer of beauty. Vaiṣṇava propagation of aesthetical union of Kṛṣṇa and Rādha is strongly connected with union in Love. Anthropomorphic dimension of the Divine exhibits the human imagination of relating with the Transcendental in the tangible form accessible to the devotees.

2. Divine as Embodiment of Love

Loving heart with devotion leads the *bhakta* to God of Love. The radical changes in the religious history of Indian religion from Upanisadic intellectual approach to the Divine, to the devotional period of theistic schools of *Bhakti,* ushered in a new concept of God as Love itself. The famous phrase in Saivism "*anbē śivam* – Love is Lord Śiva"[3] vouches for understanding God not as just having a quality of love and mercy, but God as Love. True understanding of God comprehends the inherent unity of Love and God, and leads to transformative realization in the experience of the Divine. Though *bhakti* understanding of God is more personal with innumerable auspicious qualities and the relation of humans to God becomes a personal relationship expressed by love, singing in praises, adoring, offering gifts and committing oneself to Lord's service,[4] Saivism declares the transcendental aspect of Śiva as

2 The idol is the most concrete of God's forms, called as *arcavatara;* the belief is that God descends into the idol and makes it divinely alive, so that He may be easily accessible to his devotees.

3 Tirumūlar's *Tirumandiram,* Verse 270 states that Love and Siva are one, emphasizing the unity of Love and God. Love in purest form is synonymous with the divine presence.

4 Augustine Thottakara, *Indian Spirituality: Hindu Spiritual Traditions – A Christian*

Love. *Bhakti* leads the devotees by its passage of human love to Love Divine by contemplation. Upaniṣads taught that *Atman* is *sat* (Truth) and by contemplation one realizes Truth as Soul Force. To know the *Atman* as Truth by meditation is not only a form of worship but it is real worship.[5]

Bhakti schools taught the doctrine of God as Truth and Love. In contrast to abstract Upanisadic teaching and rigorous moral teachings of Śramanic traditions, *Bhakti* schools praised family life, without advocating asceticism or abandoning the world. God is not incomprehensible. God being Love and that Love shining in the soul is sufficient to lead to life of peace, forgiveness and mercy. The *Bhakti* saints preached and practised the human-hearted and universal love and good-will to all without measure. Āḻvārs, the Tamil Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* saints wandered from shrine to shrine, with passionate emotion, composing and singing devotional hymns in ecstasy and in Love, with personal adoration offered to the Supreme.[6] Divine Love at the root of everything in a life of devotee through *bhakti* is expressed in any form of worship through faith-love relationship and loving surrender and loving participation in the Divine nature as Love.[7] Supreme love of participation of the personal God is *parabhakti.*[8] Casting all knowledge, action and emotions in the perspective of *Bhakti,* a devotee evokes the presence of the Divine.

3. Devotional Love to Divine as Love

Approaching *Bhakti* with reason, imagination and intellectual sensibility reveals a profound transformation of surrendering love of a devotees to a master, to mystical unity of realizing the nature of Divine as Love, not just worshiping the Divine who has love as His predominant quality. The term 'devotion' conveys a person's profound emotional and mental commitment to a sacred being, which is expressed in conscientious

Interpretation (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2005),142.

5 N.G. Chandavarkar, foreword, *The Life and Teaching of Tukaram* by J.N. Fraser & J.F. Edwards (London: Oriental Publishers, 1922), xv-xvi.

6 J.N. Fraser & J.F. Edwards, *The Life and Teaching of Tukaram* (London: Oriental Publishers, 1922), 37.

7 George Gispert-Sauch, "Bhakti" in *Gems from India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 91-93.

8 Richard De Smet, *Guidelines in Indian Philosophy,* ed., Ivo Coelho (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2022), 288.

and purposeful activities. *Bhakti* emphasizes on motivated action as 'participation.[9] Self-surrender through devotion is one of the paths that leads one to the state of spiritual emancipation in which one is freed from the bondage of finite existence.[10] To know oneself as well as the absolute reality, one must be consumed by intense love. The practice of self-surrender is the true 'path of devotion.' Perfect surrender is the state of just being what one is, by cultivating submission of one's individual will to the will of God, by giving up all personal desires; because desires impel one to do actions and thereby prevent one from just being. By cultivating the attitude of self-surrender one is able to reduce the strength of one's will, and deprive the mind of its force that impels it to be active.[11] The mystic poets are unique in their poetic diction to convey their personal mystical experience. All mystics find it beyond their power to communicate to others the exact nature of a mystical experience without recourse to symbols. The mystic verses are attempts to explain the inexplicable.[12] The mystic poets are devotees of high purpose and passionate involvement.

Viewing through its intellectual dimension, *Bhakti* movement is an attempt to 'sacralize' the 'secular' even though devotion in mysticism has been considered as anti-intellectual emotionalism. Intellectual aspects of *bhakti* amidst the devotional enticements and allurements, discover the ecstasy of divine love in human eternal quest for Truth, Reality and Bliss. Discussion on Vrindavan Gopīs who stayed behind, without following Kṛṣṇa, Daya Krishna writes, "After all, Kṛṣṇa had left Vrindavan much earlier to fight the battle of *dharma,* and if the Gopīs did not follow him, it was because they loved not Him, but their own emotions of loving Him. It was not Kṛṣṇa, they loved, but they were in love with the love they felt for him."[13] The reality of Kṛṣṇa does not seem to interest the Gopīs. Again, Arjuna the *Bhakta* of friendship

9 Karen Pechilis, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17-24.

10 Michael James, *Happiness and the Art of Being: Bhagavan Sri Ramana* (Create Space, 2012), 435.

11 Michael James, *Happiness and the Art of Being,* 463.

12 V.R. Narla, *Vemana* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1969), 49.

13 Daya Krishna, Mukund Lath, Francine E.Krishna, eds., Introduction, *Bhakti: A Contemporary Discussion* (New Delhi: ICPR, 2000), iv.

with Kṛṣṇa, was frightened and could not love his friend Kṛṣṇa, when the reality of God was revealed to him in *Viṣvarūpam.*[14] Devotee cannot love the real nature or reality of the Divine, but loves only his manifested, illusory, friendly aspect which becomes the subject and object of one's devotion. In infinite mystical Love there is no dualism of spirits, no subject or object of love, no lover and beloved. The love which is the essence of mysticism and powerful creative force, is a potent force with a direct bearing on reality, with enormous transformative potential. Love encompasses emotion, will and action; it is the dimension experienced in mysticism. God as Love is the greatest gift of religious mysticism to the world.[15]

4. Life of Love: Practical and Mystical

Life is to be lived and loved. Love is discerned at the depths of the human spirit, envisioning a kindness-understanding and a kindness-promoting frame of thought. The world is shot through with Love, as articulated with an intuition of humankind and as having a strong bearing on how people exist in the world today. Emotions and volitions in humans are not the chance outcomes of blind contingency in an indifferent process of evolution.[16] Love is the urge to co-be well and emotions are motivating and enabling the interactive ability to achieve that. The notion of Infinite Love provides a transcendental root for all aspects of living. Love seeks harmony; finds it where it exists and creates it where it does not exist. Love seeks to transcend the greed and hatred inherent in human existence. A mysticism of love is *bhakti-yoga,* ultimately transcended in Absoluteness. Mystical love is not essentially different from natural love; but both are manifestations of one continuum.[17] Possessed by Divine love, mystics become self-absorbed and in the flames of self-consciousness pour forth their songs of devotion. At the

14 Refer, *Bagavat Gita, Chapter 1,* on *Viṣvarūpadarṣana yoga,* where Lord Kṛṣṇā reveals His cosmic, universal form, with an awe-inspiring vision of not only just a display of divine power but about the nature of reality and the all-pervading presence of the Divine.

15 J.S.Kruger, "Love" in *Signposts to Silence: Metaphysical Mysticism* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018), 427. *https://doi.*org/10.4102/aosis.2018.BK52.20.

16 J.S.Kruger, "Love," 425.

17 J.S.Kruger, "Love," 428.

same time, silence overpowers and they move steeped in trance. To love the Divine is to know the Real. Silence is Peace, Bliss and Knowledge. For the mystics love is none but the Divine in their heart, the King of their souls. Silence opens the psychic centres and meditation absorbs cosmic energy and awakens Divine knowledge that the mystics live in tune with the Divine. Opening their hearts to Divine love, they enter inner solitude, plunge into inner silence and settle in the deeper Self.

Nuggets of golden truth, cast in brilliant verses come out of the inner mine of yearning in the mystics. The soul, hungering for the inner delight cannot live with pleasures of the world and flimsy shows of sanity and luxuries. The mystics make their life a song-offering to the Divine of their heart. They would live in the Divine, for the Divine; living in tune with the Infinite is the soul's birth-right. Intense love for the Divine controls their wandering senses, internalises their attention, intensifies their concentration, and lulls their mind into to meditation and contemplation. A dynamic peace possesses them, widening their heart's love into a deep compassion for all. Life in union with the Divine and in harmony with fellow creatures is eternal springtime for the mystics.[18] The mystics seek the Unique One who is all and all in all.[19] The heart's outpouring of Divine Love found in mystic songs is not ordinary word. When chanted they are actually effective in awakening Divine Consciousness dormant in every living entity. We always merge in the transcendental mellow of Divine beauty.[20]All these songs have exquisite melodies, serving not only pure devotional service but helping the devotees obtain the mercy of the spiritual master and benediction of the Divine. The verses are so pregnant with meaning and transcendental vibrations that they lead to succinct spiritual experience.

18 B. Natarajan, *Songs of Saint Tayumanavar* (Hawaii: Himalayan Academy, 1978), 66-67.

19 B. Natarajan, *Songs of Saint Tayumanavar,* 64.

20 Swami Parbhupada, Trans., *Songs of the Vaisnava Acaryas,* New Edition (California: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2015), vii.

Conclusion

Unlocking the treasures of religious aspiration in the soul of Indian mysticism one finds bhakti as tidal wave sweeping human feelings and emotions into the shore of spiritual quest. Centred on loving surrender to the Lord, bhakti serves as a case for affectivity as cognizing principle, paving a foundation for a new approach and form of spirituality, revealing the truth of reality of the Divine as Love and establishing a living relationship with the Divine. Bhakti is not to be understood as against intellect or reason primarily dealing with the abstract and living in the world of distinctions, categorization and classification, but as the living pulse of reality capturing 'lived' feelings and emotions. Our reflection shows bhakti feelings and emotions towards the Transcendental Reality as being the real cognitive means in apprehension of the Ultimate, who is conceived as a Person rather than an abstract principle. Love in mysticism, where the intellectual and emotional get fused in one, is felt in the context of relations in actual life as the Transcendent is considered as a Lover, Master, Friend, Father, etc.

FORGIVENESS IN CHRISTIAN LIFE
An Exegetical Interpretation of Matthew 6:12

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Abstract: *This article offers an exegetical analysis of Matthew 6:12, the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, which presents a profound interconnection between divine and human forgiveness. The verse, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," raises significant theological questions regarding the relationship between the forgiveness granted by God and that extended by human beings. Through close examination of the text, particularly the use of ὀφειλήματα ("debts") and the aorist verb ἀφήκαμεν ("we have forgiven"), the study explores the relation between divine and human forgiveness—whether human forgiveness functions as a condition for, or a response to, divine forgiveness. The findings underline the fact that, in Matthew's theology, forgiveness is both a divine gift and an ethical imperative, making it a fundamental expression of discipleship and a reflection of God's own mercy.*

Introduction

The **Gospel of Matthew**, particularly the **Sermon on the Mount**, presents a profound vision of Christian discipleship grounded in the principle of love. Within this discourse, Jesus offers His disciples the prayer known as the *Lord's Prayer* (*Mt 6:9–13*), intended as a model of authentic prayer. Central to this prayer is the *fifth petition"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"*(*Mt 6:12*).This petition uniquely intertwines divine mercy with human responsibility, positioning the act of forgiving others as integral to the experience of receiving God's forgiveness. The prayer for forgiveness introduces a theologically rich and ethically demanding dimension to prayer, raising important interpretive questions: What does it mean to say forgive us our debts? Can the sins be considered as debts? Furthermore, the connection between the *two clauses in the prayer,* "forgive us our debts" and the "as we have forgiven our debtors", raises interpretive questions regarding the conditionality and mutuality of forgiveness.

Can **human forgiveness** serve as the **condition or context** for receiving **divine forgiveness**? Does the phrase *"as we have forgiven"* imply a *comparison*, suggesting that human forgiveness sets the measure for God's mercy? A careful analysis of **Mt 6:12** offers significant insights into Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and highlights the **centrality of this theme** in Christian life. It challenges the disciple to embrace a forgiving disposition as both a reflection of and a participation in the divine nature, underscoring forgiveness as essential to authentic Christian living.

The Fifth Petition in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12)

The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew,*"And Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors"* (Mt 6:12)[1] raises some of the most theologically rich and ethically challenging questions in the New Testament. The petition is composed of two distinct yet interrelated clauses: a *protasis* that contains the petition directed to God,*"forgive us our debts"*; and an *apodosis* that contains a declarative statement, *"as we have forgiven our debtors."* These two components are linked by the conjunction **ὡς καί** (*hōs kai*, "as also"), which serves to establish a correlation between divine and human forgiveness. This syntactical construction not only binds the two realms, the divine and the human, but also emphasizes their reciprocal relationship.

The *Protasis*: "And Forgive Us Our Debts"

The first clause of the petition *"forgive us our debts,"* is a direct request to God for the forgiveness of sins. It arises from a profound awareness that forgiveness is ultimately the prerogative of God alone. The belief in God's power to forgive sins is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and constitutes a foundational aspect of Jewish theology. This conviction also underpinned the daily sacrificial rituals carried out in the Jerusalem Temple.[2]

1 Although the same prayer is present in the Gospel of Luke we look at the prayer from the Matthean perspective. We also take note of the views of the scholars that there had been editorial modifications in the prayer.

2 As E. Lohmeyer points out, "The idea of forgiveness of sins is firmly associated with Old Testament and Jewish foundations of the Gospel." E. Lohmeyer, *The*

In the Lord's Prayer, the term used for *forgiveness* is derived from the Greek verb **ἀφίημι** (*aphíēmi*), a word with a rich semantic range in both classical and Hellenistic usage. In secular contexts, *ἀφίημι*could mean *"to release," "to let go," "to dismiss,"* or *"to permit."* It was also used in legal settings to denote the *release of someone from a legal obligation* or the *remission of debt or penalty.*[3] In the **New Testament,** *ἀφίημι* continues to bear these shades of meaning, particularly in the sense of *"letting go," "leaving behind," "setting aside,"* or *"forgiving."*[4] The noun *ἄφεσις* is used almost exclusively to denote *divine forgiveness*[5]*,* the gracious remission of sins granted by God.

In the New Testament, 'divine forgiveness' expresses the very nature of God, who offers mercy even when it is undeserved. Divine forgiveness is the manifestation of *God's unconditional love* in the face of human failure. Forgiveness flows directly from the nature of God as love (1 Jn 4:8). Within the **Synoptic Gospels,** forgiveness (*ἄφεσις*) is portrayed as a **divine gift**, one that humanity is perpetually in need of, and which is freely offered when certain conditions are met—most notably, a **repentant heart** and a **willingness to forgive others.** This is clearly emphasized in key passages such as **Mt 6:12, 14–15;18:21–35, Lk 17:3,** and **Mk 11:25.** The interplay between divine and human forgiveness is a central theme in Jesus' teaching, reflecting both the generosity of God and the moral imperative placed upon the disciple.

The Matthean form of the Lord's prayer is noted for its unique term used in the fifth petition for the forgiveness of sins. The Greek noun **ὀφείλημα** (*opheílēma*) commonly denotes a **"debt"** or **"sum owed."**[6] The use of this term here signifies that the evangelist sees sin as debts.[7]

Lord's Prayer, London, William Collins Sons and Co., 1965,167.

3 R. Bultmann, " ἀφίημι / ἄφεσις" , *TDNT,* I, 509.

4 R. Bultmann, " ἀφίημι / ἄφεσις" ,510.

5 R. Bultmann, " ἀφίημι / ἄφεσις", 511.

6 F. Hauck," *ὀφειλήματα*," *TDNT*, V, 565.

7 R. Brown is of the opinion that "Perhaps **ὀφείλημα (***opheílēma*) served to point up the personal nature of the offense involved in sin, as compared with the impersonal notion of trespass or transgression against divine law."R.Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," in *New Testament Essays*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1967, 244.

The concept of sin as debt also involves distinctive interpretation of the Jewish doctrine of sin. For Judaism sinfulness is part of human limitation and consists of transgressions, committed consciously and unconsciously, against God's commandments.[8] The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer with the use of the term **ὀφείλημα** understands human sinfulness not as the violation of ritual codes, taboos, and purity laws, but as the failure to fulfill ones general obligation toward others.[9] Sins are taken to be instances of injustice, in the sense of obligations outstanding and not met.[10] Since human life as a whole consists of an interconnected web of obligations, the totality of all unredeemed obligations constitutes human sinfulness.[11] To forgive a debtor is to release him/her from an obligation and it is God who can cancel these debts.

Jesus' invocation of divine forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer is not radically novel within its Jewish context. However, what distinguishes this petition is the emphasis it places on a personal and filial relationship with God as Father, as well as a deepened, interiorized understanding of sin. These elements confer a distinctive theological depth to the Lord's Prayer, marking a shift from ritual-based atonement to a relational and transformative model of forgiveness.

The Significance of the Relation to the Father

The Matthean form of Lord's prayer begins with the invocation 'Our Father'. The title 'Father,' although is placed at the beginning of the prayer also continues to govern the remainder of the prayer.[12] It would be entirely appropriate, therefore, to articulate the petition for forgiveness

8 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon On the Mount,* Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 373. The Christian notion of sin presupposes that demonic forces of evil possess humanity, which is hence alienated from God.

9 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 380.

10 The concept of obligations have remarkable parallels in Paul's Theology; for example Rom 1:14; 4: 4; 8: 12; 1 Cor 5: 10; 7: 3; 2 Cor 12: 11etc.

11 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 402.

12 As P. B. Harner points out, "By expressing the new relationship that the disciples have with God, it establishes the context within which they continue to pray and trust that their prayer will be answered. In this sense the word Father not only introduces the prayer but makes the entire prayer possible."P. B. Harner, *Understanding the Lord's Prayer*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975*,* 56.

as: *"Father, forgive us our debts."* At this juncture, it is particularly significant to observe that Jesus employs the intimate Aramaic term **"Abba"**[13] in addressing God, a usage that reveals the unique relational dynamic embedded within the prayer.

In the Old Testament, God is indeed understood as the Father of Israel, and Israel is often portrayed as God's children (cf. Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; Hos 11:1). However, it is noteworthy that, despite this theological imagery, there appears to be no instance in the Old Testament in which God is directly addressed as "Father" in prayer.[14] Moreover, within Jewish thought and practice, the use of a familiar term such as *Abba*, common in the language of the family,[15] would have been considered overly intimate, and therefore inappropriate, for addressing the transcendent God. Jesus' use of *Abba* unveils the intimacy of his filial relationship with God, expressing his unique Sonship.[16] Jesus also invites his disciples to participate in this relationship. By teaching them to pray *"Our Father,"* Jesus authorizes his followers to approach God with the same familiarity and confidence that he himself enjoys.[17] In the New Testament, the Fatherhood of God is no longer grounded in a national covenant with Israel, but rather in ***union with Christ***, the Son par excellence. One of the key innovations introduced in the prayer for forgiveness, therefore, lies in this transformed understanding of the divine-human relationship: it is now one of ***Father and child***.[18] From within this relational framework, the disciple prays with trust and intimacy, *"Father, forgive us our debts."*

A New Understanding of Sin

The petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer also introduces a profound theological understanding of sin. Humanity stands before

13 J. Jeremias states that "*Abba* as an address to God is *ipsissima vox,* an authentic and original utterance of Jesus." See. J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament,* London, SCM Press, 1965. 30.

14 H. Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount*, London,Geoffrey Chapman, 1984, 109.

15 J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, SBT, London, SCM Press, 1967, 60.

16 H. Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 110.

17 J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 63.

18 E. Lohmeyer rightly notes, "Here fear is overcome by trust, brokenness by a firm promise, and it is not a new spirit which leads the suppliant to God, but the knowledge of being a child of the father."E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer,*178.

God with debts, obligations both to the divine and to one another, that remain unpaid or, more significantly, beyond human capacity to repay.[19] These "debts" encompass the entirety of human relational and moral responsibility, arising from mutual obligations within the human community and before God. In invoking divine forgiveness, the supplicant turns towards God and seeks to be restored to the fundamental identity bestowed by grace: a free and confident child of God who lives from the abundance of divine goodness. Only this forgiveness, as a divine act, has the power to liberate the human person from the inherited burden of sin, to extricate one from the entanglement of past actions and the shadows of earthly existence. It is forgiveness alone that, through its miraculous character, reconstitutes the human being in the freedom of God's children. The subsequent clause—"as we forgive our debtors"—acquires its full theological weight in light of the fatherhood of God. As Lohmeyer insightfully observes, debts become truly meaningful within a community of brothers, where mutual love constitutes both the context and the criterion of obligation.[20]

The *Apodosis*: "As We also Have Forgiven Our Debtors"

One of the significant aspects in the petition for forgiveness is the *attached declaration* embedded within the prayer itself - *"As we also have forgiven (ἀφήκαμεν) our debtors." The parallel in* **Luke 11:4** states: *"for we ourselves also forgive (ἀφίομεν) everyone who is indebted to us."* Notably, Matthew employs the *aorist tense* (*ἀφήκαμεν*), while Luke uses the *present tense* (*ἀφίομεν*).[21] The expression *"we have forgiven"* in Mt 6:12b represents a literal translation of the aorist verb and stands out as a particularly striking reference to human action. Scholars like U Luz observes that "there had not been a case where human acting is taken

19 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 402.

20 E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer,*177.

21 M. Zerwick and M. Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testment,* 2 Vols, Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1974, I, 16; J. Lambrecht calls our attention to the fact that "philologists sometimes call this form the dramatic aorist, a tense used for acts that have just been performed and of which the result still endures into the present. J. Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation*, Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1985, 144.

into a central prayer text in this manner."[22] The inclusion of human forgiveness as a condition or context for divine forgiveness marks a radical theological development, emphasizing the intrinsic connection between divine grace and human ethical responsibility within the framework of Jesus' teaching.

The Role of the *Apodosis* in the Fifth Petition

The statement in **Mt 6:12b,** "as we have forgiven our debtors," is not structured as a petition but rather as a **declarative statement,** a statement of fact. This prompts an important exegetical and theological question raised by **H.D. Betz:** *Does the purely petitionary clause in v 12a stand independently, or does it require the appended declaration of v 12b for its full meaning?*[23] The significance of this question lies in the nature of the two clauses. Verse *12a* constitutes a supplication directed toward God, requesting something that is beyond human capacity,divine forgiveness. By contrast, verse *12b* makes an affirmative claim regarding human action: it asserts what the petitioner has already done, *the forgiveness of others.* This falls within the realm of human responsibility and ethical action.

Why, then, is such a statement of human action appended to a prayer directed solely to God? Could the petition for forgiveness (v. 12a) stand on its own? Is verse 12b a later editorial addition, perhaps inserted by a redactor for theological or liturgical reasons unrelated to the original context of the prayer? In fact some scholars have indeed proposed that 12b is a secondary expansion.[24] However, Betz and other scholars argue convincingly that the declaration in 12b is not merely a later gloss but a *theologically integral component* of the reconstituted petition. It reflects a deliberate emphasis in Jesus' teaching: that *divine forgiveness*

22 U. Luz *Matthew 1-7*: *A Commentary* (E. Trans. by W. C. Linss), Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989, 384; Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive: Interhuman Forgiveness in the Teachings of Jesus," in F. X. D'Sa (ed.), *The Dharma of Jesus*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2003, 222.

23 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 400.

24 According to J Nolland, "It represents an expansion which glosses the petition in such a manner which is in keeping with the other fundamental Gospel teachings." J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew, A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdman's Publishing Co. 2005, 291.

is intrinsically linked to human forgiveness.[25] ***The inclusion of human activity in this core prayer underscores the relational dynamic between divine grace and ethical obligation. As George Soares Prabhu emphatically states, "the ability to forgive one another is not just one among the qualities desirable in the disciple of Jesus drawn up by the New Testament. It is rather an absolutely necessary dimension of Christian existence."***[26] ***The*** *apodosis*, therefore, is not an incidental addition but a theologically necessary element within the logic of the prayer and the moral vision of the Gospel.

The Relation between the *Protasis* and the *Apodosis*

Having established that the *apodosis* of the forgiveness clause is an integral component of the *protasis*, the question naturally arises: *What is the precise relationship between these two clauses?* Does the connective phrase **ὡς καὶ** (*hōskai* – "as also") imply a *comparison* between divine and human forgiveness? And if so, how can the limited and imperfect forgiveness of Jesus' disciples be set in comparison with the boundless mercy of God? Can it be interpreted as a model, proposed by the evangelist, suggesting that God is to imitate human forgiveness? Or alternatively, does it imply a kind of moral causality whereby human forgiveness becomes the condition for receiving divine forgiveness—suggesting, perhaps uncomfortably, that one may "earn" God's pardon?

This issue is especially acute in the **Matthean version** of the Lord's Prayer, due to its use of the *aorist tense* (*ἀφήκαμεν,* "we have forgiven"), as opposed to **Luke's** present tense (*ἀφίομεν*, "we forgive"). Many scholars, following **J. Jeremias,** interpret Matthew's aorist as a somewhat awkward rendering of an underlying Aramaic ***perfectum praesens*****—**a present perfect. Jeremias suggests the translation: *"as we also herewith forgive our debtors."*[27] This phrasing emphasizes not a completed past action but a definitive present disposition. **R.E. Brown** further clarifies that even if the aorist in Matthew is rendered in the past tense, the **temporal aspect is not the central focus;** rather, what is

25 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 380.

26 G. Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive: Inter-human Forgiveness in the Teachings of Jesus," 222.

27 J. Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer,* 92.

highlighted is the **singularity and totality** of the action—treated as one decisive act before the judgment seat of God.[28]

Throughout the **Gospel of Matthew**, and indeed across the **New Testament,** the imperative of human forgiveness is consistently emphasized. However, the relationship between divine and human forgiveness is not presented with uniform clarity. The **fifth petition** of the Lord's Prayer (*Mt 6:12*), in which the *apodosis* implies prior human forgiveness, appears to suggest that divine forgiveness is *contingent upon* human action. This logic is echoed in the **sayings of Jesus** in *Mt 6:14–15*, where divine forgiveness is explicitly conditioned upon the act of forgiving others. However, the **Parable of the Unforgiving Servant** (*Mt 18:23–35*) appears to reverse this sequence: it is the *master's prior forgiveness* that creates the moral imperative for the servant to forgive others. This raises a deeper theological tension.

Lohmeyer addresses this tension by suggesting that "the problem of the sentence is not which forgiveness is prior but what correlation there is between divine and human forgiveness."[29] **George Soares-Prabhu** builds on this insight, noting that the seemingly conflicting formulations in the New Testament indicate a **dialectical interdependence** rooted in the **unlimited and initiating forgiveness of God**.[30] The conjunction **ὡς** (*hōs*), thus signals a purely logical relationship between the two clauses, not a comparison.[31]

J. Jeremias further contends that **ὡς** has a **causal nuance** in this context. His rendering, *"as we also herewith forgive our debtors,"* underscores the inner moral demand that the prayer places upon the one who prays.[32] In essence, the petitioner reminds himself that **to seek forgiveness from God while withholding forgiveness from others**

28 R. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," 244.

29 E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, 181.

30 G. Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive: Inter-human Forgiveness in the Teachings of Jesus," 223.He also views that the conflicting formulations are there because they are theologically non-technical formulations which are not to be pressed too closely.

31 E. Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, 18. He also points out that Matthew has the aorist in both *protasis* and *apodosis*, which at least suggests that both clauses are intended to be taken simultaneously.

32 J. Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer,* 92.

is a contradiction. The authenticity of the disciple's prayer is thus judged by his reconciliation with his brother.[33] This personal response, an active, forgiving heart, is the essential disposition expected of the disciple of Jesus.

Human Forgiveness: A Condition or Consequence of Divine Forgiveness?

Human forgiveness must be understood not as a means of earning God's pardon, but as the necessary ***disposition*** that renders one **capable of receiving** the infinitely greater forgiveness of God.[34] When the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer is interpreted properly, it does not establish a *quid pro quo* nor does it imply the **chronological or causal priority** of human forgiveness. Rather, the Matthean phrase **ὡς καὶ** (*hōskai*, "as also") signifies that human forgiveness is the ***correlative counterpart*** of divine forgiveness.[35] G. Soares-Prabhu sees our forgiveness as our response to the experience of God's forgiveness in us which in turn sets in movement a spiral of forgiveness. He says:

> Human forgiveness originating from the experience of God's love feeds back into this experience, creating new possibilities of forgiveness. Human forgiveness is thus both a consequence of our being forgiven by God and at the same time a condition for it. That is why the NT formulations on forgiveness are seemingly contradictory and confused. They describe different moments in the cycle of forgiveness, different segments in the spiral.[36]

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33 J. Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer,* 92. This willingness to forgive is the hand which Jesus' disciples reach out towards God's forgiveness. They say "O lord we indeed belong to the age of the messiah, to the age of forgiveness, and we are ready to pass on to others the forgiveness which we receive. Now grant us, dear father the gift of the age of salvation, thy forgiveness.

34 L. Sabourin, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew,* 2 Vols., Mumbai, St. Paul Publications, I. 407; See also W. D Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical commentary on the Gospel of Matthew,* 611.

35 R. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," 248.

36 G. Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive: Inter-human Forgiveness in the Teachings of Jesus," 223. He further explains our relation to the Father's forgiveness as follows, 'The sun shines always, for it cannot but shine, it is we who hide ourselves away from its warming rays or close our eyes to its light." In the same way God our Father is always forgiving, it is we who need to dispose ourselves to receive His forgiveness.

The readiness to forgive demanded by the Lord's Prayer is therefore not just a happy trait of character or an acquired psychological disposition. It is a religious attitude rooted in the core of Christian experience of an utterly loving and forgiving God. "As we forgive" does not mean that our forgiveness of others is the ground of our being forgiven, nor is strictly the measure of God's forgiveness towards us, but it impressively states that the unforgiving cannot be disposed to receive forgiveness.

Conclusion

Jesus taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer as a model for authentic Christian prayer, and within it, the fifth petition (Mt 6:12) stands as a profound expression of the centrality of forgiveness in Christian life. As human beings, we stand continually in need of God's forgiveness. We make this request not as strangers, but in the intimate relationship of children to a Father. In asking for forgiveness, we are not merely seeking the removal of guilt, but the restoration of our original dignity as children of God. What is particularly striking in this petition is the inclusion of a human action—our forgiveness of others—as part of a prayer addressed to God. This insertion is theologically significant: it reveals that human forgiveness is the condition and the context in which we approach God's mercy. We do not earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others, but in forgiving, cultivate the disposition necessary to receive divine pardon. In the New Testament, forgiveness is inseparably rooted in love. God forgives because God is love, and the disciple is called to forgive as an embodiment of that divine love already received. As such, the fifth petition challenges every Christian to examine the authenticity of their love, for genuine love must forgive, and true forgiveness must flow from love. One cannot ask for divine mercy while harboring resentment or withholding mercy from others. Forgiveness is thus the most compelling sign of love and the deepest witness to a life of true Christian discipleship.

FROM SACRED TO SCIENTIFIC
Forgiveness in Empirical Light

Augustine Pamplany, CST

Abstract: *Today, forgiveness has evolved from a moral or spiritual ideal into a well-established therapeutic tool, supported by extensive empirical research. This essay explores the intersection of religious teachings and psychological science in understanding forgiveness. While forgiveness has long been a central value in most religious traditions, especially Christianity, contemporary psychological studies reveal its measurable benefits for physical, emotional, and relational well-being. The essay examines early research connecting religiosity to forgiveness, including nuanced findings on how religious people forgive over time. Two major therapeutic models—Enright's Process Model and Worthington's REACH Model—are presented as evidence-based pathways to emotional healing through forgiveness. Both have demonstrated effectiveness across diverse contexts. The essay argues that religious frameworks must now articulate their moral wisdom in empirically grounded language to engage modern, scientifically literate audiences and promote forgiveness as a universal human practice.*

Introduction

This essay tries to show how the age-old wisdom of religions on the value of forgiveness has, in recent times, been adopted, especially by the mental health sciences, and supported by evidence-based empirical research. The first part of the essay introduces key empirical studies on the relationship between religion and forgiveness. It then goes on to elaborate on two leading therapeutic models of forgiveness developed by psychologists. By outlining the physiological, psychological, and social benefits of forgiveness, the essay advocates for the translation of this enduring religious value into the contemporary language of science, making it more accessible to the modern individual.

1. Empirical Research on Religion and Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been traditionally associated with religion.[1] Forgiveness is considered as a value in all religions. It is one of the central values of Christianity and it finds its expression in varying degrees in other religions too. A consequent social assumption is that religious people are more forgiving. This was exemplified in the gesture of forgiveness extended by Esther Staines, the wife of Graham Staines, to the assassins of her husband and children. However, this observation has many nuances as found by the empirical studies.

Many psychologists have explored how religion and forgiveness are connected. Everett Worthington, a psychologist at Virginia Commonwealth University, noted that when researchers first began seriously studying forgiveness in the late 1990s, most people still saw forgiveness as something deeply tied to religion—almost as if it belonged exclusively to faith communities.[2] In a 1999 study,[3] researchers looked at how forgiving people are and how religious they are. Overall, they found a moderate connection between being religious and being forgiving—a correlation of 0.4. This means more religious people tend to be more forgiving in general. But when it came to transgressions, real situations where someone wronged them, that connection was weaker—a correlation of 0.2. So, in this case, religious people were only a little more forgiving than others.

In 2005, Jo-Ann Tsang helped solve this puzzle.[4] She discovered that the difference came from how the research was done. When religious

1 An extensive summary of the perspectives on forgiveness by the five major religions of the world, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, is available in, M. S. Rye, K. I. Pargament, M. A. Ali, G. L. Beck, E. N. Dorff, C. Hallisey, V. Narayanan, and J. G. Williams, "Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness," in *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, and C. E. Thoresen (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 17–40.

2 Everett L. Worthington, *The Science of Forgiveness*, Templeton World Charity Foundation, 2020, https://www.templeton.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Forgiveness_final.pdf.

3 M. E. McCullough and E. L. Worthington Jr., "Religion and the Forgiving Personality," *Journal of Personality* 67 (1999): 1141–64.

4 J. Tsang, M. E. McCullough, and W. T. Hoyt, "Psychometric and Rationalization Accounts for the Religion-Forgiveness Discrepancy," *Journal of Social Issues* 61 (2005): 785–805.

and non-religious people were asked about just one recent hurt that was still unresolved, religion and forgiveness were only weakly connected (a correlation of 0.2). But when people were asked to list their top three major hurts, and those were averaged together, religious people were much more forgiving overall (a correlation of 0.4). It means that religious people are not that much more forgiving in the heat of the moment. But over time, they tend to let go of grudges more easily. That is why when they look back on past hurts, they don't have as many to list, for they have already forgiven.

Forgiving God: In this connection, it is to be recollected that early in the study of forgiveness, Clinical psychologist Exline had coined the phrase "forgiving God."[5] Some religious people objected to the idea of "forgiving God," arguing that, technically, God cannot do wrong and therefore doesn't need forgiveness. However, people often feel hurt and blame God, leading to emotional responses that resemble unforgiveness. So, from a psychological perspective, the idea of forgiving God may still be meaningful. To avoid conflict over the wording, the researcher shifted focus to how people experience anger toward God and how they deal with that anger and related spiritual struggles. She also found that even some atheists, despite not believing in God, reported feeling anger and inner conflict related to the idea of God. Psychologically speaking, perhaps forgiving God is a legitimate concern. But to avoid controversy generated by that language, she has continued to study the ways people get angry at God and do (or do not) resolve the resulting anger and spiritual struggles.

Forgiveness by God: It is to be noted that although the primacy of divine forgiveness was underscored in many religious teachings, there has been very little research on what it is like for people to feel forgiven by God. Worthington comments that most large surveys that touch on the topic use just one basic question to measure it,[6] and even with that limited approach, studies have consistently found that feeling forgiven

5 J. J. Exline, C. L. Park, J. M. Smyth, and M. P. Carey, "Anger toward God: Social-Cognitive Predictors, Prevalence, and Links with Adjustment to Bereavement and Cancer," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100, no. 1 (2011): 129–48.

6 Worthington, *The Science of Forgiveness.*

by God is linked to better health, longer life, and greater well-being.[7] In recent times, Psychologist Frank Fincham has taken the lead in this area and is now regularly publishing work focused specifically on the emotional and psychological impact of feeling forgiven by God.[8]

2. Therapeutic Frameworks for Forgiveness

In recent decades, forgiveness has evolved from being solely a moral or religious ideal to becoming a recognized therapeutic tool in psychology. Grounded in clinical research and practice, forgiveness is now understood as a process that can lead to emotional healing, reduced psychological distress, and improved well-being.[1] As a result, psychologists have developed structured approaches to help people work through their pain and move toward forgiveness in a healthy, deliberate way. Among the various therapeutic models of forgiveness, two of the most well-established are Enright's Process Model of Forgiveness and Worthington's REACH Forgiveness Model. These models do not simply encourage forgiveness as a virtue; they offer practical steps and emotional strategies that guide individuals through the often-difficult journey of releasing resentment and finding peace. We briefly examine these models below.

2.1. The Process Model

Psychologist Robert Enright developed a structured, step-by-step approach to help people move from deep hurt toward genuine forgiveness. His Process Model of Forgiveness involves four key phases, each building on the last to promote emotional healing and personal growth.[9]

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7 Loren Toussaint, Michelle Barry, Lisa Bornfriend, and Mark Markman, "Restore: The Journey Toward Self-Forgiveness: A Randomized Trial of Patient Education on Self-Forgiveness in Cancer Patients and Caregivers," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 20, no. 2 (2014): 54–74.

8 Frank D. Fincham and R. W. May, "Self-Forgiveness and Well-Being: Does Divine Forgiveness Matter?" *The Journal of Positive Psychology* published online 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1579361.

9 Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, "Exploring Forgiveness," in *Exploring Forgiveness*, ed. Robert D. Enright and Joanna North (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 3–8.

***Uncovering* the Hurt:** In this first phase, individuals take time to explore and honestly face the pain caused by the offence. This includes recognising the emotional and personal toll it has taken. The goal here is awareness; to fully understand how the hurt has affected one's life, rather than burying or denying it.[10]

Making the *Decision* to Forgive: Next, the person learns what forgiveness really means and what it is not (for example, it doesn't mean excusing the wrong or forgetting it). With this understanding, they consciously choose to forgive. This is a turning point: forgiveness becomes a deliberate commitment.[11]

Doing the *Work* of Forgiveness: Now comes the heart of the process. In this phase, individuals begin to explore the offender's background, motivations, or possible struggles. By trying to see the offender as a flawed human being, not simply a villain, they begin to release some of the anger. This shift in perspective can reduce bitterness and help the healing deepen.[12]

Finding Meaning and Renewal: In the final stage, people often report a sense of personal growth. They may discover new purpose or meaning in their suffering and become more open to connection with others. Emotions like sadness, anxiety, and mistrust may decrease, while hope, peace, and even compassion can grow in their place.[13] Enright's model is not a quick fix, but a transformational process. By following these four phases, many people find themselves emotionally lighter, more resilient, and better able to rebuild their relationships, or move forward without resentment.

2.2. The REACH Model

Developed by clinical psychologist Everett L. Worthington, the 'REACH' Forgiveness model is a structured, evidence-based intervention designed to help individuals forgive others, and themselves,

10 Robert D. Enright and Richard P. Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2000), 65–67.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Enright and North, "Exploring Forgiveness," 9–12.

through a guided emotional and cognitive process. Unlike a theory that explains how forgiveness naturally unfolds, REACH is a therapeutic model created to facilitate forgiveness as a voluntary, intentional process for people who desire to forgive in the aftermath of personal harm or injustice.[14] Forgiveness, in this context, is not understood as excusing, forgetting, or condoning harmful behaviour. Instead, it involves letting go of bitterness and resentment while cultivating empathy, compassion, and ultimately, emotional release. Worthington emphasises that no one should ever be pressured to forgive, as doing so without genuine readiness can be emotionally harmful and counterproductive.[15]The REACH model often begins by inviting participants to recall a situation where they successfully forgave someone in the past. This primes their awareness of forgiveness as a possible and beneficial process. Participants are then introduced to the scientific and psychological benefits of forgiveness, ranging from lower stress and blood pressure to improved mental health, interpersonal relationships, and even spiritual well-being.[16] Importantly, forgiveness is presented as one of several legitimate coping strategies, not the only or morally superior choice.

The REACH Acronym: Five Key Steps to Forgiveness

The model is structured around the acronym R-E-A-C-H, with each letter representing a distinct stage in the forgiveness journey. These steps help individuals move from a place of hurt to one of emotional healing and peace.

R – Recall the Hurt: Individuals are encouraged to bring the painful memory to mind deliberately and honestly. This step is about facing the reality of what happened, without minimizing or exaggerating it. People are guided to resist becoming stuck in bitterness, victimhood, or revenge. By acknowledging the pain without feeding resentment, they create space for healing to begin.

14 Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

15 Ibid.

16 Everett L. Worthington Jr. et al., "Forgiveness, Health, and Well-Being: A Review of Evidence for Emotional Versus Decisional Forgiveness, Dispositional Forgivingness, and Reduced Unforgiveness," *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 30, no. 4 (2007): 291–302.

E – Empathize with the Offender: Empathy is central to this stage. Through therapeutic techniques like the "empty chair" exercise (borrowed from Gestalt therapy), individuals imagine speaking to their offender and then switch roles to see the situation from the other person's perspective. While this does not excuse the offence, it humanises the offender and fosters understanding, which softens the emotional intensity of the hurt.

A – Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness: Forgiveness is reframed here as a gift freely given, not because the offender deserves it, but as a compassionate, unselfish act, similar to how we ourselves have received forgiveness in the past. This step draws on moral and spiritual principles, and often evokes powerful emotional responses as individuals recognize their capacity to forgive despite pain.

C – Commit to Forgive: Once a person decides to forgive, that decision is made concrete. This might involve writing a letter to oneself (e.g., "Today, I forgave [Name] for [Offence]") or saying it out loud. The act of commitment strengthens resolve and reduces the likelihood of backsliding into resentment.

H – Hold onto Forgiveness: Emotional forgiveness is fragile, especially when painful memories resurface. In this final stage, individuals are given tools to sustain their forgiveness, such as rereading their commitment notes or practising mental exercises that reinforce their decision. This ongoing reinforcement helps people respond to recurring thoughts or doubts without rekindling anger.

After completing the REACH process, individuals are encouraged to reflect more broadly on their capacity for forgiveness, sometimes expanding their focus to include other unresolved hurts. Additional exercises guide them through forgiving a wider range of people and situations, extending the emotional and relational benefits of forgiveness more broadly in their lives.

The REACH model is among the most well-researched forgiveness interventions to date. In controlled studies, it has shown significant effectiveness in reducing unforgiveness, anger, depression, and anxiety,

and in increasing hope, empathy, and emotional well-being.[17] When compared to other forgiveness models, REACH is equally effective per hour of intervention and can be delivered in a variety of formats: individual therapy, group sessions, or self-guided workbooks.[18]It has been used successfully in clinical settings, colleges, and secular environments, making it one of the most adaptable and accessible models of forgiveness available.[19]

3. The Benefits of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is found to have significant empirical support linking it to both physical and mental health. Psychologists such as Everett Worthington, Loren Toussaint, and Charlotte Witvliet have led the way in exploring its multidimensional benefits. Their research confirms that forgiveness not only alleviates psychological suffering but also enhances physiological well-being, improves interpersonal relationships, and even holds promise as a public health strategy.

Physical Health Benefits: Chronic unforgiveness can be physically harmful. Over time, physiological stressors contribute to cardiovascular issues, weakened immune function, digestive problems, and damage to brain structures such as the hippocampus. Forgiveness, in contrast, reduces stress responses and supports bodily systems in restoring balance. Forgiveness interventions have even been associated with improved sleep, reduced pain, and better overall wellness. These connections have been extensively studied by health psychologists like Toussaint and Worthington, whose research links forgiveness to lower health risks across the lifespan.[20]

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17 Nathaniel G. Wade, Everett L. Worthington Jr., and John E. Meyer, "But Do They Work? A Meta-Analysis of Group Interventions to Promote Forgiveness," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 73, no. 5 (2005): 902–914.

18 Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 2006.

19 Loren L. Toussaint et al., "Promoting Forgiveness at a Christian College: A Comparison of REACH Forgiveness and Forgive for Good Methods," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 48, no. 2 (2020): 111–124, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647120905266.

20 Everett L. Worthington Jr., Loren Toussaint, and David R. Williams, *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health* (New York: Springer, 2015).

Mental Health and Emotional Resilience: Forgiveness significantly improves mental health, especially in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and obsessive-compulsive thinking. Central to this benefit is forgiveness's ability to interrupt rumination - the repetitive, negative thought patterns that fuel emotional distress. By helping individuals let go of resentment and gain emotional distance from the offense, forgiveness promotes inner peace and emotional regulation. In their extensive review, Toussaint and Webb documented consistent mental health improvements among those who practice forgiveness, particularly in clinical populations and those recovering from trauma.[21] Similarly, Enright and Fitzgibbons have shown how structured forgiveness therapy can reduce psychological symptoms and support healing.[22]

Improved Relationships and Social Bonds: Healthy relationships rely not only on intimacy and communication but also on the capacity to repair emotional damage. The ability to forgive plays a pivotal role in restoring trust and emotional closeness following interpersonal conflict. Long-term relationships, such as marriages and deep friendships, thrive when individuals can forgive and be forgiven. This capacity reduces hostility and fosters emotional safety, which in turn contributes to both relational satisfaction and physical health, as healthy social bonds are tied to reduced mortality and improved immunity.[23]

Public Health and Flourishing: Given its psychological and physiological benefits, forgiveness is being considered as a public health intervention. Programs like Worthington's REACH Forgiveness model have been used in churches, universities, and community campaigns to improve collective well-being. Public health scholars such as Tyler Van

21 Loren Toussaint and Jon R. Webb, "Theoretical and Empirical Connections Between Forgiveness and Mental Health," in *Forgiveness and Health*, eds. Worthington, Toussaint, and Williams (New York: Springer, 2015).

22 Robert D. Enright and Richard Fitzgibbons, *Forgiveness Therapy: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015).

23 Charlotte V. O. Witvliet et al., "Compassionate Reappraisal and Emotion Suppression as Alternatives to Rumination: Implications for Forgiveness and Psychophysiological Well-Being," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 6, no. 4 (2011): 286–299.

der Weele argue that promoting forgiveness at a societal level could reduce stress-related illnesses and enhance communal flourishing.[24] A 2019 study demonstrated the effectiveness of community-based forgiveness campaigns in improving mental health across diverse populations.[25]

Conclusion

This essay tried to show how forgiveness, once rooted primarily in spiritual and religious traditions, has evolved into a secular, empirically supported value with wide-ranging psychological and social benefits. Scientific research has validated what religious wisdom long upheld: that forgiveness heals and transforms. In an age increasingly shaped by evidence-based reasoning, it is now incumbent upon religious traditions to translate their moral exhortations into language that resonates with the modern, scientifically informed human being. Such a dialogue between faith and empirical insight offers the promise of making forgiveness more accessible, relevant, and transformative across all spheres of life.

24 Tyler J. Van der Weele, "Is Forgiveness a Public Health Issue?" *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 2 (2018): 189–190.

25 Brandon J. Griffin et al., "Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Community-Based Forgiveness Campaign," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 14, no. 3 (2019): 354–361.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
Model of Faith

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Abstract: *This article explores the Blessed Virgin Mary as the exemplary model of Christian faith and discipleship. Drawing from Scripture, Church teachings, and theological reflections, it presents Mary as the "Anawim Yahweh"—one who embodies humility, obedience, and unwavering trust in God's will. Her fiat at the Annunciation marks a pivotal moment of surrender and active cooperation in the divine plan, reflecting the very essence of faith as both gift and human response. Mary's life, from her Immaculate Conception to her Assumption, is examined through Christological, Mariological, and ecclesiological lenses, emphasizing her enduring role the one who believed and thus Mother and guide to believers. Her spiritual depth, expressed in the Magnificat and her fidelity at Calvary, serves as inspiration for contemporary Christians as pilgrims of hope overcoming crises of belief. The article ultimately calls readers to imitate Mary's virtues and embrace a life of faith marked by grace, obedience, and contemplative trust.*

The Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei* states, "The 'door of faith' (*Acts* 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church....This journey of faith begins with baptism."[1] Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us (cf. CCC 153). The Church lives by faith on her continued pilgrim journey. Today, there is always a need for continuous rediscovering ways of deepening that faith. Pope Benedict urges, "we will need to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus Christ, the 'pioneer and perfector of our faith' (Heb 12:2)." (*Porta Fidei*, no. 13). Yes, we need models of faith. Among all witnesses of faith, Mary "shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues." (*Lumen gentium*, 65). Mary is often referred to as "Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45).

1 Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), nos. 1, 13.

These words highlight Mary's unwavering faith and total trust in God's divine plan. The Blessed Virgin, with her example, teaches us how to believe in God and understand Christian life as a life of faith. Hence, the topic: *Mary, the Model of Our Faith.*

This article, therefore, explores the significance of Mary as a model of faith and a mother to believers, emphasizing her role as a guiding figure in the journey of faith. By contemplating the example of Mary as the *Anawim Yahweh,* we learn to obey God through the path of faith and surrender. It posits that understanding Mary's life and virtues enhances Christian devotion and encourages active participation in one's faith and works of charity. For, a proper devotion would always entail living the spirituality that is offered by that devotion. Aiming at it, this work focuses on Mary as presented in the Gospels, the contemporary documents and theologians of the Church drawing out their Christological, Mariological, and ecclesiological significances.

Mary, the Highly Favoured One

In Luke 1:28, the angel Gabriel greets Mary with the phrase "highly favored" (κεχαριτωμένη, *kecharitōmenē*), which in Greek grammar is a verb, participle, perfect, passive, vocative, singular, feminine. The Greek perfect and pluperfect passive tense marks the event as a factual state of being and thus highlights its centrality as a fixed state from the beginning.[2] It carries a sense of plenitude as in Latin Vulgate *gracia plena*, which appears in the 'Hail Mary' prayer. As the word implies and the Church teaches, from the first moment of her existence, Mary is "full of grace" meaning, "highly favoured one." (*Lumen gentium,* 56). It means, Mary was wholly transformed by the grace of God. Though she was young and unprepared for such a message (cf. Lk 1:34), she responded with trust and humility: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). "It was not just a consent to the birth of Jesus, but a responsible acceptance of participation in the work of salvation he came to accomplish."[3] This moment marks the essence of true belief—complete surrender to God's will, despite uncertainty or personal fear.

2 H. Conzelmann, "Charis…." *TDNT 9*, 392-393.

3 John Paul II, "Homily at Ephesus," Osse., Rom.,Dec. 8, 1979,7.

Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Before this faith can be exercised, one must have the grace of God to help, the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God. As the word *kecharitōmenē* suggests, Mary was full of grace and was able to respond to God in faith every moment of her life (cf. CCC 153).

The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception states, "the most Blessed Virgin Mary from the first moment of her conception, by the unique grace and privilege of God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved intact from all stain of original sin."[4] This grace was given to her for the vocation to be the mother of God, the Redeemer of the world. It is a grace freely bestowed on her by God (cf. also Eph 1:6).[5] Therefore, this greeting signifies the special grace and favour bestowed upon Mary by God, setting her apart for the unique role of bearing the Messiah.

The Dogma of the Assumption teaches that preserved from all stains of original sin by the free gift of God, and having remained always from all sins, she would not be bound to experience the consequences of sin—death—in the same way we do.[6] Mary's assumption shows the result of this freedom from sin—the immediate union of her whole being with her Son Jesus Christ with God at the end of her life. The dogmas of Immaculate Conception and Assumption of our Lady were privileges of the Mother of God in an eminent way. They are also privileges to be shared by every Christian in some manner. Mary, the most perfectly redeemed, becomes a model for Christians giving them the hope of reaching through their conquest of sin and death that state which Mary already enjoys at the throne of God. Mary's example encourages the People of God to live their faith in holiness, free from sin by keeping in their heart and meditating on the events of salvation.

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4 Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1854), 4

5 Sara Butler, "The Immaculate Conception: Why was it Defined as a Dogma? And What was Defined?" in *Studying Mary; the Virgin Mary in Anglican Roman Catholic Theology and Devotion,* eds. Albert Denaux and Nicholas Sagovsky (London: T & T Clark, 2007),155.

6 Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1950), 44.

Let It Be: Mary's *Fiat*

True belief is about fully trusting God and surrendering to His will, even when the path and future is unclear. The Blessed Virgin Mary exemplifies this beautifully. When the angel Gabriel announced that she would conceive Jesus, she did not hesitate or resist—she humbly responded, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). The Greek word γένοιτό (*genoito*) – Aorist middle optative of γίνομαι (*ginomai*), means "let it be" or "may it happen."[7] The optative mood expresses wish or desire, showing Mary's voluntary acceptance.[8] The Greek preposition κατὰ (*kata*) means "according to" or "in conformity with." So, in response to the angel's message, Mary willingly accepts God's will. It reflects Mary's faith in God and submission to God's will. It parallels to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (cf. Lk 22:42). It echoes Abraham's faith (cf. Gen 15:6) and Hannah's surrender in faith (1 Sam 1:11).[9]

Mary embodies faith and obedience. Mary did not understand how this could be realized. She accepted what humanly speaking was impossible, because of the assurance from God, *nothing is impossible with God*. (*Redemptoris Mater*, 17,18). Here her surrender was not passive; it was a conscious choice to accept God's plan; despite the difficulties it would bring. It is true that "believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act." (CCC 154). Therefore, Mary's surrender to God's will was making her choice in conformity with God's will, also, a human act. It is an expression of her cooperation with God to carry out His plan even if she does not understand it or what it will entail for her. Mary was completely obedient to the will of God, ready to experience all that God has planned for her, including the 'sword' that would penetrate her soul.

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7 Joseph H., *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: baker Book House, 1975), 1036.

8 F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 384.

9 John Kudiyiruppil, *Mariology: Doctrine and Devotion* (Bangalore: ATC Publishers, 2021), 17.

The single and unequivocal "yes" of Mary changed the course of human history. At the annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the full submission of intellect and will, manifesting the 'obedience of faith' to God. (*Redemptoris Mater*, 13). Mary's faith expressed itself in a complete obedience that had no calculation, no guarantee, no hint of reservation.[10] Mary 'believed that the words spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45) and at the same time she lived by the content of these words. Pope Benedict XVI stresses that "her obedient faith shapes her life at every moment with regard to the initiative of God. The listening virgin lived in complete harmony with the word of God; she kept the events of the life of her Son in her heart, somehow, she made one mosaic from them (cf. Lk 2: 19.51)."[11] This moment marks Mary's *fiat*, her 'yes' to God, making her a model to follow. Surrendering to God's will requires deep faith—letting go of fear, control, and personal desires to allow Him to guide our lives. It means trusting that His plan is always greater than our own. While it is not always easy, it leads to peace, strength, and a profound sense of purpose. Mary's fiat is a model for us. It inspires us to accept and do God's will always even though it entails pain, misunderstanding, and self-denial.

Mary Treasured in Her Heart God's Word in Faith

To belief is more than just accepting God's existence—it requires contemplation, self-reflection, and a deep inward engagement with word of God. Pondering God's word allows one to gain wisdom, strengthen their faith, and align their lives with His will. Psalm 1:3 speaks of the condition of those whose delight is on the Word of God, "They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper." At the annunciation and after witnessing events in Jesus' life, Mary "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19, 51). In Greek,

10 Adrienne von Speyer, *The Handmaid of the Lord* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 8.

11 Benedict XVI. *Verbum Domini: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.* Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 27.

the word συνετήρει (*synetērei*) is imperfect, indicating continuous action. In the same way, the word συμβάλλουσα (*symballousa*) meaning "pondering," is a present participle, suggesting ongoing reflection in her heart (*en tē kardia autēs*) emphasizing internal contemplation. It is reminiscent of Genesis 37:11, where Jacob "kept" Joseph's dreams in mind, Mary stores divine mysteries.

St John Paul II teaches, by accepting the Word, 'And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son' (Lk 1:31), Mary was to become the 'Mother of the Lord,' and the divine mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished in her. Mary gave this consent, after she had heard everything, the messenger has to say. She says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and "devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son." (*Lumen gentium,*56). Mary did not just hear God's words; she reflected on it, letting His truth shape her understanding. Pondering God's word invites transformation—it challenges, comforts, and guides. It is not a passive listening; it is an active searching for meaning, truth, and spiritual growth. This verse portrays Mary as a model of contemplation, embodying faith and wisdom. Mary's "recollected faith" teaches us the importance of listening to God's word, pondering the truths of our faith, and praying daily to our Triune God. Only in this way can we be the "good soil" in which God's word can bear abundant fruit (cf. Lk 8:15).

Faith calls for action, for a commitment to doing what God asks, even when it is difficult or unclear. Jesus himself emphasized this when He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21). This reminds us that faith is not just words, it is obedience, service, and love in action.

Faith in Action

True belief transforms the way we live—it inspires compassion, integrity, and a deeper connection with God's purpose. Mary is precisely the one who, more than anyone else, hears the word of God and keeps it (cf. Lk 11:28). Mary's journey to Elizabeth was a confirmation of God's

plan. The meeting serves as a powerful testament to faith and humility, as both women embrace their roles in shaping Christian history. After receiving the angel Gabriel's message that she would conceive Jesus, Mary did not hesitate—she immediately set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was with child.

Mary's visit was not just about sharing joy; it was an act of service, offering support to Elizabeth in her time of need. This journey was an act of trust and obedience, demonstrating her unwavering faith in God's word. This moment teaches us that faith is not passive—it moves us to act, to serve, and to trust in God's promises. Furthermore, throughout Jesus' life, Mary continued to live out her *fiat*. She conceived, nurtured, and remained faithful to Jesus throughout His life, and remained faithful even at the foot of the cross. Her unwavering presence demonstrated her lifelong commitment to God's plan. She continues to intercede for believers and serves as a model of faith. (*Lumen gentium,* 52-54). She is the preeminent model of a "lived faith." Mary's blessedness does not relate only to a single graced episode but rather points to a discipleship—a motherhood—that characterized her entire life. In other words, hers was a living, active faith. She advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, from the Annunciation to Calvary and then to Pentecost, faithful at every step of the way.

Mary Obeyed God's Word in Faith

During the public ministry of Jesus, a woman from the crowd who had been profoundly impressed by Jesus, showered her appreciation for Jesus in public: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you" (Lk 11:27-28). The great esteem and respect that this woman had for Jesus made her declare that his mother was blessed. This statement shows the close and reciprocal relationship between mother and son. The response of Jesus "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk11:28) is a pointer to the real greatness of Mary. Mary's greatness does not lie in her physical privileges, but rather in her unconditional obedience in word and deed to God's word and His will. The blessing uttered by Jesus is directed to all those who receive his message as the word of God. Mary is the one who was open to the

word of God. It is not by chance that Elizabeth had already declared Mary blessed (Lk 1:45). Mary is Jesus' mother; but she is mother in a far greater way, because she does God's will revealed in His word.

Mary's Fiat: Expression of Her Humility

The *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) is a beautiful expression of Mary's humility and deep faith. In this song of praise, Mary acknowledges that all glory belongs to God, not herself. She understands that she is not chosen because of personal merit but because of God's grace. She begins with, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," emphasizing that her joy comes from God's greatness, not her own. She becomes the spokesperson of whole Israel. The *Anawim Yahweh*, the poor, the lonely, the oppressed, and the afflicted, who had God as their only trust.[12] Instead of boasting, she magnifies the Lord, showing that humility means directing praise away from oneself. She speaks of how God lifts the humble and brings down the proud, reinforcing the theme that humility is rewarded in God's kingdom. Mary's humility in the Magnificat serves as a model for all believers, teaching that true greatness comes from surrendering to God's will.

Mary's Belief through Trials

Mary's faith was not without suffering. Mary was continuously formed by God through crises in her life, shaping her into a faithful disciple. At the annunciation, when Mary received the message of to become the mother of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, still being a virgin, she faced confusion and uncertainty (cf. Lk 1:26-38). Her visit to Elizabeth through the hill country of Judah, though an act of service and faith, confirming her role as a blessing to others was a tiresome journey (cf. Lk 1:39-56). Yet another painful test for Mary was as she endured misunderstanding and the potential risk of public disgrace at the doubt of Joseph (cf. Mt 1:18-25). Journey to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth there in a manger in most unwelcome situation stripped Mary of comforts and consolation (cf. Lk 2:1-7). The encounters with Simeon and the flight into Egypt and exile were moments of perplexities that further

12 Brown, R.E, et all (ed), *Mary in the New Testament* (Bangalore: TPI, 2016),142.

challenged and shaped her faith (cf. Lk 2:34-35; Mt 2:13-16). The words of Simeon, "And a sword will pierce through your own soul" (Lk 2:33), according to Pope John Paul II, are "like a second annunciation to Mary, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish His mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow." (*Redemptoris Mater*, 16).

Jesus lost in the temple at the age of 12 was an event that Mary least expected and understood, yet she treasured all these in her heart in faith (Lk 2:41-51). The ultimate test for Mary was witnessing her son's suffering, completing her journey of sacrifice and self-denial (cf. Jn 19:25-28). She believes each day, through all the experiences and adversities of Jesus' childhood and – afterwards – in the years of her life hidden in Nazareth. Mary's crises were opportunities for growth, shaping her into the mother of all faithful through continual trials that strengthened her faith. Submitting ourselves to Christ will inevitably lead to the Cross (cf. Lk 9:23). This was particularly true of Mary, whose pilgrimage of faith led her to Calvary, where she associated herself with her Son's sacrifice. Despite the pain and sorrow, her belief never wavered. She remained steadfast, trusting that God's plan was far greater than earthly suffering. Her endurance teaches believers that faith is not about avoiding difficulties but about trusting God through them. We, then, require courageous faith to persevere serenely and even joyfully through our struggles.

Mary's Fiat: Expression of Her Undivided Dedication to God

Mary's Fiat—her unwavering "yes" to God's will—stands as a profound expression of her undivided dedication to God. This moment marks Mary's complete trust and surrender to God's plan, despite the uncertainties it carried. For this, Mary remained a virgin, as the outward expression of her adherence to God and her total commitment to the salvific plan of God. The more she realized that she is from God, and for God's work of redemption, the more she decided to remain a virgin with the desire to live only for God. The angel did not ask Mary to remain a virgin, it was Mary, under the inspiration of the holy Spirit, who chose to be so.

Marialis Cultus, the Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Paul VI, teaches that Mary, while completely devoted to the will of God, was not a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others but was someone who actively proclaimed that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions (cf. Lk1:51-53).[13] Mary's total trust in God is evangelical poverty, her total availability and surrender is Mary's virginity. It indicates her single-minded openness to God's grace. It is total commitment, her beatitude.

Conclusion

To conclude this article, Mary: Model of Our Faith, we reflect on how the Blessed Virgin embodies unwavering trust, humility, and discipleship. The Blessed Virgin's exemplary faith in God encourages the faithful to look to Mary as a model. Mary's generous obedience is a profound example of faith and trust in God's will. She did not merely accept God's plan passively—she embraced it wholeheartedly, with courage and devotion. Her life is a testament to faith in action—believing, contemplating, and obeying God's word even in the face of trials and uncertainty. From the Annunciation to the foot of the Cross, Mary's journey illustrates complete surrender to God's will. Her *fiat*, "Let it be to me according to your word," is not just a passive acceptance but an active participation in God's salvific plan. In her humility, she magnifies the Lord, acknowledging that everything is by His grace. Her obedience is not blind submission but a conscious, faith-filled choice to cooperate with divine providence.

Mary's example is not limited to her role as the Mother of Christ but extends to every believer. She teaches the modern people in their crisis of faith that faith is a journey, not a single moment, and requires contemplation, trust, and perseverance through trials. Her life reminds us that belief is not just intellectual assent but a lived experience—one that manifests in service, love, and steadfast commitment to God's will.

13 Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus: For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), 37.

Contemplated in the episodes of the Gospels and in the reality which she already possesses in the City of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern persons torn between anguish and hope, defeated by the sense of own limitations and assailed by limitless aspirations, troubled in mind and divided in heart, uncertain before the riddle of death, oppressed by loneliness while yearning for fellowship, a prey to boredom and disgust. She shows forth the victory of hope over anguish, of fellowship over solitude, of peace over anxiety, of joy and beauty over boredom and disgust, of eternal visions over earthly ones, of life over death.

In today's world, where faith is often challenged and doubted, Mary remains a beacon of hope. She encourages us to deepen our trust in God, meditate on His word, and act in faith. She is the model of discipleship, leading us to a more profound understanding of Christian life—one rooted in grace, obedience, and love. May we, like Mary, be receptive to God's call, courageous in our faith, and steadfast in our journey toward holiness. Mary reflects deeply and ponders on all the events in her life from the perspective only faith can give. By contemplating her example, we learn to embrace life's uncertainties with trust, knowing that we recognize God's will in all that happens in our lives. The virtues of the Mother of Jesus who is also our Mother in the order of grace, will also adorn her children who steadfastly study her example to reflect it in their own lives. And this progress in virtue will appear as the consequence and the already mature fruit of that pastoral zeal which springs from devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Mary's model of leadership should encourage each Christian to follow the path she followed, to imitate her and to promise to find a pattern and a model of life in the school of her example.

SPIRITUALITY AND ITS RELEVANCE
In and for Contemporary Society

Thumma Mariadas Reddy MSFS

Does spirituality still have a place and relevance in our lives? Do our spiritual practices still make sense in our modern world? These are the most frequent and disturbing questions concerning spirituality. There is an increasing discussion, debate, contestation and controversy about the relevance, usefulness and effectiveness of spirituality in the contemporary society. Religion and spirituality are "frequently regarded with some suspicion even by people within the church."[1] Some opine that "we have entered an age when men have outgrown religion."[2] In specific reference to the discussion about Christianity, "they say that insistence on the religious dimension of Christianity has become a barrier which prevents secular men from committing themselves to the Christian lifestyle."[3] Thus, "the practice of religion has become an embarrassment, and a hindrance to the veritable Christian mission."[4]

1. A Contrasting and Conflictual Situation

While worldliness and modernism are presented as concern and care for life and human well-being, spirituality is often depicted as indifference and unconcern for the human welfare. Spirituality is also mistaken as something anti-progress, anti-happiness, rigid, self-restrictive and auto-penalising. Spirituality is also understood as evasive, not seeing and confronting the existent problems squarely and adequately. Many see spirituality as a failed attempt at addressing the challenges and complexities of life. In contrast, modernism, which is anti-spiritual, despite its inadequacies, is regarded as a sincere path that tries to face the situation in all honesty.

1 John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), 1.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

2. Dissolving the Wrong Notions and Perspectives

2.1. Concerning Spirituality

2.1.1. Spirituality, Not a Private Affair

Very often, spirituality is reduced to a private affair, wherein an individual strives for one's salvation. Accordingly, to many, the word 'spirituality' is associated with the striving for individual salvation, and a spiritual man is equated with the 'pietist' who is excessively bothered about the cultivation of his inner life and is blind to the social and political realities around him. "It suggests a kind of hot-house atmosphere in which people are unduly preoccupied with their own inward condition."[5] The missing or neglect of this 'corporate' or 'collective' aspect of spirituality behind the investiture of individual striving is a great challenge for contemporary spirituality.

2.1.2. Spirituality, not Anti-Worldly, though Unworldly

Often prayer and worship, religion and spirituality, present themselves, both in their practice and effect, as a way of escape from the real world. In the excessive concern for not being entangled with the preoccupations and allurements of the world, spirituality runs the risk of an anti-world label.

In this context, we must remember that a contemporary spirituality, while being forward-looking, must also be closely related to the world in which our lives are set. It must issue in action in human affairs. Failing in this involvement and commitment to the well-being of the world, all spirituality will amount to nothing but hypocrisy.[6] In the right sense, true spirituality is meant to be 'worldly,' in the sense of being concerned with the 'real' world, and not so much with the church world or another world.[7] It is unworldly in the sense of not being tainted

5 Ibid., 40.

6 F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 589, 674. He was wise enough to understand that action without prayer is, from a Christian point of view, just as much a failure as prayer without action.

7 John B. Coburn, "The New Mood in Spirituality," in *Spirituality for Today,* ed Eric James (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968), 19.

with the negative aspects of worldliness.[8] It is certainly not-worldly but at the same time is concerned about the world. It follows then that spirituality is not anti-temporary but not-bound-to temporariness. It is not anti-temporal but directed to eternity.

2.1.3. Spirituality, not Abstract, though Not-Tied down to the Concrete

In the past, excessive emphasis was laid on the doctrine. Faith was understood as an intellectual assent, and theology was reduced to an abstract academic pursuit, far removed from the concrete problems of the world. The quality of faith and spirituality was more a matter of correctness of beliefs and concepts. This is the dominance of orthodoxy over orthopraxis.

In this context, we must bear in mind that a faith that is reduced only to an intellectual assent, and a theology, only to a set of propositions, are shallow and inadequate. They are not intellectual enterprises[9] but are essentially concerned with the concrete living and dying and rising of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus is a "Social gospel" that plunges into concrete action of love and service. It is a systematic theology that vitalises it and makes it effective.[10]

2.1.4. Spirituality, Not Anti-Material, though Not-Materialistic

Often, spirituality is presented as hostile to all that is material. Being concerned with the 'immaterial' and spiritual, it is understood as resentful, repellent and resistant towards any material progress and

8 'Worldliness' is used here in specific reference to its negative components and effects, such as excessive anxiety and preoccupation with the interests and pursuits of the world, leading to greed, attachment, deception, accumulation, corruption, self-gratification, and subsequently leading to neglect of God and spiritual concerns, and indifference to duties of charity towards others. It is not used in the critical sense of 'pertaining to the world'. Cf Eric James ed., *Spirituality for Today* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968), 22.

9 Faith is ultimately a response to God's revelation and theology is the expression and formulation, clarification and interpretation of it. We must always bear in mind that theology is nothing but God-language, and the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. Cf L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, and New York: Macmillan, 1953), 11.

10 W. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 1.

wellness. This is not true. Spirituality is not against the material needs and material development because true happiness cannot be totally devoid of material well-being. Rather, Spirituality is against materialism, whereby man is reduced only to a material being; life is reduced to material existence; and excess importance is given to material prosperity. The consequences are disastrous. Human life becomes so much earth-bound, and greed, accumulation, manipulation and corruption become inevitable. Materialism is the pathway to ego-centrism and detrimental to the quality relationships and sound values of love and service.

2.1.5. Spirituality, Not-Evasive but Not-Over-Involved

This is again another charge against spirituality, that it overemphasises withdrawal from the world and thus is predominantly evasive; that it avoids any responsibility and commitment to the world. It undermines and neglects principles like involvement, participation and engagement, which are crucial for a meaningful and committed human existence and relationships for the progress of society. There is validity in this critique. However, true spirituality "is never divorced from action and could be more properly described as the necessary preparation for the most effective action since that action is most effective which is in line with the purposes of God."[11] Further, what is important to note is the prime concern of spirituality: not to get over-engrossed and over-entangled in worldly affairs, to the extent of losing the sense of the 'higher' and the 'above and beyond.'[12]

2.1.6. Spirituality, not Anti-Happiness or Anti-Fulfilment but Not-Pleasure-Seeking

Not seldom spirituality is accused of being repellent and resistant to happiness. It is true that "the practice of religion has been and is still linked with evils and weaknesses of one kind or another, with ignorance,

11 Alan Ecclestone, "On Praying," in *Spirituality for Today,* ed Eric James (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968), 37.

12 Cf John B. Coburn, "The New Mood in Spirituality," in *Spirituality for Today,* ed Eric James, 25-26. The point here is the dialectic and the not the conflict between 'engagement' and 'disengagement', action and withdrawal. For a balanced human life, both the aspects are important.

superstition, opposition to science; with a false other-worldliness that leads to indifference in the face of social injustice; with the immaturity and the refusal to grow up and accept responsibility; with fanaticisms that have stood in the way of friendship and co-operation; with a self-centred, inward-looking quest for salvation."[13] However, we must bear in mind that, like many other powerful factors in human life, religion and spirituality can lead to bad results as well as good. It can diminish our happiness and fulfilment as well as foster it.

Spirituality is not anti-fulfilment. Spirituality is essentially fulfilment-oriented. It aims at a fuller personal being for man. "God is not glorified through the denigration of man or by having man abased before him. On the contrary, he is glorified as man attains a being more nearly conformed to the image of God."[14] What spirituality is against is the pleasure-seeking culture wherein true joy and happiness is reduced to and equated with mere enjoyment, pleasure,[15] gratification, entertainment, deviations and aberrations. It is in the same perspective, we can also understand many practices of religion and spirituality that appear to be self-punitive, need not be so, but can be regarded as self-purgative, cleansing man into a healthy and wholesome being.

2.1.7. Spirituality, not Anti-Progressive, but Discerning

This is again a mis-notion that spirituality is against progress and development, because its concerns are otherworldly and its norms are detachment, mortification and sacrifice. But the truth is that true spirituality is never anti-progressive. It is against only a false kind of progress. Any earthly progress becomes shallow and inadequate when it is relegated to mere material development and not utilised for the

13 John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), 4.

14 Ibid., 7.

15 T.N. Dhar, *On the Path of Spirituality* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006), 82-85: We need to bear in mind that seeking pleasure in itself is not wrong. It is natural that everyone seeks pleasure from different things. Some derive pleasure from material achievements, some from mental entertainment and some from spiritual attainments. The vital questions are - which is the right area of seeking pleasure, what are its effects, the durability of it, like transient or permanent, momentary or lasting. It is here that spirituality becomes of paramount importance. For, it is the spiritual attitude that enables us to bring about poise and equanimity in our life and have balanced approach towards the ups and downs of life.

full development of humankind and the promotion of God's glory.[16] In this context, it is helpful to reflect a while on what is true progress and development. Development is not merely material progress and affluence: "*Progress of a merely economic and technological kind is insufficient.*"[17] It is not enough to boost economic and social assets. "A prosperous society, highly developed in material terms but weighing heavily on the soul, is not of itself conducive to authentic development."[18]

True development is integral: The Church is committed to an integral human development: "*the whole Church, in all her being and acting – when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity – is engaged in promoting integral human development*."[19] To be "'authentic' development: it must be 'integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man.'"[20]

"The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development."[21] "*Development must include not just material growth but also spiritual growth.*"[22]"*There cannot be holistic development and universal common good unless people's spiritual and moral welfare is taken into account*."[23]

True development is integrally Spiritual: Development can be authentic if only it takes into account the essential "spiritual dimension". It means "new eyes and a new heart, capable of *rising above materialistic vision of human events*, capable of glimpsing in development the 'beyond' that technology cannot give."[24]

16 George Thottungal, *Aspects of Spirituality* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004), 140.
17 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth)* (July 2009), 23: 35.
18 Ibid., 76: 115-116.
19 Ibid., 11: 19.
20 Cited in Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 18: 28 from Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 14: 264.
21 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 18: 28.
22 Ibid., 76: 116.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 77: 116-117.

2.2. Concerning Modernism[25] and Mundanity

2.2.1 Modernism is Not All-Solving and All-Liberating

The disenchantment with spirituality has to do also with a far-stretched faith in modernism. Modernism is understood and presented by many as a problem-solver and a new liberator. The famous phrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Man come of age," clearly indicates this mentality: Man no longer depends on God, who is the Universal Provider.[26] He has grown out of a certain sort of dependence. He has grown up, finding a new freedom from an old dependence. He can build and fulfill his life without dependence on God and His promises of a future bliss.[27]

Here, we need a corrective. 'Man come of age' does not necessarily mean that the contemporary man is better than the earlier, more responsible and more mature. Rather, this is in the sense of his craving and search for more and more independence and freedom. The fact that man feels and thinks that he is totally independent of God does not make him independent in reality. Man can never claim to be independent of God in an absolute sense.

2.2.2 Modernism Is not Unlimited

Modernism pretends to be unlimited. But in reality, it is very much limited, restricted and confined. This is borne by the fact of the "boundary situations,"[28] described so by Karl Jaspers. These are the experiences of our limit-situations, the existential boundaries that indicate the limit or closure of our lives, such as sickness, guilt, anxiety, and death. The limitedness of modernism is also evidenced by the fact of our intellectual insufficiency. Our desire to know may be unrestricted, but there is a real experience of the inability to know everything about everything. Our knowledge and the pursuit of it, is restricted and

25 'Modernism' is used here as a generic term that indicates not only the modern and contemporary times but also a mindset and culture that is defiant and resentful towards any spirituality.

26 Cf John Townroe, "Christian Spirituality and the Future of Man," in *Spirituality for Today,* ed Eric James*,* 43.

27 David Jenkins, *Guide to the Debate about God* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), 101.

28 Cf David Tracy, "Religious Language as Limit-Language," *Theology Digest*, 22 (1974): 291-307, 292.

conditioned. Further, the inadequacy of modernism is also testified by the fact of moral insufficiency[29] or moral impotence[30] in man. This is the failure to actualise the good that one intends. This is the gap between one's essential freedom and the actual effective freedom.[31] It is this moral impotence that makes us incapable of sustained development and perfection.

2.2.3. Corollaries Concerning Modernism

Certain implications follow then: Modernism is not always synonymous with progress because often it also includes situations of regress and decline. It is not always identical with betterment. It is not always equivalent to right perspectives. It is not always liberating but is enslaving in different and newer forms. It is not holistic though can be comprehensive.

3. True Spirituality: A New Culture-Construct

What is needed is not to throw away spirituality completely, because even the 21st-century man needs the practice of spirituality for the fulfillment of his humanity.[32] In this context, it is worth recalling the wise words of Teilhard de Chardin: "The more man becomes man, the more will he become a prey to a need, a need that is always more explicit, more subtle and more magnificent, the need to adore."[33] And to continue, "To adore… that means to lose oneself in the unfathomable, to plunge into the inexhaustible, to find peace in the incorruptible, to be absorbed in defined immensity, to offer oneself to the fire and the transparency, to annihilate oneself as one becomes more deliberately conscious of oneself, and to give of one's deepest to that whose depth has no end."[34]

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29 Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1972), 52-55. In clarifying the fact of moral insufficiency Lonergan uses terms such as decline, aberration, egoism, alienation et cetera.

30 Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 1st rev. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1958. 1st ed., 1957), 627-630.

31 Ibid., 619-620.

32 John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), 5.

33 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), 118.

34 Ibid.

3.1. True Spirituality: Holistic and Integral

At this stage, it is very clear that spirituality is all-comprehensive and not confined to any particular religion. We can arrive at a wider definition: "Spirituality means a search for meaning and significance by contemplation and reflection on the totality of human experiences in relation to the whole world which is experienced and also to the life which is lived and which may mature as that search proceeds."[35] In this sense, true spirituality cannot but be transformative. "Once we imbibe spirituality our aptitude undergoes change and our behaviour and attitude towards our fellow beings and our day-to-day affairs get transformed."[36]

3.2. True Spirituality: A Journey of Self-discovery and Self-fulfilment

Spiritual growth is not a matter of mere adherence or conformity to certain doctrines or concepts. Rather, it is a matter of consistent blossoming into the truest version of oneself. It is a matter of fostering a deep connection with ourselves and the world around us. It is about finding harmony within and without. For, it is through introspection and self-awareness that spiritual growth blossoms.[37]

Spiritual growth, in its essence, is a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. And one can achieve self-development only by self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is the persistent radical tendency, the higher instinct of the human spirit to go beyond oneself, beyond what he or she has and is, and to give themselves to a cause, to a leader and above all to God. At the highest level, self-transcendence is excelling in the moral and spiritual spheres.[38] Thus, true spirituality is nothing but the full flowering of self and self-fulfilment through self-growth and self-transcendence. An authentic spirituality is a great ignition for

35 Mollie Batten, "Spirituality and Living in this World," in *Spirituality for Today*, ed Eric James, 61.

36 T.N. Dhar, *On the Path of Spirituality* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006), 98.

37 "St Francis de Sales and Laity," *Studies in Salesian Spirituality,* no. 6 (Bangalore:SFS Publications, 1987).

38 George Thottungal, *Aspects of Spirituality* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004), 80-81.

authenticity. It acknowledges the importance of goals and aspirations but cautions against the relentless pursuit of status or wealth at the expense of one's well-being and integrity. We are encouraged to set meaningful goals aligned with sane values and to approach success with a humble heart.

3.3. Spirituality: A Navigating Guide amidst the Sea of Technology

In an era, characterized by a relentless surge of technological advancements, spirituality beckons as a guiding light for the contemporary man to navigate the intricate intersection of their lives with the digital frontier.[39] Spirituality helps for the fabric of a meaningful and balanced coexistence with the omnipresent influence of technology.

In this context, spirituality as the seedbed and practice of virtues and values becomes a true guiding light in dealing with digital technology. Spirituality induces one to a life of virtue. Virtues are not mere niceties but essential compass points steering the contemporary man through the complexities of technology. These virtues collectively shape a balanced digital lifestyle and responsible engagement. "A spiritually transformed person is conscious of the fact that virtue lies in service and being good to others and vice in troubling others."[40] The values of spirituality like kindness, respect, patience and humility, can and do influence the approach towards as well as the conduct of the social media. In the vast arena of digital age, where social media is a powerful force shaping the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, the virtue of kindness serves as a moral compass for navigating the intricacies of online connections. Instances abound where acts of kindness in the digital realm have forged lasting bonds and meaningful relationships. In the face of pressures such as undeserved blame, ever-accelerating currents of information and instant gratification, spirituality wisely fosters the virtue of patience, promoting calmness, resilience and a thoughtful approach to challenges. Thereby, one navigates difficulties with a level head, makes well-considered decisions, and maintains a positive outlook during times of uncertainty. Spirituality, with its

39 Mirim J. Metzger and Andrew J. Flanagin, *Digital Media, Youth and Credibility (*Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 17.

40 T.N. Dhar, *On the Path of Spirituality* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006), 98.

virtue of humility, helps for the recognition of the potential pitfalls associated with technology. It fosters a genuine self-awareness and self-responsibility, avoiding arrogance and the misuse of technology for personal gain."Humility and Simplicity are key virtues for Spiritual Growth."[41]

3.4. Spirituality: Enhancer of Ecological Stewardship

Spirituality plays a crucial role in ecological stewardship. Especially, enkindled by a creation-spirituality, which envisions man as a caring and responsible steward towards the whole creation, humanity is urged to nurture a harmonious relationship with the nature. This in turn engages the humans in environmental protection and conservation efforts. It helps to foster a sense of responsibility and owning up towards the natural world. It also equips them with the knowledge, skills, and motivation needed to take action for a more sustainable future.

Involvement in ecological stewardship can have a profound impact on both the individuals involved and the wider community. It can lead to increased awareness and understanding of environmental issues, greater community cohesion, and more sustainable practices. Ecological stewardship is a crucial step towards achieving a more sustainable and equitable future for our planet. This ensures the long-term health and well-being of our natural world.[42]

3.5. Spirituality: Bridge-builder through Interfaith Dialogue

Spirituality with its spirit of respectful engagement helps to navigate the intricacies of interfaith dialogue. Fouad Elias Accad, in *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam*, emphasizes the importance of finding common ground and fostering understanding between different faiths.[43] His work provides practical insights into building bridges of communication and collaboration.

41 Suresh Babu, *Growing in Virtues: Guiding Ordinary People to a Virtuous Life through the Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales*, (Bangalore: SFS Publication, 2022), 160.

42 A. Johnson, "Challenges and Opportunities for Youth in Environmental Initiatives," *Environmental Challenges*, vol. 3, no. 234 (2000), 45-47.

43 Fouad Elias Accad, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 63.

3.6. Spirituality: Promoter of Mental Health

There is no health without mental health.[44] The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines, "Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."[45] Mental health is a key component of health for anyone. Mental health is sometimes also called emotional health. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Unfortunately, mental Health is at a crisis level today, especially among the youth. The youth are experiencing unprecedented mental health challenges. They struggle with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. In recent years, there have been significant increases in certain mental health disorders in youth, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

Spirituality encourages individuals to acknowledge their struggles without judgment and to cultivate a sense of inner tranquility amid life's turmoil. The spiritual teachings on resilience and perseverance offer valuable insights to those battling mental health issues. Spirituality also underscores the significance of community and support networks. Today's men grappling with mental health challenges can draw inspiration from the spiritual emphasis on building supportive relationships and seeking guidance from mentors and trusted confidants.

3.7. Spirituality: Fount of Love

Love is the highest form and effect of spirituality. In philosophical language, love is the form of all virtues, in the sense of specifying the essence of them.[46] Love becomes the driving force behind all tasks. No matter what the circumstances of the challenge at hand might be, spirituality urges everyone to tackle it with a loving attitude. It is worth recalling and drawing inspiration from St Francis de Sales, the doctor of love, as he extols: "Everything through love, nothing through

44 World Health Organization, 2005.

45 World Health Organization, 2018.

46 George Thottungal, *Aspects of Spirituality* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004), 113.

constraint." There is no doubt that love affects our goals. The efforts that we put into the activities become a lot more than just activities when we approach our goals with love; they turn into works of love.

3.8. Spirituality: A Soothing Channel of Forgiveness

In a world that suffers from the malaise of unforgiveness, spirituality with its dent on forgiveness and reconciliation can work as a redeeming balm for the sick and wounded humanity with its inflicted and afflicted relationships. Spirituality emphasises the transforming aspect of forgiveness and the power of its influence on the relationships we have with others and ourselves. Forgiveness is not about forgetting or condoning the wrongs that have been done. It is about releasing the burden of anger and resentment that weighs heavy on the soul. It is about reclaiming our power and charting a course towards a future unencumbered by the shackles of the past.[47]

Forgiveness helps us to let go of grudges and go ahead with a fresh feeling of compassion and empathy in our relationships with others. It facilitates reconciliation and builds a deeper bond based on understanding and mutual respect. Forgiveness frees us from the burden of previous grievances, allowing us to overcome obstacles and pursue our dreams. When we forgive, we remove the emotional energy associated with the painful events, allowing us to transfer our focus and energy to more constructive efforts. This increased emotional freedom allows us to tackle obstacles with flexibility, clarity, and a sense of purpose, driving us forward with fresh desire and power toward our goals.

3.9. Spirituality: A Call for Simplicity

In the 21st century, where technological advancements and consumerism dominate daily life, the call to simplicity is more pertinent than ever. A sound spirituality encourages us to resist the allure of excess and to focus on what truly matters. This simplicity extends beyond material possessions; it encompasses relationships, goals, and the overall approach to life. By simplifying their lives, men can cultivate a sense of clarity, purpose, and inner peace.

47 The Power of Forgiveness, Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/communication-success/201401/the-power-forgiveness

Conclusion

Many contend that the era of spirituality is over. Yet, quite contrary to such a view, great numbers are searching for 'spiritual experience' and are not ready to discard the culture of spirituality. They are looking for a spirituality that is different, healing, integral and holistic. Their grievance and defiance are not against spirituality as such, but are against the type of the spirituality that goes against their goals, targets, comforts, and interests.

I am convinced of the truth that "Contemporary man is not going to permit his nature to be truncated by the excision of the religious dimension."[48] Therefore, it is not an outright rejection of spirituality, but a craving for building a "counter culture"[49] where one rises above the allure and confinement of the secular culture. "A religious dimension is a normal constituent of the counter culture."[50] It may be fitting to conclude our reflection with the following words: "All we can say is that the struggle to find the appropriate forms of spirituality is our struggle and that the new forms will emerge as we respond in an age of unbelief with what is eternal for the Gospel: faith, hope and love. Then the new patterns of spirituality will emerge."[51] In essence, in the 21st century, true spirituality is a renewed emphasis on a holistic approach to ethical living, urging the contemporary men to integrate timeless virtues into their daily lives while navigating the unique challenges and opportunities of contemporary world.

48 John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (London: SCM Press Ltd,1972), 3.
49 Theodore Rszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (London: Faber & Faber, 1970)
50 John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (London: SCM Press Ltd,1972), 2.
51 John B. Coburn, "The New Mood in Spirituality," in *Spirituality for Today,* ed., Eric James, 27.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES
A Call for a New Spiritual Paradigm in Contemporary Times

Varghese Manimala, OFM Cap

1. Introduction:

We are in a privileged moment in history (*Kairos*), which invites us to make our lives meaningful and contribute to the wellbeing of the world. Perhaps the dreariness of our lifestyle and the daily humdrum have taken away the thrill and buoyancy of our living a life of commitment and experience the power of the Spirit ever active and challenging us. The Vatican Council II invited the religious for renewal and reform giving us two norms – Rediscovering the spirit and original charism of the founder and Reading the signs of the times. Pope Francis reminds us that our time is a time of trial: "It is more difficult to live as a consecrated person in today's world." The struggle for fidelity and lack of strength to persevere are experiences which belong to the history of religious and consecrated life since its beginnings. Fidelity, despite the eclipse of this virtue in our time, is engraved in the profound identity of vocation of consecrated persons: it has to do with the meaning of our life before God, Church and society. We need a coherent fidelity that enables us to grasp and reclaim the truth of our own being, that is to remain in God's love. Hence, our task is to promote abiding in God's love to build up the community in the power of the Spirit, and become proclaimers of the Good News of Liberation as prophets in the modern world.

2. Community Building as "Walking Together"

St. John Berchmans says: "*Vita communis*, *maxima penitentia*" (community life is the greatest penance). Yes, indeed, community life is a great penance, and a very difficult task, but we cannot avoid it because we all depend on others although we are all unique beings. One of the characters in a drama written by the great philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre says: "The other is my hell." It is quite true, when I look at the other

as my adversary who hinders all my aspirations and projects. But how will you change this hell into a grace? Hell+o = hello. What does that 'O' stand for? For yourself. You are donating yourself to the other, so the other becomes your 'hello.' Another philosopher, a contemporary of Sartre, Gabriel Marcel says: "The other is a grace given to me." We are planning to look in some detail how this can be applied in our life as community members. The process is described by five words, all beginning with letter 'A.'

2.1. Acceptance: We all need to exercise an accepting presence. We live in a community, and our community is based on fidelity. Fidelity is a commitment to the other, an unconditional vow. It is an abdication of preservation of one's title. It is the spontaneous and un-imposed presence of an I to a thou. I create myself in response to an invocation which can come only from a 'thou. 'It is a call to which I answer 'present'. In saying 'I am here' I create my own self in the presence of a thou. Fidelity is the active perpetuation of presence. The essence of fidelity is to be creative, and to seek to cooperate with the other person's efforts to become free. Fidelity is a commitment to care for the other without counting the cost. Fidelity is an act of the total person taking responsibility for another person. Fidelity is opposed to pride. The best example for fidelity and commitment is the family. The other has entrusted herself or himself to me, and I have a duty to care for her/him. People who practice acceptance do not make a show of their acceptance.

2.2. Availability (Disposability): Only a disposable (available) person can be truly free. Indisposability is sterility. E.g. If a couple marry, and then decide not to have children, that is indisposability, and it leads to sterility, not of the womb alone, but of the heart also. This can happen to us too. Disponibility should be experienced by everyone as a necessity in life – it should become the life-blood of her/his existence. By availability is meant the attitude of the man/woman who lays himself/herself 'open' to the impact of Being, and who allows himself/herself to be permeated by the other's presence. An unavailable person's life is meaningless, a non-authentic existence.

The highest form of disposability (availability) is sacrifice – laying down one's life for the sake of others (e.g. St. Maximillian Kohlbe). In this sense it is essentially creative and cannot be compared with suicide, for one has a very high aim for which the life is laid down. Suicide is essentially a negation; it is essentially refusal, a resignation. Sacrifice is essentially attachment. Just as sacrifice is a form of availability, so too is hospitality. I care for the other because as a person he has entrusted himself to my care.

Unavailability is a form of alienation. I may understand that compassion is appropriate, but may offer it only with my mind. Very often we may treat others as 'cases' rather than 'presences.' An unavailable person is withdrawn from us. S/he may pretend to be always busy. To be unavailable is to be in some way not only occupied but encumbered with oneself. She/he refuses admiration to another. Total unavailability for a long time can lead a person to despair (and can even lead to suicide). The freest person is most fraternal. By encountering the other in availability and freedom we establish a community of love; freedom has value in the context of the community. Freedom and grace go hand in hand. "Grace" is the situation where freedom is exercised. As religious availability has to stand out, for religious life could be defined as "availability for the Transcendent and the immanent."

2.3. Appreciation and Accommodation: Appreciation is the capacity to rejoice with others when they are successful, and to be compassionate in their struggles. Basic virtue needed is compassion (*karuṇa*). Appreciation builds up the individual and the community, while depreciation pulls down, and it can reach a rock-bottom. In order to offer appreciation, the basic disposition needed is accommodation. It means that you respect the individual person whatever may be her backgrounds or attitudes. It is not mere tolerance, which is more negative, while accommodation is more positive and supportive of the other. Appreciation and accommodation builds up the capacity of the other. Certain people are so reluctant to reach out to others in appreciation; sometimes we may give a spiritual excuse also.

2.4. Accompaniment and Discernment: We all need to acknowledge that we live a life of uneasiness and discomfort, and no religious congregation is free from it. As Pope Francis says in the *Guidelines* (*Gift of Fidelity*) regarding the culture of our time: "We live immersed in the so-called *culture of fragmentation*, of the *provisional*" (no. 6). There are different forms of discomfort or more serious and critical problems, these needs to be addressed before implementing paths of accompaniment, prevention and care. There is an urgent need of humility, closeness and empathy. The same urgency should be felt to direct our gaze and listening full of solicitude and care toward those who are experiencing conditions of discomfort, uneasiness or crisis. It is a gaze of "compassion, and not pity. There is no compassion that does not listen and show solidarity with the other." This gaze arises from "the freedom born of love and of the desire to put the good of others before all else" (n.7). For this a superficial and short-sighted gaze will not do. Perhaps, there is a need to rediscover and encourage the original attractiveness, as an antidote to the 'paralysis of normality and as openness to the grace that turns the world and its ways of thinking upside-down.' There is a discomfort and uneasiness that undermine credibility of religious life, as there is a decline of appreciation as a global project, being perceived as alien to the culture of our time. Pope Francis lists some of the signs: "individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world, addiction, intransigence (lack of compromise), the rejection of new ideas and approaches, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, hiding behind rules and regulations." The consecrated person is not a bureaucrat or a functionary, but a passionate person who cannot live in "dull and dreary mediocrity." Further, "none of us should be dour, discontented and dissatisfied, 'for a gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom.' Like everyone else, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, etc." These needs are to be addressed through proper evaluation, and overcome through discernment and accompaniment.

The scope of the process of discernment-accompaniment for consecrated persons, which is certainly more demanding than in the past, has potential to be expressed in a new way. It is urgent to identify

and face those questions which may cause concern, but which are also signs of hope. Accompaniment and discernment are inseparably united: the one occurs in the virtuous process of discernment and the other is nourished and takes the form of accompaniment. We used to throw the blame on those who left the consecrated life, denying any responsibility to the Institute (cf. GF no. 49).

The capacity to discern is inseparable from the formation of consciences: "We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them." This is not to be understood in an individualistic sense. The centrality of the conscience does not mean following my own ego, doing what interests me, what suits me, what I like (Pope Francis). "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person" (GS. 16). It coincides with the personal identity of each person, with its own more or less troubled history: relationships, affections, culture of belonging. Conscience is formed through good relationships; and it leads to self-understanding, which takes place through dialogue between consciences. Spiritual accompaniment, in fact, is a dialogue supported by the willingness to collaborate in the context of a relationship, through mutual respect, which makes it possible to listen and to propose- or re-propose – the values to be recognized, chosen, and assimilated (cf. GF no. 54).

According to me one of the misused vows in the Catholic Church is the vow of Obedience; superiors make use of it under the umbrella of Canon Law. In this context I always admire the great Buddha, he never bound his monks by the vow of obedience, but only with the vows of simple life and celibacy. Regarding obedience his words were: "Let no one be your master, let truth be your guide and *dhamma* (*dharma*) be your principle." He even told his disciples: "Do not follow my teaching out of respect for me; if you do not find them worthwhile, throw them out."

2.5. The Notion of *Ubuntu* for a Creative Intersubjective Existence

Perhaps, the notion of *Ubuntu*, an African one, may surprise us, but it is very expressive and quite fitting to our theme. For understanding this notion an event that took place in a remote place in Africa is required. A white missionary who in Christmas Season was conducting a

competition for children. He filled a small bag with chocolates and kept a few metres away hidden, and kept a small flag on it as a sign. He asked the children to run and get the prize, he had said that one who reaches the place first and touches the prize will get the whole of it. A boy who ran quite fast and reached almost near the place, when he looked back found others lagging far behind. He waited for them to reach him, and together they ran and took the bag in their hands with a clap of joy and laughter, and shared it among them. The missionary was surprised and asked the boy who reached the place first why he did not claim the whole prize as he was far ahead of others. Then he shouted "*Ubuntu*" which in their language indicates "I am because you are," "You are because I am." The mutual dependence or mutual inter-independence makes the human existence more meaningful and fulfilling. The modern, so called civilized and developed man seems to lack this very much. What is reigning supreme is the spirit of competition, and defeating others to make the maximum profit, a special by-product of globalization. It is here that we need ask the tantalizing question whether modern humans have lost the direction, and the fact that we all stand in need of the other for completion.

The challenge is great, and yet we have no other option but to accept it. It is here that the great Buddhist notion of *karuṇa* (compassion) needs to come to our aid. Compassion means feeling and suffering or rejoicing with the other. Other's joy or suffering becomes my own. If we look at the Gospels, especially that of Luke, all the miracles of Jesus proceed from this *karuṇa* or compassion. "Do not cry, I cannot bear it." How he raises son of the widow Nain because he was overtaken by the suffering of that poor woman. Miracles can take place in human relations provided we have such an outgoing attitude of compassion and understanding. That is the goal of intersubjective and pro-active existence. If there was such an attitude the wars between Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine would not have continued unabated and whole rest of humanity remained aghast at the meaningless slaughter of innocents, and would not have tolerated the madness of a few individuals. The cry of innocent Palestinian children is piercing our ears, and the developed nations continue supporting such horrible massacre by selling arms.

The sale of weapons is the biggest profit making business of all so-called developed nation, and will be continuing to be talking about peace and human rights very loudly. We need to put down our heads in shame. The destructive mentality that is so much dominating today can also enmesh our communities, and lead to inevitable destruction. If proper accompaniment is lacking, community life will remain sterile, and lead to the end of which no prediction can be made now.

3. Call for an Inclusive Spirituality: Co-responsibility and Rebuilding:

Today we live in a world divided by various religions, spiritualties, ideologies, and convictions of various sorts. What we need today is a transcendental spirituality or a new spirituality with a new vision, and we may call this as "inclusive spirituality." Today human beings can no longer live as isolated individuals; they are called to relationships of various dimensions, and spirituality is one of the most important among them. Inclusive spirituality, as defined by the *Triveni Journal*, a journal of Indian renaissance, "promotes the acceptance of diverse beliefs and practices as equally valid paths to understanding the ultimate truth, fostering an environment of respect and open-mindedness among various spiritual traditions in the world."

Religion provides communal belonging through doctrines and rituals. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a solitary yet expansive inward journey—a personal dialogue with transcendence, often expressed through meditation, contemplation or engagement with nature. Recognising this difference is key to fostering inclusive spirituality. Where religion may draw lines of orthodoxy, inclusive spirituality builds bridges. It understands that many individuals today are spiritual but not religious, or belong to minority traditions. True inclusivity respects not only interfaith dialogue but also intra-faith diversity and those outside formal religion altogether. Pope Francis offered a beacon of hope through what we now recognise as inclusive spirituality—a way of engaging the divine that is rooted in openness, authenticity, and compassion rather than dogma or exclusion. Inclusive spirituality embraces all—people of all religions, those with no religion, those who

doubt, and those who have been wounded by rigid systems. It makes room for complexity, for contradiction, for imperfection. And Pope Francis, even while holding the highest office of one of the world's oldest religious institutions, embodied this radical openness with humility and grace.

Conferring dignity on inclusive and liberation spirituality is the need of the hour in contemporary times. The sad yet empirical fact is that individual persons and classes of persons the world over are denied dignity. They are treated by governments and businesses and races and classes as non-persons, as de facto outcasts, as expendable. Emigrants fleeing crime and persecution arrive on the shores of nations who reject them. They end up nation-less, land-less, home-less.

As a great example for the needed transformation in contemporary spirituality, there is no doubt, Pope Francis is an exemplar par excellence. We shall sum up some of his attitudes that seem to further stand out besides the above mentioned ones. (1) Mercy over Judgment: Francis placeda strong emphasis on God's mercy, often stating that the Church should be a "field hospital" for the wounded, not a tribunal for the perfect. Also when questioned about the LGBTQ+, homosexuality, approach to the divorcees, etc., his remark was: "who am I to judge them." (2) Care for the Poor and the Earth: Francis linked social justice with ecological concern, calling for an "integral ecology" that respects both people and the planet. His encyclical *Laudato Si*… very clearly explicates it. Francis explicitly connects spirituality with ecologicalresponsibility.(3) Interfaith Harmony: Francis made several historic moves to reach out to other faiths. His meetings with Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and, and Buddhist leaders were marked not by theological superiority, but by humility and a shared concern for peace and justice. Despite their vastly different contexts, both leaders emphasize an inclusive, compassionate spirituality rooted in humility, love, and service. Their teachings and actions invite afresh dialogue across faiths, fostering a vision of a world based on shared humanity rather than exclusive dogmas. Pope Francis' spirituality was deeply inclusive—not because he diluted the Christian message, but because he interpreted it in its most universal essence: love of God and love

of neighbour. (4) Universal compassion: compassion is not seen as a sentimental ideal, but a divine imperative. Pope Francis'outreach to the poor, refugees, and theLGBTQ+ community, migrants, etc., is so widely known and imitable. (5) Humility as a Core Virtue: Francis often warned against clericalism—the notion that religious leaders are above others. Their leadership style should dismantle hierarchy, and replace it with humility. (6) Interfaith Engagement: Pope Francis'visit to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and signing of the "Document on Human Fraternity" shows that truth is not the monopoly of any one faith, and that all sincere seekers are part of the divine journey. (7) Service to Humanity as Worship: serving others is a form of worship. Francis' call is for a "culture of encounter" because we meet God not in isolation but in community, especially among the needy and suffering. His approach, like that of all true religious leaders, invites us, to go beyond our faith tradition, to build bridges, heal divisions, and recognize the sacred in every human being.(Cf. PL, pp. 23-24) Like St. Francis, who embraced lepers when others turned away, Pope Francis consistently reached out to the marginalized. His pastoral care included particularly those on the fringes of society—including the transgender community—emphasizing the inherent dignity and worth of every person.

In the context of the inclusive spirituality, we need to consider the important concepts of *Co-responsibility and Rebuilding.* Here, one of the philosophers who stressed so much on the theme is none other than the contemporary philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas. The "self" of responsibility arises first only through the fact that a feeling self exposes himself to the injuries which the carrying of responsibility carries with itself. In fact, the identity the subject comes into being only through being assigned responsibility by the others. Under the pressure of the accusation the responsibility changes into *substitution*. This means that the One offers himself as a guarantor, as *hostage for all the others*. The subject comes into the world which is already out of joint; and it accuses itself of everything that the others have perpetrated. His uniqueness grows from the circumstances that it bears the misdeeds of the others. His being accused and being persecuted assumes the character of penance. Although I have not committed anything wrong, still am called to account. I am nothing but a hostage for the others. I

assume the responsibility for everyone and for everything. Substitution is a basic concept of Levinas' ethics. In his perspective it is thanks to the substitution for others that there is in the world such a thing as nearness, warmth, mercy, forgiveness and compassion. Even the simplest gesture of courtesy and considerateness springs from this basic relation. For all relations among persons presuppose on the one hand the subjectivity of the I, and on the other hand its ability to put himself into the place of the Other, i.e. substitution.

An important point that we want to highlight in the philosophy of Levinas is the "*passivity of the human spirit."* In this concept of being passive has the original meaning of "being in suffering." Levinas stresses on both forms of suffering: bodily suffering such as pain, aging, death; and moral suffering such as being accused, being persecuted, being obsessed. The creaturely responsibility which man has to carry, without having assumed it, brings to light Levinas' conception of passivity in its contrast to any philosophy of consciousness. We find that unlike other philosophers, the philosophy of Levinas stands out not merely for its novelty but for the reason that he makes his 'phenomenology' rooted in concrete human experiences, and he challenges the modern human beings to take responsibility to build up a better world through availability, and being responsible for the world.

When we exercise our responsibility for the other there happens Rebuilding. Those who feel rejected and uprooted will experience the availability of others discounting their own inconveniences, and make the others feel valuable and indispensable. Such rebuilding needs to take place especially in the case of refugees, migrants and victims of oppression. The challenge is great but without exercise of such co-responsibility and rebuilding the future of the world is very much at stake. The vast majority is exercising a silence of surrender to what is happening, and pretend to be incapable of countenancing the menace that is going on unhampered. The ruthlessness of some world leaders has become the rule of the day, and deprive the vast majority, especially the poor and the downtrodden their rights and dignity. Let us remember that if fail to exercise our responsibility, it is equal to violence. Let us not pretend to be fighters for peace, that is hypocrisy.

4. Conclusion

Our aim in the foregoing pages has been to search for and arrive at, if possible, for a relevant spirituality that is really humanistic and is exercised in the spirit of compassion. It is quite sad that modern world is too individualistic and consumeristic that the needs of the other are easily forgotten. While there is an abundance of goods thousands die of starvation especially in the poor and developing world. The developed countries dump the food stuffs in the sea to maintain the high price in the world market; what an inhumanity, and we boast of our achievements.

Pope Francis speaking about our response to the presence of the other, especially the migrants, uses four words while summarising the relationship: "Welcome, Protect, Promote and Integrate," (cf. *FratelliTutti* 129). They are simple words but with a depth that should proceed from our hearts. Similarly, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, he stresses on the use of three simple words to be constantly used in our relationship; this he does in his advice especially to the couples: "Please, Thanks, Sorry," although very commonly used words when we use them sincerely they can mend our broken relationships. There is an urgent need to evaluate and recast our understanding and practice of spirituality so that it can nourish our daily life in a very humanistic manner, rather than in a pretended angelic type of existence. This calls for a transformation that is worthwhile, and very urgent, and necessitated by the contemporary world situation, because our sense of empathy and compassion has reached a rock-bottom.

References:

Pope Francis: *Amoris Laetitia*
_____ *FratelliTutti*
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PRAYER AS THE FOOD OF ONE'S SOUL
The Gandhian Perspective

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Abstract: *The article explores prayer from Mahatma Gandhi's standpoint, defining it as an earnest desire to connect with Truth. For him, prayer was essential spiritual nourishment – "as food is necessary for the body, prayer is necessary for the soul." The article examines Gandhi's understanding of the purpose of prayer as self-purification rather than pleasing God, its various forms (meditation, repetition of Ramanama, congregational prayer), and its effects (peace, fearlessness, strength for non-violent resistance). Gandhi maintained a disciplined prayer routine that incorporated elements from multiple religious traditions, demonstrating his belief that all religions contain fundamental truths.*

Introduction

Prayer, a universal spiritual practice that transcends cultural and religious boundaries, serves as humanity's intimate dialogue with the divine—a sacred bridge between the finite and the infinite. Across civilisations and throughout history, this profound act of communion has manifested in countless forms: from silent meditation to elaborate rituals, from spontaneous whispers to carefully crafted liturgies, and from personal petitions to collective invocations seeking guidance, healing, and transformation. More than simply asking for divine intervention, prayer represents humanity's deepest yearning for connection with something greater than us, offering solace during life's darkest moments, and amplifying joy in times of celebration. Mahatma Gandhi, the votary of India's independence movement through his philosophy of non-violent resistance (*satyagraha*) and the advocate of rural development through the introduction of village industries, was also a proponent and practitioner of prayer. He maintained a meticulous prayer routine throughout his life, starting each day before dawn with prayers and devotional songs from various religious traditions. Gandhi's approach to prayer was deeply inclusive, drawing from Hindu texts like

the Bhagavad Gita while also incorporating elements from Christianity, Islam, and other faiths, reflecting his belief that all religions contained fundamental truths.

The present article discusses prayer from the Gandhian perspective, highlighting its importance and various components found in his life and writings. It begins by introducing the Gandhian understanding of what prayer means. It then discusses the object and forms of prayer. The benign effects of prayer on Gandhi, as seen in his interventions in the various spheres of human life, and a discussion on how prayer becomes the food of one's soul, conclude the article. The timeless practice of prayer has created sacred space within his otherwise mundane existence, allowing Gandhi to pause amidst life's constant motion, recalibrate his moral compass, and helped him draw strength from sources beyond the material world—ultimately nourishing his spirit with the essential sustenance it requires to navigate life's complex journey of activism with grace, purpose, and resilience. For him, "prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion."[1] The article is an invitation to appreciate and behold prayer as a sure means to approximate the divine, and of which Gandhi is an undisputable exemplar.

What Is Prayer?

For Gandhi, prayer means "an earnest desire to be filled with the spirit of Truth. This desire should be present all twenty-four hours. But our souls are too dull to have this awareness day and night. Therefore, we offer prayer for a short time in the hope that a time will come when all our conduct will be one continuously sustained prayer."[2] It is "a heart search…a call to humility… a call to self-purification."[3] It is "a yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, an invocation for His

1 *Young India*, 23-1-1930, 25.

2 M.K Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action* (Ahmedabad: 1955)37; as cited by Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, The Last Phase,* vol., 9. book 2, part I, 2nd reprint (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1997), 66.

3 *Harijan*, 8-6-1935, 132; as cited by Pyarelal*, Mahatma Gandhi, The Last Phase*, book 2, 66.

blessing."[4] It is "a confession of one's unworthiness and weakness and is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart."[5] "For those who are filled with the presence of God in them, to labour is to pray. Their life is one continuous prayer or act of worship."[6] He believes that for those who act only to sin, indulge themselves, and live for self, no time is too much for prayer. But for the ordinary mortals, there is a middle path. They are not so exalted as to say that all their acts are a dedication, nor are they so far gone as to be living purely for self. Hence, all religions set apart times for general devotion.[7]

At another time, Gandhi wrote: "Prayer is no flight of eloquence. It is no lip-homage. It springs from the heart. If, therefore, we achieve that purity of the heart, when it is 'emptied of all but love,' if we keep all the chords in proper tune, they 'trembling pass in music out of sight.'"[8] Hence, prayer needs no speech. Instead, it is in itself independent of any sensuous effort. "I have not the slightest doubt that prayer is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with the utmost humility,"[9] wrote Gandhi.

Prayer is a means of remembering God and can be offered even when observing silence.[10] "As I believe that silent prayer is often a mightier force than any overt act, in my helplessness, I continuously pray in the faith that the prayer of a pure heart never goes unanswered."[11]

The Object of Prayer

The object of prayer is not to please God, who does not want our prayers

4 MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, ed., V.B. Kher, vol., 1 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1961), 169.

5 *Young India*, 24-9-1925, 331; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, 171.

6 MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, p. 170.

7 *Young India*, 10-6-1926, 211; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, 170.

8 Shriman Narayan, ed., *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, vol., 1, trans., Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2006), 82.

9 Ibid.

10 *Harijan*, 20-4-1947, 118.

11 *Young India*, 22-9-1927, 321.

of praise, but to purify ourselves. For Gandhi, this process of self-purification "consists in a conscious realisation of His presence within us."[12] Again, he wrote: "The purer I try to become, the nearer to God, I feel myself to be."[13] He believed that there is no strength greater than that which such a realisation gives. The presence of God has to be felt in every walk of life. Gandhi penned, "I am surer of His existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in this room. Then I can also testify that I may live without air and water, but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but that cannot kill me. You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. But blast my belief in God, and I am dead."[14]

For Gandhi, God is an indefinable, mysterious Power that pervades everything. "I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen Power that makes itself felt and yet defies all proof because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses."[15]This formless, omnipresent divine force was at the core of his spiritual understanding. "The purer I try to become," writes Gandhi, "the nearer to God, I feel myself to be. How much more should I be near to Him when my faith is not a mere apology, as it is today, but has become as immovable as the Himalayas and as white and bright as the snows on their peaks?"[16] Speaking about purification in prayer at a speech Gandhi said: "Prayer does for the purification of the mind what the bucket and the broom do for the cleaning up of our physical surroundings. No matter whether the prayer we recite is the Hindu prayer or the Muslim or the Parsi, its function is essentially the same, namely, purification of the heart."[17] Furthermore, he wrote: "prayer plays a large part in a self-purificatory sacrifice and you will see that it will be a veritable cow of plenty for you and will make your way clear."[18]

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12 *Harijan*, 26-5-1946, 156.
13 *Young India*, 11-10-1928,340-341.
14 *Harijan*, 8-10-1938, 285.
15 *Young India*, 11-10-1928, 340-341.
16 Ibid.
17 Anand T. Hingorani, ed., *Food for the Soul* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1957), 80.
18 *Young India*, 7-1-1932, 8.

Forms of Prayer

Gandhi advocated several forms of prayer, which could be personal or congregational. Meditation is a form of personal prayer that every religion subscribes to. For Gandhi, meditation consisted of "closing the eyes and ears of the mind to all else, except the object of one's devotion."[19] Therefore, Gandhi said that a person, while praying, may be said to worship "his own glorified self,"[20] the divine essence, the truth that is within oneself, within the soul of every being. "At prayer time, our speech is addressed to ourselves and is intended to shake off our torpor. Some of us are intellectually aware of God… None has seen Him face to face. We desire to …realise Him, to become one with Him… through prayer."[21]

The repetition of *Ramanama* is another form of personal prayer. The philosophy behind *Ramanama* is this: "Constant repetition of a word-symbol connoting the Ultimate Reality, or whatever aspect of it appeals to one, with concentration till it results in such a silence of intellect, will, and feeling, that the divine Word can be uttered within the soul."[22] It forms part of the spiritual exercises prescribed in almost all religions. "If the word is simply repeated 'all whole and not broken up or undone' by discursive analysis, the fact for which the word stands will end by presenting itself to the soul in the form of an integral intuition."[23] Gandhi used the name of Ram for repetition.

The effects of *Ramanama* are many. It gives a living faith in oneself and others. A person who repeated *Ramanama* and thereby cleansed his inner being could not tolerate the filth outside. Since the soul is the governing principle of a human being, one can treat one's body through *Ramanama*. However, it will be a meaningless farce when, at the same time, one is drugging one's system with medicines.[24] *Ramanama*

19 *Harijan*, 18-8-1946, 265; as cited by Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, book 2, 66.
20 *Harijan*, 18-8-1946, 267; as cited by Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, book 2, 66.
21 MK Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action* (Ahmedabad: 1955), 36; as cited by Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, book 2, 66.
22 Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: 1946)320; as cited by Pyarelal, The *Last Phase*, book 2, 164.
23 Ibid.
24 MK Gandhi, *Ramanama* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1949), 28-29.

banishes fear. Gandhi, as a child, was frightened of ghosts and spirits. Rambha, his nurse, suggested the repetition of *Ramanama* as a remedy for his fear.[25] Gandhi, in his turn, offered the same talisman to the refugees at Laksham Refugee Camp.

> God resides in the hearts of the pure always. If you walk in fear of Him, you need fear no one on earth. Why should you be afraid of the cry of Allah-o-Akbar? The Allah of Islam is the same as the Rama of Hindus – the protector of the innocent. If you believe in Ramanama, you will not think of leaving East Bengal. To run away from danger instead of facing it is to deny one's faith in man and God and even oneself. It were better far to drown oneself than live to declare such bankruptcy of faith.[26]

Gandhi also insisted on congregational prayer. "Man is both an individual and a social being. As an individual, he may have his prayer during all the waking hours, but as a member of society, he has to join in the congregational prayer."[27] It is a means for establishing the essential human unity through common worship. "Mass singing of Ramadhun and the beating of Tal are its outward expression. If they are not a mechanical performance but are an echo of the inner unison, as they should be, they generate a power and an atmosphere of sweetness and fragrance which has only to be seen to be realised."[28] Its success depends upon the purity of the leader and the faith of the audience. Gandhi said, "I know instances in which the audience had faith and the leader was an impostor. Such cases will continue to happen. But truth like the sun shines in the midst of the darkness of untruth. Their result, as in my case, will be known probably after my death."[29]

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25 MK Gandhi, *An Autobiography (The Story of my experiments with Truth)*, trans. Mahadev Desai, reprint 1996 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), 27.

26 Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, book 2, 19.

27 *Young India*, 8-9-1927, 294 at 295; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, 201.

28 *Harijan*, 3-3-1946, 25; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, 204-205.

29 *Harijan*, 21-7-1946, 229; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, 205.

Fruits of Prayer

Gandhi was of the opinion that the fruit of prayer should be looked for not in any "extraneous evidence, but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have left the real presence of God within."[30] One of the benefits of prayer is peace. Gandhi said: "In spite of despair staring me in the face on the political horizon, I have never lost my peace. In fact, I have found people who envy my peace of mind. That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer."[31] The experience of this inner peace helps the individual to promote social peace, which is not merely the absence of conflict but a positive, dynamic force rooted in truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*).

Gandhi claimed that one could discover truth and the method of applying it, that is, *satyagraha* or soul force, by patient endeavour and silent prayer.[32] Through prayer, Gandhi sought to discipline his mind, overcome personal weaknesses, and cultivate a deeper connection with what he called 'the Divine Truth.' For him, prayer serves several key functions in developing truth and non-violence. Prayer provided him with a time for honest introspection, helping him recognise his own failings and weaknesses, which are prerequisites for truthful living. Prayer gave Gandhi the inner strength to resist injustice without resorting to violence, even in the face of severe opposition. It reminded Gandhi of the fundamental unity of all life, reinforcing his commitment to non-violence toward all beings. Through prayer, Gandhi constantly examined and purified his intentions, ensuring his actions came from truth rather than ego or anger.

For Gandhi, a person of prayer knows no fear. The prayer that leads to self-purification makes a person fearless. He wrote: "Fearlessness is a sign and symbol of self-purification."[33] Gandhi spoke of two types of fears that torment a person's mind—fear of death and fear of loss of material possessions. He wrote: "A man of prayer and self-purification

30 *Young India*, 11-10-1928, 34-341; as cited by Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, book 2, 66.
31 *Young India*, 24-9-1931, 272 at 274; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. 1, 186.
32 *Young India*, 1-6-1921, 174; as cited by Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, book 2, 65.
33 *Young India*, 7-1-1932, 8.

will shed the fear of death and embrace death as a boon companion and will regard all earthly possessions as fleeting and of no account. He will see that he has no right to possess wealth when misery and pauperism stalk the land and when there are millions who have to go without a meal."[34] Gandhi felt that God always heard his prayers. "I have found Him nearest at hand when the horizon seemed darkest – in my ordeals in jails, when it was not all smooth sailing for me. I cannot recall a moment in my life when I had a sense of desertion by God."[35] Thus, for Gandhi, prayer is the primary means of fostering orderliness, peace, and tranquility in our daily actions. It will "take care of the vital thing, and other things will take care of themselves. Rectify one angle of a square, and the other angles will be automatically right."[36]

Prayer as Food of One's Soul

Mahatma Gandhi viewed prayer as a foundational spiritual practice that transcended religious boundaries and served as a powerful tool for personal transformation and social change. For this reason, he did not consider prayer a mere ritual but an essential spiritual nourishment that sustains the soul's life and growth. Just as food maintains physical health, regular prayer maintains spiritual vitality, becoming indispensable for one's spiritual well-being. Gandhi firmly believed that "as food is necessary for the body, prayer is necessary for the soul. A man may be able to do without food for a number of days, … but, believing in God, man cannot and should not live a moment without prayer."[37] Further, he noted that "he who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days together, but not a single moment without prayer. For, without prayer, there is no inward peace."[38]

In *Young India*, Gandhi wrote: "I started with disbelief in God and prayer, and, until at a late stage in life, I did not feel anything like a void in life. But at that stage, I felt that, as food was indispensable for

34 Ibid.
35 *Harijan*, 24-12-1938, 392 at 395; as cited by MK Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol.1, 188.
36 *Young India*, 23-1-1930, 26.
37 *Young India*, 15-12-1927, 424.
38 *Young India*, 23-1-1930, 25.

the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul. In fact, food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul. For starvation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-starvation."[39] Thus, Gandhi felt that "prayer is even more essential for the well-being of the soul than is food for the maintenance of the body... If we provide food for the body which is perishable, then, surely, it is our primary duty to provide food for the soul which is imperishable, and such sustenance is found in prayer."[40] Through this regular spiritual practice, the soul receives its essential nourishment, just as the body requires regular meals. Gandhi encouraged everyone to "try and find that as a result of daily prayer, he adds something new to his life, something with which nothing can be compared."[41] This continuous addition represents the soul's growth through prayer's nourishment.

Conclusion

Thus, Gandhi understood prayer not merely as asking for favours but as "an intense longing of the heart"[42] and "daily admission of one's weakness."[43] For him, "prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening."[44] It represents a direct communion with the divine that he believed resided within every person. Beyond personal spiritual nourishment, Gandhi saw prayer as inseparable from service to humanity and the pursuit of truth. It is a means to eliminate fear and bad habits. He wrote: "I can give my own testimony and say that a heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other bad old habits. Prayer is an impossibility without a living faith in the presence of God within."[45] Prayer became so dear to him that he wanted to die with a prayer on his lips. Hence, he wrote: "If someone killed me and I died with prayer

39 *Young India*, 24-4-1931, 74.
40 MK Gandhi, *From a Prayer Speech*, 14 July 1945; as quoted in MK Gandhi, *Prayer*, comp., Chandrakant Kaji (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2002), 12.
41 MK Gandhi, *Prayer*, 32.
42 MK Gandhi, *Prayer*, 6.
43 MK Gandhi, *Prayer*, 44.
44 *Young India*, 23-1-1930, 25.
45 MK Gandhi, *Prayer*, 14.

for the assassin on my lips, and God's remembrance and consciousness of His living presence in the sanctuary of my heart, then alone would I be said to have the non-violence of the brave."[46] To conclude, we can say that Gandhi's approach to prayer was practical rather than merely theoretical. He believed true prayer must manifest in one's daily actions and interactions with others. For him, prayer that did not lead to truthful and non-violent living was meaningless.

46 *Prayer Speech*, 16-6-1947; Pyarelal,*The Last Phase*, part 2, 327.

THE ROLE OF PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION In 'Becoming Human'

Jolly Chackalackel, MSFS

Abstract: *This paper is a reflective exploration of the transformative power of prayer and contemplation in the process of becoming fully human. Drawing from close observation of lived experience, it highlights how prayer and contemplation gradually shape a person's values and outlook on life. In a world increasingly governed by utilitarian principles and a "use-and-throw" culture, these practices may appear outdated or unproductive. Yet, time and experience reveal their enduring significance in nurturing authentic humanity. The reflection is framed within the triangular relationship of God, the human person, and the world, emphasizing that becoming human is a gradual process requiring patience, effort, and openness to the divine.*

Introduction

My long association with Dr. George Panthanmackel as a batchmate and close companion has shown me how prayer and contemplation can gradually transform a person into a better human being. This article is a reflective piece, drawn from lived experience rather than extensive references. It unfolds in three movements: first, a reflection on the meaning of prayer and contemplation in today's utilitarian world; second, an exploration of their relevance in shaping authentic humanity; and finally, a consideration of the triangular relationship of God, human person, and world as the foundation of spiritual growth.

The Two Pillars: Prayer and Contemplation

Humanity has long sought to understand itself—not just in terms of biology or society, but in terms of meaning, purpose, and the inner journey of becoming fully human. Throughout history, prayer and contemplation have been central practices in this endeavor. While cultures, religions, and philosophies vary in their definitions and methods, the impulse

to pray and to contemplate seems almost universal. These practices are not merely religious rituals; they are deeply existential tools that shape how individuals relate to themselves, others, and the cosmos. In becoming more human, in the truest and most profound sense, prayer and contemplation are not optional accessories but essential elements of our inner architecture.

1. Understanding "becoming human"

To understand the role of prayer and contemplation in becoming human, we must first ask: what does it mean to "become human"? From a biological standpoint, humanity is defined by DNA. But from a philosophical or spiritual lens, being human transcends physicality. It involves self-awareness, moral reasoning, empathy, creativity, and the capacity to seek truth, goodness, and beauty. It also involves the profound sense of *becoming*—not being a finished product, but a dynamic, evolving self. None of us are finished products, born fully human in this deeper sense. We grow into it through love, suffering, learning, relationships, and the pursuit of meaning. Prayer and contemplation, in their various forms, are catalysts in this process of humanization. They awaken, nourish, and guide the inner life, helping individuals move beyond mere existence into a life of conscious presence and purpose.

2. Understanding the Nature of Prayer

Prayer is commonly understood as communication with the Divine. For some, it involves speaking to God in words of praise, supplication, or confession. For others, especially in Eastern traditions, prayer may involve chants, mantras, or silent union with the absolute. But beyond form, the essence of prayer is relational. It is the reaching out of the human soul toward something greater—whether called God, Spirit, Source, or simply the Transcendent. In prayer, one steps beyond the confines of ego and enters into a space of humility, surrender, and openness. This reaching out—whether with words or in silence—does something profound to the human psyche. It reminds us that we are not self-sufficient beings. It breaks the illusion of control and autonomy. Prayer acknowledges mystery, and it shapes the human soul with the contours of reverence.

3. Contemplation: The Art of Deep Seeing

If prayer is relational reaching, contemplation is relational seeing. It is not simply thinking deeply but a quiet presence to reality as it is. Contemplation, derived from the Latin *contemplari*, means to gaze attentively or observe with clarity. In the contemplative tradition—whether in Christian mysticism, Zen Buddhism, Sufi practices, or indigenous spirituality—contemplation is the practice of stillness, awareness, and union. It is a shift from doing to being, from analysis to presence. While prayer can often be active—asking, praising, repenting — contemplation is receptive. It trains the mind to be still, the heart to be open, and the soul to be awake. Through this openness, individuals begin to see the world not as an object to manipulate but as a sacred mystery to encounter.

4. The Transformation Process of Becoming Human

Both prayer and contemplation work on the self—not just as behaviors but as modes of being. In becoming human, one must learn to transcend ego, break habitual patterns of fear and control, and grow in compassion, humility, and integrity. Prayer transforms the self by reorienting it. In the act of praying, one is reminded of one's dependence, one's finitude, and one's yearning for connection. True prayer is not about getting what one wants; it is about becoming who one is meant to be. It opens space for gratitude, forgiveness, and moral courage. Contemplation, on the other hand, transforms by quieting the noise of the false self—the self that defines itself by achievement, appearance, or approval. In contemplative silence, the masks fall away. One begins to see oneself not through the lens of ego but through the gaze of love, through the eyes of the eternal. This insight is not just psychological—it is ontological. It changes how one exists.

5. Prayer, Contemplation, and Moral Growth

Becoming human also involves ethical awakening. We become more human as we become more just, more loving, and more courageous. Prayer and contemplation nurture this moral growth not by teaching rules but by changing perception. In prayer, we are confronted with

our own brokenness and the brokenness of the world. We bring our wounds and the world's suffering into the presence of compassion. This awakens empathy. When one prays for others, one begins to see them as fellow pilgrims, not competitors or enemies. Contemplation deepens this ethical vision by helping one see the interconnectedness of all things. In the stillness of contemplation, the boundaries between self and other soften. One begins to perceive life as a unity, where the suffering of one affects the whole. This leads to a more compassionate way of living, rooted not in duty but in awareness.

6. Role of Tradition and Practice in Becoming Human?

While prayer and contemplation are universal, they are also deeply shaped by tradition. Whether in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, or other spiritual paths, these practices are embedded in communities, teachings, and rituals. Tradition provides structure, language, and wisdom. It keeps the practice from becoming self-centered or escapist. For example, in the Christian tradition, the Psalms offer language for every human emotion—joy, anger, despair, hope. In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation are grounded in a vision of enlightenment for all beings. Yet even outside formal religion, people are rediscovering prayer and contemplation. In secular mindfulness, yoga, or nature-based spirituality, many are seeking ways to quiet the mind and open the heart. While the forms may differ, the hunger is the same: to become more fully human.

7. Human Emotions of Suffering and the Depth of Being

One of the greatest challenges and opportunities for becoming human is suffering. Pain, loss, illness, and death confront us with our vulnerability. In these moments, prayer and contemplation are not just comforts—they are lifelines. When suffering is brought into prayer, it is not denied or suppressed. It is held in a space of divine attention. This transforms suffering from meaningless pain into sacred struggle. It allows the sufferer to find dignity, hope, and even grace in the midst of sorrow. Contemplation does not seek to explain suffering away. It teaches presence. Rather than escaping pain, the contemplative learns

to sit with it, to listen, to trust that even in darkness, there is light. This depth of being—this willingness to feel, to endure, and to remain awake—is at the heart of becoming human.

8. The Relational Value of Prayer, Contemplation, and Community

We often think of prayer and contemplation as solitary. While solitude is important, these practices also have communal dimensions. In fact, they are most trans-formative, when they connect the individual to others. Prayer gathers people. In churches, mosques, temples, and homes, people come together to lift their voices, to lament, to rejoice. In these shared rituals, a sense of belonging and shared humanity emerges. Contemplation, though often silent, also fosters community. It teaches non-judgment, patience, and deep listening—qualities that are essential for authentic relationships. In contemplative communities, people learn to be present to each other, to see beyond roles and wounds, and to love without condition. Becoming human, then, is not a private affair. It is deeply relational. Prayer and contemplation help individuals see others not as means to an end but as sacred beings on a shared journey.

9. Possible Dangers in "Becoming Human"

Despite their value, prayer and contemplation are often misunderstood or neglected. In modern life, speed, distraction, and skepticism dominate. Prayer may seem naive or outdated. Contemplation may appear passive or impractical. Moreover, people often give up on these practices because they expect quick results. But the fruits of prayer and contemplation are slow-growing. They require patience, discipline, and trust. Another danger is using prayer as a form of escape or control—praying not to be transformed but to avoid responsibility. Likewise, contemplation can become narcissistic if not grounded in love and service. To truly aid in becoming human, these practices must be authentic. They must be rooted in truth, humility, and a willingness to be changed.

10. Prayer, Contemplation, and the Future of Humanity

In a world marked by conflict, environmental crisis, and spiritual disorientation, the need for a deeper humanity is urgent. Prayer and contemplation are not luxury items for the few—they are vital practices for the survival and flourishing of the whole. They teach us to listen—truly listen—to ourselves, to each other, and to the world. They help us slow down, pay attention, and live from a deeper center. They restore wonder in a world of cynicism, hope in a time of despair, and connection in an age of isolation. Becoming human is not just a personal journey; it is a communal calling. The more we practice prayer and contemplation, the more we bring into the world the values we so desperately need: compassion, courage, humility, wisdom, and peace.

Conclusion

To be human is to seek, to grow, and to love. It is to be aware of one's fragility and one's infinite worth. Prayer and contemplation are ancient pathways into this fullness. They do not remove us from life—they deepen our engagement with it. They teach us to see with the eyes of the heart and to live with the strength of the soul. In a world that often forgets what it means to be truly human, these practices invite us to remember. To pray is to return to the source. To contemplate is to see that all is sacred.

RELIGOUS EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

Ivo Coelho, SDB

Abstract: *The relationship between religious experience and expression is central to modern theology, from Protestant liberalism and Catholic modernism to Indian religious thought. Schleiermacher reclaimed the value of religious sentiment against Kantian rationalism, yet risked reducing Scripture and the Church to symbols of inner experience. Similarly, Advaita Vedanta and Radhakrishnan emphasize the ineffable immediacy of divine encounter, often relativizing creeds and institutions, while figures like S.N. Goenka radicalize this stance by rejecting language and concepts altogether. Within Catholicism, Vatican II and Indian theologians have highlighted "God-experience" as the essence of faith, while questioning the necessity of creeds, codes, cults, and community. This paper argues, however, that religious expression—both linguistic and non-linguistic—is indispensable for articulating, sharing, and deepening experience. Christianity uniquely claims that expression itself comes from God in the historical person of Jesus Christ, affirming that divine love is mediated not only interiorly but also through concrete, communal, and historical forms.*

The problem of religious experience and its relationship to expression is right at the centre of Protestant liberalism and Catholic modernism.[1] Kant had reduced faith to an exercise of practical reason. Against such rationalism, Schleiermacher re-established the value of sentiment and religious experience. It would seem, however, that he ended up reducing the Bible and the Church to mere symbols of the interior religious experience.[2] In the context of the liberal theology that followed, there arose biblical criticism and history of dogma. Critics rapidly came to the conclusion that the Bible was a purely human work, a crystallisation of the religious experience of the primitive Christian

1 Alessandro Maggiolini, "Magisterial teaching on experience in the twentieth century: From the modernist crisis to the Second Vatican Council," *Communio* 23 (1996), 227-28.

2 Robert Rouquette, "An Audit of Modernism," *Theology Digest* 5 (1957), 141ff.

community. Historians began claiming that the dogmas and institutions of the Church were a product of a purely human evolution, and even an adulteration of the original gospel message.[3] In this context, Catholics like George Tyrrell began suggesting the need to clarify whether revelation consisted "in certain divine statements, or in certain spiritual experiences about which *man* makes statements that may be inspired by those divine experiences, yet are not divine but human statements."[4]

Liberalism and modernism find surprising echoes among Indian religions. Thus, for example, Advaita Vedanta is widely understood as teaching that when one attains the Supreme Experience, one must drop the sphere of expression – creeds, codes, cults, community structures, and even the scriptures themselves.[5] Radhakrishnan notes that religion is direct experience of the divine,[6] and that it cannot be expressed logically or verbally;[7]every expression of truth is therefore relative. "However perfect and final the revelation may be, when once it enters the realm of human apprehension, it is subject to all the imperfections of the human mind."[8] He went on to say that one who has had the experience no longer belongs to a particular religion but transcends it. He belongs to an 'open community,' an 'invisible church.'[9] In a more extreme way, S.N. Goenka, contemporary reviver of *Vipassana*, the ancient Buddhist technique of meditation, teaches that the mind is a liar, and recommends that we get rid of images, concepts, words and

3 Ibid.

4 Cited in Maggiolini 230. Ibid. 231: Tyrrell conceives of revelation as an interior and personal experience to which every exterior factor, whether historical or theological, is subordinate.

5 The French monk Dom Henri Le Saux, who took the name Abhishiktananda, underwent a severe crisis, when after years of practicing Advaita he was told by a Hindu friend that he was on the threshold of the final experience: all he had to do was to let go of his Bible, his mass, his rituals.

6 Thomas Paul Urumpackal, *Organized Religion According to Dr S. Radhakrishnan* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1972) 169. The essence of religion, says Radhakrishnan, is personal encounter with the supreme: see "The Essence of Religion," *President Radhakrishnan's Speeches and Writings* (New Delhi: Patiala House, 1969) 113-14.

7 Radhakrishnan, "The Essence of Religion," 114.

8 S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1967), 141.

9 Urumpackal, 169.

propositions and remain at the level of pure experience, focusing on our breathing and our sensations, because the awareness of our breath and of our sensations cannot be wrong.

The emphasis on experience in the Indian religions and the recovery of the term 'experience' in Vatican II have come together to create a great emphasis on 'God-experience' in the Indian Church. Peter Lourdes, well-known Indian priest-psychologist, expresses the common theological mind when he notes that the four C's – Creeds, Codes, Cults, Community – are not the essence of religion but merely a human necessity. "A religion of four C's is the outer, more superficial core of religion. The inner and more essential core of religion is the religious experience."[10] "The four C's have a purpose. I do not think they are unnecessary: I think they are expendable. Once the purpose is served they can be handled lightly, not with care. Beginners may need the whole gamut of four C's, but only as a starting point not as a destination. Once they reach their destination, they will use the four C's as tools not as lifeboats."[11]

An outstanding instance of this emphasis on experience is New Age, with its interesting combination of Western rationalism and Eastern mysticism. Experience and intensity of feeling are all important for New Age.[12] Revelation and authority are out: New Age co-opts within itself all religions and all movements that have no place for revelation and for authority.

Some Distinctions and a Caveat

The question of the relationship between religious experience and expression is complex and momentous. It is complex, for experience, expression and religion are primitive terms that are widely

10 Peter Lourdes, "Less Religion More Experience," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 13/3 (2002) 327. A version of this article was earlier published as "A Catechesis that is Life," *DB Catechetics India*1/1 (August 1983), 3-9.

11 Lourdes, 331.

12 J. Ratzinger, "Current Situation of Faith and Theology," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English edition (6 November 1996), 5: "The Absolute is not to be believed, but to be experienced. God is not a person to be distinguished from the world, but a spiritual energy present in the universe."

controverted.[13] It is momentous, for it has to do with the encounter of cultures and religions, which Joseph Ratzinger has called the intellectual critical point in the new millennium.[14] If, further, this issue is linked to questions about the limits and possibilities of reason,[15] we can expect an exploration of these issues to be both rewarding and illuminating. Within the limits of this brief paper, however, I will limit myself to pointing out the peculiar relationship between religious experience and expression within Christianity.

As far as experience is concerned, I would like to propose a distinction between consciousness and knowledge. By 'consciousness' I refer to experience unmediated by any symbols or language. By knowledge I refer to the result of the process of attending to experience, making sense of it, and arriving at a judgment. In the light of this, we can distinguish between a world of immediacy on the one hand, which is the world of the new-born baby, for example, and the world mediated and constructed by meaning and value into which the baby grows. As for religious expression, it can be linguistic as well as non-linguistic. The former includes doctrines and dogmas, but also poetry, songs, literature, and so on, while the latter includes religious community, moral behaviour, dances, art, architecture and religious edifices, music, and non-linguistic symbols. Obviously, there is much overlapping between the two categories.

13 I. Coelho, "Experience: 'A Most Enigmatic Concept'," *Lonergan Workshop*, ed. Fred Lawrence, 27 [2017] 47-80. It is possible to distinguish three different ways of conceiving the relationship between experience and expression: the propositionalist model that thinks of doctrines as truth-claims or vehicles of cognitive information, the experiential-expressivist model which assumes that relgion is founded on an experience that is expressed in a variety of ways, and the cultural-linguistic model that understands relgiions as comprehensive interpretive schemes that that structure human experience and understanding of self and world: see Charles Hefling, Jr., "Turning Liberalism Inside-Out" [review of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, 1984], *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 3/2 (1985), 51-52. In this article I propose a variation on the second model that takes important elements from the other two models.

14 James V. Schall, "Ratzinger on the Modern Mind," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (October 1997) 10; cf. Ratzinger, 5.

15 Ratzinger, 4-5.

I propose that religious experience pertains to the world of immediacy: it is consciousness but not necessarily knowledge. Given this distinction, it is possible to think of people having religious experience but not necessarily knowing that they have such an experience. Such experience would be manifest at least in some way in changed behaviour, for example, but the person might not attend to it, identify and name it, and make a judgment about it. She might even consider herself non-religious. Given our situatedness or thrownness, I think it is quite impossible to *speak* of religious experience in the abstract. In my case, therefore, I will speak against the background of the Christian religious tradition within which I was born and in which I live. Within the Christian religion, it is possible to identify religious experience as "the love of God poured into our hearts" (Rom 5:5), which we can refer to also as the gift of God's love. Phenomenologically, this is an experience of love without limits.

The Role of Religious Expression

Words, expressions, language are not something merely marginal to religion. Giving expression to experience is, in fact, an important part of being human. A man and a woman who are in love, but who have not expressed their love to each other, have not yet reached the fullness of love. But if they have taken the trouble to express their love to each other, there begins a new phase. In a certain sense, here is where being in love really begins.[16] This holds in its own way also for the love between God and the human being. Like human love, religious love also needs to come to expression. "Ordinarily the experience of the mystery of love and awe is not objectified. It remains within subjectivity as a vector, an undertow, a fateful call to a dreaded holiness. Perhaps after years of sustained prayerfulness and self-denial, immersion in the world mediated by meaning will become less total and experience of the mystery become clear and distinct enough to awaken attention, wonder, inquiry."[17]

Even at this point, however, there may not be clear answers. But here the importance of the word becomes evident. Existing religious expression

16 B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 112-113.

17 Lonergan, *Method in Theology,*113.

is a help towards expression of my own experience. For I am not the first to have undergone such experience. There is the word of religious tradition, the word of preaching, the word of fellowship. Through the accumulated wisdom of the religious tradition, and with the help of religious specialists (priests, gurus, spiritual masters, preachers) one is helped *to identify* what is going on within oneself. Through the word of fellowship one gathers together with others *to celebrate* the gift. And when one has identified and named the gift, one can begin *to respond* to God's love in a new and more deliberate way. Like the man and woman who express their love to each other, there now begins a new phase.

In most cases, the gift of God's love does not involve a sudden transformation of character or personality; it is more like the seed planted in the ground that needs to be tilled, like the sprout that needs sunlight and rain and protection from choking weeds, devouring insects, roving animals. "Great saints are rare, and even they call themselves vessels of clay. The need of teaching and preaching, of rituals and common worship, is the need to be members of one another, to share with one another what is deepest in ourselves, to be recalled from our waywardness, to be encouraged in our good intentions."[18] When religious experience becomes a dominant force in one's life, one might even move out of the world mediated by meaning into the world of immediacy, where images and symbols, thoughts and words lose their relevance and even disappear.[19] The mystic is so overwhelmed by her experience that language seems too inadequate to her: she prefers to keep silence, and if she speaks, she tends to use symbolic language and often negative language.

The Intersubjective Component

The intersubjective, interpersonal component is, therefore, essential to religious experience. Religious experience is intensely personal and utterly intimate. "But it is not so private as to be solitary. It can happen to many, and they can form a community to sustain one another in

18 B. Lonergan, "The Future of Christianity," *A Second Collection*,ed. W.F.J. Ryan and B.J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 157.

19 B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 112.

working out the implications and fulfilling the promise of their new life. Finally, what can become communal, can become historical. It can pass from generation to generation. It can spread from one cultural milieu to another. It can adapt to changing circumstances, confront new situations, survive into a different age, flourish in another period or epoch."[20]

Religious Expression: Necessary but Expendable?

We have been arguing that religious expression is important. It helps us identify and name the religious experience, and to grow in such a way that that experience comes to focus and becomes central in our lives, leading sometimes to a withdrawal into the world of immediacy, as in the case of some mystics. But is expression essential? Could we say then that religious expression, important as it is, is nevertheless expendable, as Peter Lourdes thinks – a ladder to the thrown away once one has climbed, a boat to be set loose once one has reached the Other Shore?

We could begin by pointing out that, phenomenologically, this is not the position of all religions. It might be acceptable to some kinds of Advaitins and to some Buddhists, but it is not acceptable to the 'religions of the Book.' For Christians, as also for Judaism and Islam, religious expression has a special importance. A letter on Christian meditation issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1989 is explicit on this point:

> Pope John Paul II has pointed out to the whole Church the example and the doctrine of St. Teresa of Avila who in her life had to reject the temptation of certain methods which proposed a leaving aside of the humanity of Christ in favour of a vague self-immersion in the abyss of the divinity. In a homily given on November 1st, 1982, he said that the call of Teresa of Jesus advocating a prayer completely centred on Christ 'is valid, even in our day, against some methods of prayer which are not inspired by the Gospel and which in practice tend to set Christ aside in preference for a mental void which makes no sense in Christianity. Any method of prayer is valid insofar as it is inspired by Christ and leads to Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6)'.[21]

20 Lonergan, *Method in Theology,*130.

21 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation* (15 October 1989), note 12.

When religions are based principally on the gift of God's love, it is easy to regard religious expression, especially in its linguistic form, as a merely human objectification of the inner experience. As such, it is easy to see how religious expression is always inadequate and therefore easily relativized. Thus most Advaitins might easily leave behind the *sagu<a Brahman* in favour of the *nirgu<a Brahman*.[22]

Christians, however, believe that not only the gift of God's love, but also some specific expressions of that experience come from God. They believe that God gives his love not only in the secret of the heart, but also in a historical person, Jesus Christ. Christians have neither an original philosophy nor an original ethic. Their sole function is to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to his resurrection. "What distinguishes the Christian, then, is not God's grace, which he shares with others, but the mediation of God's grace through Jesus Christ our Lord."[23] For Christians then, God not only gives his love in the heart but also expresses that love outwardly in a concrete historical person. If a man and a woman are not fully in love until they express that love to each other, then Christianity believes that God brings us to the fullness of love by expressing his love to us in Jesus Christ.

If a man and a woman were to love each other yet never avow their love, there would be lacking to their love an interpersonal component, a mutual presence of self-donation. Without that interpersonal component, their love would not have the opportunity to grow. There would not be the steady increase in knowledge of each other. There would not be the constant flow of favors given and received that would make love conscious of its reality, its strength, its durability, aware it could always be counted on.

Now if there is this interpersonal element to human love, if that element is a distinct and important factor in its emergence and in its growth, something somehow similar could also be thought of religious love. But, then, we should not solely have the gift of God's love flooding our hearts. We should not solely believe what results from the objectification of that

22 Cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology,* 118-119.

23 B. Lonergan, "The Future of Christianity," *A Second Collection*156.

love. Besides completing our personal self-transcendence in the secrecy of our hearts, God would also address his people as a people, announce to them his intentions, send to them his prophets, his Messiah, his apostles. In that case religious beliefs would be objectifications not only of internal experience but also of the externally uttered word of God.[24] Here then is where I would differ from Peter Lourdes who holds that all expression is an outflow of the religious experience. It is important to recognize the Christian claim that expression comes from God. But can expression come from God? That is a distinct question, which philosophy can answer only in the realm of possibility and impossibility.

24 B. Lonergan, "Faith and Beliefs," *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 47.

Part - III

BECOMING

The Realm of Human - ANTHROPOS

HUMAN TRANSCENDING – DIVINE ENCOUNTERING
A Reflective Journey in Search

Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, OFM Cap

Abstract*: This study is a reflective look into the question of the Divine from contemporary philosophical perspective, as different from the traditionally used rational approach. It proposes that as the human is transcending, the Divine is encountered! Human transcendence is identical with 'existence,' and it refers to humans' constant movement to the more or higher. It is not a 'category,' but an 'existential' to be appropriated by one's existential choice. Although there is no fixed 'whither' for human transcendence, it has been the experience of thinkers that transcendence takes us to a divine realm! In response to cosmic transcendence, there takes place a cosmic unfolding of the Divine, as evidenced from the thinking of Heidegger and Panikkar. Cosmic religiosity enables humans to go beyond religious borders, and the Divine is brought down to the natural realm, where the whole reality is divinely saturated.*

0. Introductory Setting

Whether or not we experience in the world of today a retreat from God, or a revival of faith in God, the question of God continues to be a universal and perennial phenomenon—a phenomenon at all times, and in all places. This study is a reflective journey into the question of the Divine[1] from contemporary philosophical perspective. It is different from the traditional western (Christian) approach of rationally proving God's existence, conceptually clarifying God with the various attributes, and rationally proposing the ethico-religious code of behavior.

In the reason-guided approach of philosophizing, God has been reduced to a concept; it is explicitly brought out by Heidegger. As a result of Christianity adopting the metaphysical philosophy of conceptual

1 We use the term 'Divine,' instead of the more popular term, God, to keep our thought away from any particular perspective of a religion; the inspiration for it is from Heidegger.

precision, the non-rational thinking of the Divine gradually gave way to a metaphysically conceptualized God. The two-world doctrine of Plato got baptized as the theory of the natural and the supernatural realms. God is confined to the supernatural realm and is superimposed with metaphysical attributes of superlative degree. God is thus made an object of human estimation.[2] The characterization of God in high-precision concepts is indicative of the humans' presumptuous monopoly over the truth of God in human concepts; it is a degradation to reduce God to an object of human estimation. The metaphysical thinkers have been busy with formulating an epistemology of God in the innumerable theological books. Heidegger shows the caricature of the metaphysical God, a product of human representation.[3] God is made a dead concept to be subjected to rational analysis and manipulation by the humans.

This rational approach strangles God in conceptual prison; it is found to be untenable in today's thought-pattern. Hence, taking inspiration from contemporary thinkers we try to present the question of the Divine as a process of 'human transcending' and 'divine encountering,' which presupposes the phenomenological way of thinking—a contemporary philosophical method[4] that reconciles the subjective act (*cogito*) and the objective content (*cogitatum*) through intentionality. As per phenomenological method, reality is not looked at in its brute factuality, but in its intentional meaning (being, essence). The intentional object comes to be in the intentional act—in the act of 'fearing,' something emerges as 'fearsome.' In the context of this article, the Divine emerges as encountered in the process of the human's transcending.

In order to facilitate our further reflection we shall reformulate the two lead phrases with the help of the possessive (genitive) case: 'transcending *of* the human' (subjective genitive) and 'encountering *of* the Divine'

2 Heidegger, *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans., W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 105.

3 For a detailed consideration of this question, cf., Johnson J.Puthenpurackal, "Essencing or Essence of God: The Heideggerian Perspective," *Indian Theological Studies,* 29 (March/June 1992): 93-106.

4 Phenomenology was developed by Husserl, taking inspiration from Brentano for his notion of 'intentionality.'

(objective genitive)—the human is the *subject* of transcending, and the Divine is the *object* of encountering. Thus, the whole phrase has the following meaning: as the human is transcending, the Divine is encountered.

1. Human Transcending

Transcendence literally means 'being beyond' or 'going beyond'; and this meaning is given a philosophical depth through the various ways of presenting it. We take 'transcendence' in this study without any explicit reference to the Divine, and thus it refers only to humans—the act of transcending by humans. Divested of any spiritual colouring—ordinarily, transcendence is referred to the divine realm—'transcendence' can stand for that dimension of humans which differentiates them from non-humans; it is that 'extra,' that 'specific priority,' with which humans are endowed. Transcendence may, thus, be characterized as humans' constant movement from being what it is to the more, to the higher, to the better. We have purposely avoided giving a 'whither' for this movement; thus by transcendence we refer to humans' dynamic movement.[5] Just as only humans can *exist*, so also only humans can *transcend*; existence and transcendence refer to the 'specificity' of the humans. Hence by clarifying the meaning of existence, we will have clarified that of transcendence.

The existentialists consider existence in the active and dynamic meaning of the *act of being* human, as different from its passive meaning of the *fact of being* human; only humans can dynamically exist. Only insofar as one *exists* as human, one is human. I exist as human by dynamically and creatively choosing to be human. This dynamic meaning of existence can be better clarified in terms of its etymological meaning of 'standing-out' (*ex* + *stare*). I exist as *standing out* to 'the more.'[6]

5 Battista Mondin, distinguishes three types of transcendence according to the 'whither' of it: egocentric, social and theocentric transcendence. Cf., *Philosophical Anthropology: Man an Impossible Project?* trans. Myroslaw A. Cizdyn (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1985), 199-211.

6 By taking cue from the trend of thinking in existentialism, with the help of a few creative coinage of expressions, the meaning of existence as 'standing out' is clarified in another study of mine. "Towards a Secular Spirituality: Philosophical Perspective," in *All by Love: New Vistas in Theological Spirituality*, ed., Jose Maniparampil & Henry Jose (Bangalore: Tejas Vidya Peetha, 2010), 181-83.

The human is characterized by a 'can be' aspect, because of which I can keep on creating myself, which is differently expressed by different thinkers. According to Nietzsche, the human exists by 'becoming oneself,' by being always in the never-ending process of moving. Heidegger refers to human 'existence' as a process of transcending; he gives an ontological depth to the dynamic meaning of existence by pointing out its twofold nuance: 'can-be' (*pouvoir-être*) and 'ought-to-be' (*devoir-être*).[7] Existence, as well as transcendence, is not a category, [8] but the human's ability to be oneself (*Seinkönnen*) as one ought to be (*Seinsollen*). As the human is ordinarily prone not be oneself, there is engrained in the very being of the human a call to be oneself.[9] This call may be responded to by the human by means of one's 'resolute decision' (*Entschlossenheit*)[10] to be oneself. One exists or transcends only insofar as one keeps on responding to the call to be human; and thus existence is not a 'category' that the human is born with, but an 'existential' to be appropriated by one's existential choice.

The meaning of existence as transcendence refers to humans' 'dynamic becoming.' The human, as creative and dynamic, can rightly be characterized as a *journeying*, as a *process*. The journeying of transcending goes on as a never-ending process. This journeying or ontological transcendence does not take the human away from oneself, away from one's finite being; it refers both to one's going *beyond* and to one's standing *with* one's being. We characterize this specific process of movement with the expression: '*with boundary, beyond boundary*.'[11] Human transcendence, by being with its boundary, keeps on moving beyond! Thus the movement of transcendence goes with

7 For an elaborate consideration of this point, cf., Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger, Through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity: A Unitary Approach to His Thought in Its two Phases* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1987), 8-10; see also, footnote 33 on page 9.

8 'Category' is an Aristotelian notion, statically given to an entity as per its nature; the receiver has no role to play.

9 Cf., Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 317-23.

10 Ibid., 343. The term, *Entschlossenheit*, combines in itself the twofold nuance of the ordinary meaning of 'decision,' and the etymological meaning of 'opening.'

11 The present author has made a study with the title, "With Boundary beyond Boundary: Towards a New-ward Journeying," in *Committed to the Church and the Country*, 79-81, ed., Kuruvilla Pandikattu et al., (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013).

the boundary of finitude; the finite human keeps on transcending without ceasing to be finite!

2. Divine Encountering

Although we do not fix any 'whither' for human transcendence, it has been the experience of most of the thinkers that the process of human transcendence gradually gets a divine tinge in language and style. When this process is let grow in its intensity and purity, humans are gradually taken to a realm which may show itself as the divine realm! It is evidenced by philosophers of different schools; we refer to a few of them.

The philosophy of Kierkegaard (1813-55) is built on the transcendence of human existence, although hardly does he use the expression 'transcendence.' He considers 'existence' in the dynamic sense of the *act of being human*—in fact, he is the first to give this meaning to existence. By the act of existing I keep on becoming human by my existential choice—I keep on transcending;[12] such an existential choice is referred to as a 'leap,' which is climaxed in 'faith' as a *leap of faith*. What I am leaping to remains 'objectively uncertain,' and thus it is a leap into the darkness. At the same time, my 'subjective certainty' attracts me to take the leap. From out of this existential struggle between attraction and repulsion, I keep on making the leap of faith. As an indubitable fact, the existence of God is not to be proved, but to be passionately committed to through one's existential choice. Such a leap is a venture, a challenge, which one has to struggle to keep on making.[13] Thus existential transcendence becomes an existential leap of faith, in which the Divine is encountered.

Philosophers, such as Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber, consider humans as intersubjectively transcendent, and thus they complement Kierkegaard's existential transcendence. Human existence is

12 Kierkegaard explains the growth-dimension of existence by means of the three stages of life—aesthetic, ethical and religious. By making a choice for the higher stage, the humans keep on growing in their existence.

13 George Panthanmackel, "Faith," in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), 526-27.

essentially intersubjective, transcending itself from the prison of one's self-centredness to the openness of intersubjective fraternity. In my transcendence to the other I am creating and becoming myself. According to Marcel, the process of transcendence does not stop with the finite others, but one keeps on transcending beyond human family of finite thou-s; and in this process the traces of the 'Absolute Thou' manifest themselves![14] It is through one's transcendence to the other humans that one transcends oneself to the Absolute Thou, the Divine. The point that we want to highlight here is this: human transcendence (to the finite thou) brings about a divine encounter (with the Absolute Thou).

In our search for finding the traces of divine encounter in human transcendence, we cannot bypass Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95), the ethical philosopher par excellence. His philosophy does not offer an account of the nature of God for fear that it may entail a reversal to ontology. For him God is not an essence or being, but radical exteriority or transcendence encountered at the core of subjectivity.[15] While referring to God, he uses the expression *à Dieu* (to God) rather than *Dieu* (God) in order to avoid the implication that noun refers to a substance.[16] God is to be *related to* (in ethical response), and not *reached* (in intellectual search). "The attributes of God are not given in the indicative, but in the imperative."[17] God reveals Himself as an ethical command, which has to be responded to in action. Such an understanding of God is totally different from 'the great cognitive drama of ontology,'—the 'ontological adventure' of humans. Unlike the other thinkers who consider human transcendence as enabling divine encounter, Levinas

14 Some of the commentators refer to two types of transcendence in Marcel: horizontal transcendence to others, vertical transcendence to God. Although this distinction makes Marcel easily understandable, it can cause mis-understanding as well. Marcel does not consider two different transcendences, but the same transcendence with different intensity.

15 Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 98.

16 By the expression *à Dieu*, Levinas wants to bid goodbye (*adieu*) to God as an ontological category.

17 Levinas, "*Difficile Liberté*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), 33. As cited by Robert J. S. Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger: Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics as First Philosophy* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1993), 147.

speaks of *divine* transcendence—God extending Himself to the humans in revelation. The divine transcendence does not draw me to itself for itself, but points away from itself toward the other…[18] He proposes a 'religion of responsibility,' rather than a 'religion of need.'[19] In short, according to Levinas, God transcends Himself in the 'face of the other' with an ethical appeal, and in responding to this appeal the Divine is encountered!

Making use of the philosophical tools of some of the thinkers we have characterized 'human transcendence' and 'divine encounter' as the same happening. As the humans keep on transcending themselves, the Divine gives himself to be encountered. In these characterizations the Divine is presented as a Person, the absolute and infinite being, which is basically the Judeo-Christian understanding of God.

3. Cosmic Transcendence and Cosmic Encounter

To complement the above-given reflection—the encountering of the Divine in response to human transcending—we take a quick look at the cosmic unfolding of the Divine, making use of the insights of Heidegger (1889-1976) and Panikkar (1918-2010).

Heidegger's reflections on God are given in the form of intuitive sparks, and thus they are surrounded by poetic vagueness with philosophical profundity. In the very same process of 'thinking of Being' (*Seinsdenken),* the Divine too gets thought. Heidegger does not 'entify' the Divine as 'someone' or 'something,' and thus he does not consider the 'essence' of God, but the 'essencing' (*wesen*) of the Divine—the manifesting by way of presencing and absencing (*An-und-Ab-wesen*).[20] The 'essencing' (*wesen*) of the Divine is a subject-less manifesting to

18 Roger Burggraeve, *From Self-development to Solidarity* (Leuven: Peeters, 1985), 129.

19 The religion that is based on one's need for God is an 'economic religion,' according to Levinas.

20 "Das 'Wesen des Göttlichen' meint also hier nicht die essential des Göttlichen, sondern desen An-und-Ab-wesen." Hemut Danner, *Das Göttliche und der Gott bei Heidegger,* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1971), 121.

the receptive mortals in the spatio-temporal happening (*Ereignis*)[21] in the world. The Divine is not someone who manifests himself, but the very 'manifesting'[22] to the receptive humans in the ordinary things and events. Every enobling experience that enables the humans to 'see' the wonder of reality is a holy experience, a divine experiencing! In such an approach the Divine is looked at as a dynamic coming-to-be in the time-and-space-bound events and things. In the unmasked disposition of openness to the happening (*Ereignis*) of reality the humans 'see' the cosmic unfolding of the Divine—the whole cosmos as divinely saturated!

The cosmic transcendence and the divine unfolding, poetically sung in the philosophy of Heidegger, gets a philosophical depth in Raimon Panikkar's thought. In presenting the Divine as the self-disclosing to the humans in the spatio-temporal world, Heidegger has hinted at the mutual implication of the Divine, the human and the world; but Panikkar has made it the central tenet of his philosophy through his theory of '*cosmotheandrism*.' It refers to the unity of reality with its three centres: God/*theos*, Human/*anthropos* and World/*cosmos*—Reality is one with its three primordial adjectives![23] Panikkar's plea for a *cosmotheandric* experience of reality reiterates humans' cosmic consciousness—cosmic transcendence. Cosmic religiosity enables one to *experience* the Divine as all-pervasive, to *see* the rhythm of reality and to *hear* its symphony in the heart. Humans find the world as divinized—'sacred secularity' in the language of Panikkar.

Cosmic transcendence is the entry into the borderless situation of 'Cosmic Home,' enabled by the open disposition of the heart. It implies that both spatial and temporal borders are done away with. In 'Cosmic

21 For Heidegger, *Ereignis* is a philosophically pregnant term. Although it ordinarily means 'event,' rendering it as 'event-ing' will convey its dynamic meaning of 'happening.' Cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, "Event-ing (*Ereignis*)," in his *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), 483-85.

22 Heidegger makes use of impersonal verbs to clarify the meaning of subjectless happening. 'It rains' refers to the activity of raining, and not any subject that carries out the activity.

23 Francis X. D'Sa, "Panikkar, Raimon," in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), 1005-09.

Home' there are no distinctions between *here* and *there*, *now* and *then*; the *now* is merged into perenniality, and the *here* is merged into universality. Thus humans become cosmic persons in cosmic home. A cosmic religion with a primordial religiosity is born of humans' cosmic transcendence.

Concluding Reflections

In the process of human transcending, either as individuals or as intersubjective humans, the Divine gets encountered. When the transcending is encompassing the whole cosmos, there takes place a cosmic manifesting of the Divine. One of the positives of cosmic religiosity is the cosmic togetherness of the various religious approaches, without over-emphasizing on the specificity of one's concept of God. Every precision that is added to one's concept of God is an addition to the 'wall' that separates one's 'god' from other 'gods.'[24] History shows that such an approach has led to many an 'anathematization' and 'condemnation'! In the postmodern world where religion is used as a supportive weapon for acts of violence, a cosmic religiosity can be an antidote.

Another important positive of cosmic religiosity is that God and religion are brought down from the supernatural realm to the natural realm in the nearness of humans and the spatio-temporal world. The whole reality is saturated with and a speaking by the Divine. In today's globalized world, where 'economy' is gaining precedence over 'ecology,' a cosmic religiosity is a saving grace, which can help the humans see reality as wonderful, beautiful and sacred, and look at it with respect and devotion! Humans are becoming human by their cosmic transcendence.

24 Cf., Johnson Puthenpurackal, *Heidegger: Through Authentic Totality to Total Authenticity*, 275.

BELIEVING, BECOMING, BEING
From Faith to Fulfilment through Freedom

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ

Abstract: *This article examines the dialectical relationship between believing, becoming and being, leading toward fulfilment through freedom. It argues that faith is not a limitation but the foundation of human flourishing. Drawing from epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and aesthetics, it explores how faith functions as a transformative force, moving individuals from intellectual assent to moral action, existential realization and ultimate liberation. Engaging Augustine, Aquinas, Karl Rahner, Emerich Coreth, Balthasar, Bonhoeffer and Sartre, it shows that faith is not merely cognitive but an ontological and ethical imperative. Faith is presented as an epistemic and moral orientation that initiates transformation, guiding identity and responsibility, culminating in ontological fulfilment and authentic freedom. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study contends that believing is an active engagement with truth that leads to self-realization, communal responsibility and liberation.*

1. Introduction: Fr. George Panthanmackel, and His Quest for Human Fulfillment

a. Introducing the Theme

Faith, understood as both cognitive and existential, grounds human transformation and fulfillment. Transformation signifies the dynamic interplay of divine grace and human agency, while being marks the goal of this process—an ontological realisation of one's ultimate purpose. Christian philosophy sees progress not as linear advancement but as a deepening alignment with divine reality (Marcel, 1967, p. 93). Thus, faith emerges as a transformative power, shaping moral integrity, self-actualization, and freedom (Tillich, 1952, p. 159).

b. Honoring Fr. George Panthanmackel

Fr. George Panthanmackel's work offers a valuable framework for this inquiry. Engaging metaphysics, theological anthropology, and the

Salesian tradition, he emphasized the unity of faith and reason and the metaphysics of love enriched by both western and Indian traditions (Panthanmackel, 2019, p. 45). His approach resonates with Francis de Sales and Lonergan, while his study of Rahner and Coreth highlights the relation between transcendental freedom and divine grace (Rahner, 1978, p. 62; Coreth, 1973, p. 81). His writings underline belief as an evolving existential commitment that integrates faith with authenticity and human flourishing.

c. Philosophical and Theological Framing

Faith is more than epistemology; it is a mode of existence shaping moral and spiritual development (Newman, 1870, p. 89). Augustine and Aquinas depict faith as bridging finite human understanding with divine truth (Aquinas, 1274/1947, p. 21), while Advaita Vedanta frames self-realisation as ontological unity with the Absolute (Radhakrishnan, 1957, p. 117). Coreth (1973, p. 67) presents faith as a horizon of existential questioning, aligning with Rahner's "supernatural existential" (Rahner, 1966, p. 39).

d. Methodological Approach

This study draws upon metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. The metaphysical dimension examines faith as ontological structure (Aquinas, Heidegger, Coreth); the epistemological, its link to reason (Newman, Rahner, Ricoeur); ethics, its impact on moral agency (Kant, Levinas); and aesthetics, its role in revealing divine beauty (Balthasar, 1988, p. 142). Freedom, seen not as arbitrary autonomy but as participation in divine truth, will be explored through Augustine, Bonhoeffer, and Sartre.

1. The Foundations of Faith: Epistemology and the Ethics of Belief

Faith can be understood as both epistemological orientation and ethical commitment. It is not simply intellectual assent but a transformative mode of existence that shapes moral responsibility. In this sense, faith serves as a bridge between knowing and acting, between belief and ethical agency.

a. Defining Faith and Belief

Faith involves an act of trust in realities that transcend empirical verification. Unlike scientific knowledge, which relies on evidence and deduction, faith requires intellectual assent joined with existential commitment (Newman, 1870, p. 103). Aquinas describes faith as a *habitus* by which eternal life begins in us, enabling assent to what is unseen (Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 4, a. 1). This places faith neither in opposition to reason nor as blind acceptance, but as knowledge grounded in transcendence (Pandikattu, 2025).

Emerich Coreth's transcendental metaphysics views human cognition as intrinsically oriented toward the Absolute, making faith the highest form of reason's quest for meaning (Coreth, 1973, p. 89). Rahner's concept of the "supernatural existential" reinforces this by arguing that humanity is structurally open to divine self-communication (Rahner, 1966, p. 52). In this sense, faith arises not from arbitrary choice but from the very structure of human questioning. Yet faith also interacts with doubt. Ricoeur emphasizes faith as dialectic of conviction and critique, where uncertainty is not weakness but a deepening of belief (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 117). This prevents faith from becoming static or dogmatic, instead rooting it in intellectual integrity.

b. Faith and Moral Agency

Belief has ethical consequences. The debate around the "ethics of belief" highlights this responsibility. William Clifford argues that it is always wrong to believe without sufficient evidence (Clifford, 1877, p. 290). Newman counters that faith rests not only on proof but on the "illative sense," a holistic process involving reason, conscience, and lived experience (Newman, 1870, p. 143). Kant, in turn, treats faith in God and immortality as necessary postulates of practical reason: without them, moral life remains incomplete (Kant, 1788/1997, p. 178). Coreth (1973, p. 94) similarly contends that rejecting faith fractures human dignity, since humanity is structured toward transcendence. Thus, faith is not a private conviction but a moral orientation with existential implications.

c. Faith, Doubt, and Humility

Doubt plays a constructive role in faith. Ricoeur's hermeneutics highlights faith as interpretive openness rather than rigid assent (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 136). Bonhoeffer (1944/1997, p. 215) interprets humility as acknowledging uncertainty before divine mystery, while Levinas (1961/1991, p. 47) frames this openness as ethical responsibility to the Other. Instead of undermining belief, doubt sustains its vitality, keeping faith responsive and ethically accountable. In this light, faith is not static acceptance but an existential posture that integrates reason, conscience, and responsibility.

2. Becoming: The Transformation of the Human Person

Faith is not a static possession but a transformative force that reshapes personal identity, moral character, and social responsibility. To believe is already to begin becoming, since faith sets in motion a process of moral and existential growth.

a. Faith as a Process of Becoming

Faith is more than assent to doctrines; it is an existential movement into a new way of being. Gabriel Marcel (1949, p. 128) describes existence as incomplete, with faith serving as an invitation to transcend oneself. Rahner (1978, p. 67) frames faith as a permanent transcendence, an existential orientation that continually surpasses the present self in openness to God. Coreth (1973, p. 74) similarly emphasizes the human intellect as always reaching toward ultimate truth.

Aquinas (1274/1947) interprets faith as *habitus*, a disposition enabling intellectual and moral formation (Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 4, a. 1). It is not only conviction but a principle that orients ethical practice and spiritual life. Thus, faith functions as both invitation and discipline: it calls for transformation while also shaping the conditions for growth.

b. Moral and Spiritual Formation

Becoming requires sustained moral and spiritual practice. Aquinas highlights the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, supported by the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance

(Pieper, 1954, p. 59). These habits enable faith to translate into ethical action. Ignatian spirituality stresses the synergy of divine grace and human cooperation, with faith understood as both gift and task (Lonsdale, 2000, p. 82). Rahner (1966, p. 104) extends this horizon, suggesting that even those outside explicit Christianity may be transformed by grace, thereby expanding faith's transformative potential beyond institutional boundaries. Mystical traditions deepen this process. The Carmelite way (St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila) outlines stages of purgation, illumination, and union, paralleling Vedantic notions of detachment from illusion (Radhakrishnan, 1957, p. 162). Transformation through faith thus integrates moral virtue, grace, and contemplative practice.

c. Social and Communal Dimensions

Faith's transformative power extends into society. Levinas (1961/1991, p. 91) insists that authentic becoming is realized in ethical responsibility to the Other. Liberation theology builds on this by emphasizing faith's inseparability from justice. Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973, p. 104) interprets faith as a commitment to social transformation, while Bonhoeffer (1944/1997, p. 189) speaks of "costly grace," which demands concrete action. Coreth (1973, p. 111) reminds us that becoming cannot remain interior; it requires expression through moral and social engagement. Thus, faith transforms not only the individual but the world, creating new possibilities for justice and love.

1. Being: Ontology, Aesthetics, and the Quest for Fulfillment

Becoming is not the end of faith's journey; it points toward a deeper horizon of being. To "be" in the fullest sense is not merely to exist biologically but to participate in truth, goodness, and beauty. The Christian tradition, enriched by both philosophy and theology, insists that faith culminates in the realization of authentic being.

a. The Metaphysics of Being and Fulfillment

Philosophy has long asked: what does it mean "to be"? For Aquinas, *esse* is the fundamental act that sustains all reality. God is not merely a being among others but *ipsum essesubsistens*—Being itself. Human beings, therefore, attain their fullness not in isolation but in participation

in divine being (Summa Theologica I, q. 4, a. 1). Rahner develops this further through his "supernatural existential": every human is always already oriented toward God, even without explicit awareness (Rahner, 1978, p. 83). This means that being is incomplete if cut off from transcendence. Coreth (1973, p. 92) similarly emphasizes that human questioning presupposes openness to the infinite horizon of truth. Heidegger, though writing in a different key, echoes this when he insists that authentic existence requires confronting the mystery of Being rather than reducing it to functional categories (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 219). Augustine's view adds a moral dimension: evil is a privation of being, a diminishment of one's reality. Sin is thus not only moral failure but ontological failure—a refusal to "be" as one is meant to be (Augustine, 426/1991, p. 243). To live in faith, by contrast, is to deepen one's participation in Being itself.

b. Aesthetic Fulfillment and the Spiritual Imagination

While metaphysics grounds being, aesthetics illuminates its depth. For Hans Urs von Balthasar, beauty is not an ornament but a transcendental alongside truth and goodness. Beauty reveals divine glory, and without it, faith risks becoming dry or moralistic (Balthasar, 1988, p. 147). Aquinas defined beauty as "that which pleases when perceived" (*id quod visum placet*), drawing the soul toward God (Summa Theologica I, q. 39, a. 8). In this sense, aesthetics becomes a path to ontological fulfilment. Sacred art, music, and liturgy are not decorative but transformative, enabling participation in the reality of God. The resonances of chant in a cathedral or the contemplative power of an icon disclose a dimension of being that cannot be grasped by reason alone. Modern theology often emphasizes truth and goodness, sometimes neglecting beauty. Balthasar warns that this eclipse of beauty leads to a weakened and disenchanted faith (1988, p. 164). Reintegrating aesthetics restores faith's imaginative and affective dimension, making being not only an ontological category but a lived, sensuous experience. This aesthetic awareness also resonates with other traditions. The Advaitic pursuit of *sat-chit-ananda* (being-consciousness-bliss) and the Buddhist recognition of impermanence both highlight the interweaving of reality, awareness, and joy. Christian faith joins this chorus by affirming that

beauty discloses the transcendent and enables a more profound way of being.

c. Human Flourishing: Between Autonomy and Grace

The modern quest for authenticity often defines being in terms of autonomy. Sartre (1943/2007) famously described humans as "condemned to be free," compelled to construct meaning in a universe devoid of inherent purpose. Autonomy, in this view, becomes the measure of being. Christian thought, however, reframes freedom not as self-assertion but as self-surrender. Jesus' words—"the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32)—suggest that only in alignment with truth is freedom real. Augustine insists that freedom is the capacity to choose the good; sin, far from exercising freedom, enslaves us to lesser goods (Augustine, 426/1991, p. 276). Aquinas distinguishes between *libertas minor* (freedom from coercion) and *libertasmaior* (freedom for the good), with the latter representing the highest fulfilment of being (Summa Theologica I-II, q. 17, a. 1).

Rahner (1978, p. 91) interprets freedom as radical openness to God, while Coreth (1973, p. 103) argues that autonomy detached from transcendence collapses into emptiness. Bonhoeffer too spoke of "costly grace" as the paradoxical path to freedom through surrender (1944/1997, p. 212). Being is therefore not realized by autonomy alone but by grace—by participation in the Absolute that alone can complete the human person. This perspective has ethical implications. If being is realized only in openness to transcendence, then to reject faith is to curtail existence. The fullness of life requires an orientation toward God that integrates truth, goodness, and beauty into freedom.

d. Being as Relational and Dynamic

Authentic being is never solitary. Levinas reminds us that existence is structured by responsibility to the Other (Levinas, 1961/1991, p. 91). One "is" most deeply not in isolation but in encounter. Similarly, liberation theology interprets being as bound up with justice: to exist authentically is to act in solidarity with the poor and oppressed (Gutiérrez, 1973, p. 104). Thus, being is relational, dynamic, and participatory. It is not

static possession but unfolding gift—ever deepened by love, beauty, and justice.

2. Freedom: The Ultimate Goal of Faith and Fulfillment

The journey of faith, from believing to becoming and being, culminates in freedom. Yet freedom is among the most contested concepts in philosophy and theology. While modern thought often equates it with autonomy and self-determination, the Christian tradition frames true freedom as alignment with truth and love.

a. Freedom as Theological and Philosophical Concept

In secular philosophy, freedom is frequently defined as autonomy. Sartre (1943/2007) describes humans as "condemned to be free," forced to construct meaning in a universe without inherent purpose (p. 112). Freedom, for Sartre, is radical self-definition, unbound by transcendent reference. Christian theology, by contrast, insists that freedom is not the absence of constraints but the capacity to embrace the good. Augustine argued that sin enslaves rather than liberates, since it directs desire toward lesser goods and diminishes the self (426/1991, p. 276). True freedom is found in choosing the good and thus realizing one's deepest nature. Aquinas (1274/1947) distinguished between *libertas minor*—freedom from coercion—and *libertasmaior*—freedom for excellence. Only the latter represents authentic flourishing (Summa Theologica I-II, q. 17, a. 1).

Rahner (1978, p. 98) further interprets freedom as radical openness to God's self-communication. Human freedom, far from being self-sufficient, is grounded in transcendence. Coreth (1973, p. 103) makes the same point philosophically: autonomy severed from the infinite horizon collapses into emptiness. In this light, freedom is not arbitrary choice but participation in truth.

b. Between Autonomy and Surrender

Critics such as Nietzsche argued that Christianity suppresses freedom by demanding submission (Nietzsche, 1882/1974, p. 206). In this reading, faith represents heteronomy rather than autonomy. Yet Christian thought

reframes surrender as paradoxical fulfilment. Bonhoeffer (1944/1997, p. 212) spoke of "costly grace," a surrender that demands everything yet grants true freedom. Jesus' teaching—"Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:39)—captures this paradox. For Rahner (1966, p. 123), faith does not negate freedom but radicalizes it: human beings are already structured toward God, and in responding to this call they realize their true autonomy. Levinas (1961/1991, p. 78) adds an ethical dimension: freedom becomes authentic only when exercised in responsibility for the Other. Thus, faith does not restrict autonomy but gives it orientation. Freedom becomes not arbitrary self-assertion but the power to live truthfully in relation to God and others.

c. Social and Political Dimensions

Freedom also has communal and political significance. Religious traditions have often been catalysts for liberation—whether Gandhi's *satyagraha*, Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights struggle, or Latin American liberation theology. Faith has inspired resistance against injustice precisely because it locates human dignity in transcendence. Gutiérrez (1973, p. 143) argues that liberation is inseparable from faith: spiritual freedom must manifest as social and economic justice. Catholic Social Teaching echoes this, insisting that human freedom cannot be realized apart from solidarity and structural transformation. At the same time, freedom in pluralistic societies must avoid religious coercion. Locke (1689/1983, p. 88) warned against imposing belief, affirming freedom of conscience as foundational to civic life. The challenge is to maintain faith's liberative power without lapsing into authoritarianism. Coreth (1973, p. 114) offers guidance: true freedom emerges in dialogue, not isolation. Faith remains credible when lived with openness, conviction, and humility.

3. Conclusion: Integrating Faith, Becoming, Being, and Freedom

Faith emerges not as a static assent but as a dynamic force that initiates transformation, sustains growth, and culminates in fulfilment. The path traced here—from believing to becoming, from becoming to being, and from being to freedom—shows faith as an existential orientation

shaping the whole of human life. Believing grounds existence in openness to transcendence, becoming expresses this openness through moral and spiritual formation, being discloses its metaphysical and aesthetic depth, and freedom represents its final fruit. At each stage, faith integrates reason, ethics, and imagination. Newman's notion of the "illative sense" and Rahner's "supernatural existential" reveal that faith is not opposed to reason but its deepest horizon. Aquinas' conception of faith as *habitus* demonstrates that belief is a disposition enabling moral growth, while Augustine and Coreth underscore that refusing faith diminishes one's very being. Thinkers as diverse as Ricoeur, Bonhoeffer, and Levinas highlight that faith matures through doubt, responsibility, and surrender—reminding us that authenticity lies not in certainty but in openness to the Other and to divine mystery.

Being, in this context, is not abstract ontology but participation in God's own reality. Aquinas' metaphysics of *esse*, Rahner's theology of transcendence, and Balthasar's theological aesthetics converge to show that faith culminates in a vision of truth, goodness, and beauty. Aesthetic experience—whether through art, music, or liturgy—becomes not peripheral but central, since it reveals the splendour of being in ways argument alone cannot. Faith without beauty risks sterility; with it, faith unfolds as wonder and joy. Freedom, finally, is not reduced to autonomy or arbitrary choice. Augustine and Aquinas teach that freedom is perfected not by detachment but by choosing the good; Rahner and Coreth see it as openness to transcendence; Bonhoeffer frames it as the paradoxical liberation found in surrender; and Gutiérrez demonstrates its social horizon in liberation and justice. Authentic freedom therefore combines personal transformation with responsibility for others, balancing self-realization with solidarity.

The dialectic of faith, becoming, being, and freedom offers a coherent vision of human fulfilment. Far from restricting potential, faith enables human flourishing by aligning the self with ultimate reality. It is at once intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and social—a total orientation of existence. In a fragmented world, faith integrates reason and imagination, autonomy and grace, individuality and community. It points to the truth that fulfilment lies not in possession or autonomy

alone but in openness to mystery, in responsibility for the Other, and in participation in divine love.

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UNIVERSAL LOVE
A Response to Global Crises

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Abstract**:** *We are living in a world inflicted by many crises, such as climate change, water crisis, food crisis, migration crisis, conflicts and wars, health crisis, economic crisis that are intimidating the world with the slow death of nature and annihilation of the human species. They need immediate attention and cure. The crises are complicated with the rise of new scientific discoveries, technological growth, and the rapid changes that we witness in our daily living. All the crises are interconnected and they are directly or indirectly related to the ideology of globalization. Humanity yearns for peace and fraternity. It searches for a new ideology that could build on a network of relationships to usher in a fraternal society; a paradigm shift in our thinking and in our attitudes towards life and towards environment. Our contention in this article is that a paradigm of Universal Love characterised by compassion, empathy and love for everyone and everything, could foster understanding of a sense of interconnectedness among individuals, communities, and nature so as to realize social inclusion, fraternity, and realization of oneness. The practice of universal love in its multifaceted dimensions in the Christian tradition as well as in the Indian tradition offer us examples that it could serve as an answer to the global crises.*

1. Introduction

Global crisis is a reality. We live in a world marked by discord, dissension, hatred, and violence which are the byproducts of various crises, conflicts, and wars. Life today has become deeply unsustainable and increasingly complex. There are growing social inequalities and environmental impacts. In fact, we are now in a global crisis that includes climate crisis, water crisis, food crisis, migration crisis, health crisis, economic crisis, wars, and conflicts etc. The global crisis that the world experiences is environmental, economic, social, and political because billions of people are affected environmentally, economically, socially, and politically. The crises are complicated with the rise of new

scientific discoveries, technological growth, and the rapid changes that we witness in our daily living. All the crises are interconnected and they are directly or indirectly related to the ideology of globalization, a process that has been taking place for hundreds of years with benefits and problems. According to F. Houtart, "The economic development model that we have, with its political, cultural and psychological consequences is at the origin of these imbalances."[1] In this crisis-filled situation there is a deep yearning for peace and fraternity in each one of us. Can we really hope for peace and fraternity? Is humanity capable of ushering in an era of peace on earth? What can really help humanity to overcome the crises and build a world filled with peace and fraternity? What can really change the situation? It demands a new ideology that could build on a network of relationships to usher in a fraternal society; a paradigm shift in our thinking and in our attitudes towards life and towards environment. Our contention in this article is that a paradigm of Universal Love can be an apt response to the Global Crises that we face today. We shall begin this article with the definition and classification of global crisis, proceed with the descriptions of some of the serious global crises, analyze the underlying reasons for the crises and then we shall discuss how universal love can be a response to the global crises.

2. Definition and Classification of Global Crisis

It is very difficult to define Global Crisis because it can be looked and analyzed from different perspectives. Generally, we see natural disaster, pandemic, economic recession, armed conflict and war, or environmental degradation and the like as crises. The advanced English dictionary defines crisis as "an unstable situation of extreme danger or difficulty." It could be equated to an emergency during a patient's illness or in any other situation. Any emergency could be considered as an existential crisis. A crisis becomes global "by virtue of posing far-reaching threats to health, environment, or financial and political infrastructure in ways that call for a coordinated international response."[2] According to

1 F. Houtart, "From Common Goods to the Common Good of Humanity," HAOL, No. 26 (October 2011), 87-102 (87).

2 David Schmidtz, "Global Crises" *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Vol 40, Issue 2 (Winter 2023), 273-82 (273)

Kirsten Gelsdorf, 'global challenges' are defined as any major trend, shock, or development that has the potential for serious global impacts.[3] She identifies and lists ten challenges that need immediate attention and humanitarian support.[4] The United Nations in its Millenium Project with Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) enumerates 15 global challenges facing humanity that demands continuous attention and active works of emancipation.[5] It is very difficult to bring out an exhaustive list or analysis of global challenges or crises but for our purpose we shall briefly describe some of the major crises that demand greater attention and immediate action.

3. A Brief Description of Global Crises

Climate Change: The first in the list is climate change. It is the defining crisis of our time. United Nations survey on climate change perceives that "No corner of the globe is immune from the devastating consequences of climate change. Rising temperatures are fuelling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism. Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning."[6] The year 2023 saw multiple earthquakes around the world. Turkey, Syria, Morocco, and Afghanistan

3 Kirsten Gelsdorf, Global Challenges and their impact on International Humanitarian Action, OCHA Occasional Policy Briefing Series – No. 1, January 2010, p.4. https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Global_Challenges_Policy_Brief_Jan10. Accessed on 19 May 2025

4 They are, 1) Climate change; 2) Extreme poverty and inequality; 3) Financial and economic crisis; 4) Food crisis; 5) Water scarcity; 6) Energy security; 7) Migration; 8) Population growth and demographic shift; 9) Urbanization; and 10) Health pandemics and infectious diseases. Gelsdorf, *Global Challenges and Their Impact on International Humanitarian Action,* 4-5.

5 The global challenges according to the Millennium Project are:1) Sustainable development and climate change; 2) Clean water; 3) Population and resources; 4) Democratization; 5) Long term perspectives; 6) Global convergence of IT; 7) Rich-poor gap; 8) Health issues; 9) Capacity to decide; 10) Peace and conflict; 11) Status of women; 12) Transnational organized crime; 13) Energy; 14) Science and technology; 15) Global ethics. https://millennium-project.org/challenges-overview accessed on 16 May 2025.

6 https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win accessed on 20 May 2025.

suffered series of catastrophic earthquakes, resulting in thousands of deaths, and extensive destruction leaving many civilians injured and homeless.[7] The cost of natural disasters is increasing. The public is not prepared for the severity of future climate changes.

Water Crisis: The next in the list of serious crises is water crisis. The global water crisis refers to the widespread scarcity of fresh water and inadequate sanitation, impacting billions worldwide. People need water for agriculture for the growing world population. This crisis is driven by a combination of factors, including climate change, population growth, pollution, and unsustainable water management practices. The consequences of this crisis are severe, impacting human health, economics, and the environment. The conditions will be worse in some regions than others, with the United Nations projecting that 47 percent of the global population is likely to be living in areas reeling under "high" water stress by the end of the next decade.[8]

Food Crisis: Water crisis is followed by food crisis. According to World Food Programme (WFP), the scale of the current global hunger and malnutrition crisis is enormous. A total of 1.9 million people are in the grips of catastrophic hunger, primarily in Gaza and Sudan but also in pockets of South Sudan, Haiti, and Mali. They are teetering on the brink of famine. Many food crises involve multiple overlapping issues that are building year on year.[9] The major reasons for food crisis are conflicts, climate change, economy, and displacement. In 2023, around 2.33 billion people globally faced moderate or severe food insecurity, a number that has not changed significantly since the sharp upturn in 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those, over 864 million people experience severe food insecurity, going without food for an entire day or more at times.

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7 https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/8-crises-world-must-not-look-away-2024 accessed on 14 May 2025.

8 United Nations, *Managing Water under Uncertainty and Risk*, vol. 1 of the World Water Development Report 4 (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UN-Water, March 2012).

9 https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis Accessed on 20 May 2025.

According to the UN Hunger Hotspots report released by the Global Network against Food Crises (GNAFC), identifies 22 countries and territories where acute food insecurity is expected to worsen from November 2024 to May 2025.[10] Population growth is an added reason for food crisis.

Migration Crisis: Migration is a larger problem today. The year 2024 was marked by record-breaking deaths, a surge in displacement, and evolving trends in international migration. The year saw an increase in international migrants, with 304 million people in 72 countries globally.[11] There were many hotspots with different problems that provide scores of migrants to the world. The destruction and displacement, epidemics and a pandemic in Syria caused by the earthquakes in February 2023 made close to 5.2 million people to migrate across the region. The outbreak of the conflict in Sudan in April 2023 has resulted in one of the biggest displacement crises globally, with over 6 million people so far internally displaced. The Somali Peninsula, composed of Somaliland, Somalia. Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, more than 49 million people are displaced by conflict, drought, and flooding. Expanding criminal gang violence in an increasingly fragile country, Haiti, has forced millions of Haitian migrants to leave their country making perilous journey through the jungle to reach the United States.[12]

We do not see any end to the migration crisis. Day by day the causes and numbers are increasing. Migration crises are often triggered by conflicts, violence, persecution, human rights violations, and climate change. They can also be fuelled by economic hardship, lack of opportunity and natural disasters.[13] Solving the migration crisis, therefore, requires us to see the inter-sectionality of multiple problems and must be addressed through a whole systems approach.[14]

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10 https://www.fightfoodcrises.net/hunger-hotspots accessed on 20 May 2025.

11 https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/8-crises-world-must-not-look-away-2024 accessed on 14 May 2025.

12 https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/8-crises-world-must-not-look-away-2024 accessed on 14 May 2025.

13 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/15/the-devastating-impact-of-15-months-of-war-on-gazaAccessed on 21 May 2025.

14 Zack Walsh, "Responding with Love to a Civilization in Crisis," inhttps://www.

War and Conflicts: Wars and conflicts are not new in human history but come from the time humans lived in unorganized nature states to the present-day globalized society. The contemporary society is dotted with many minor and major conflicts, wars and crises that lead humanity towards extinction. The war between Palestine and Israel goes on for 20 months now. A google search says, as of 14 May, over 55,000 people (53,528 Palestinians and 1,706 Israelis) have been reported killed in the Gaza war. There are also 166 journalists and media workers, 120 academics, and over 224 humanitarian aid workers killed in the war.[15] A report in the *Guardian* compiled in January 2025, states that more than 110,000 have been wounded and many of them now live with life changing injuries. Nine in ten homes in the territory are destroyed or damaged. The destruction of homes and the infrastructure of daily life could be recognized as a new war crime, "domicide."[16] The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has sharply deteriorated in recent months. There are critical shortages of vital resources such as water, food, medicine, electricity, and fuel. At present 3.1 million people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory urgently need humanitarian assistance.

Besides the crises described above there are also others like health crisis, economic crisis, debt crisis etc., are affecting the globe in various ways. **Health crisis**, both historical and contemporary, significantly disrupted the health of population, often leading to high mortality and morbidity rates, as well as significant social and economic disruption. Throughout history, humanity has grappled with various infectious diseases, including plague, cholera, yellow fever, tuberculosis, polio, smallpox, measles, and influenza, each leaving its mark on the world.[17] In our times there are HIV/AIDS pandemic which already caused millions of deaths worldwide continues to be a significant health concern. The Ebola virus epidemic in 2014-2016 in West Africa caused widespread fear and disruption, SARS outbreak in 2002-2003 Zika Fever outbreaks and COVID-19 pandemic have resulted millions of deaths worldwide, significant economic disruption, and societal changes.

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rifs-potsdam.de/en/blog/2019/09/responding-love-civilization-crisis Accessed on 15 May 2025.

15 https://www.google.com/search?q=the+casualties+on+the+israel+side+in+the+gaza+war Accessed on 21 May 2025.

16 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/15/the-devastating-impact-of-15-months-of-war-on-gazaAccessed on 21 May 2025.

17 https://www.google.com/search?q=health+crisis+history Assessed on 23 May 2025.

The world encountered a Great Economic Depression in the 1930s. After this the recent **Economic Crisis** (2007-2009) that originated in the United States and quickly spread through multiple channels to other industrialized countries[18] has put several western countries on the verge of bankruptcy. Many countries "experienced deterioration in labour market conditions associated with significant retrenchment in certain sectors, decline in real wages, shifts from skilled to unskilled and regular to casual work, and a weakening of union power."[19] Many analysts affirm that this is not just one more of the cyclical crises that are frequent in capitalism; instead, it is a real structural crisis[20] that has put into question the entire economic system. The recent tax war initiated by Mr. Trump, the president of America, and responded by China, Canada, and other countries have created a trade war and analysts are afraid that it can impact global trade and economic stability. It can even lead to an economic recession. There is also a **Debt Crisis**. The global deft continues to grow. As of 2022 global debt was the equivalent of 305 trillion USD. This includes debt by both public and private debtors.[21]

4. The Underlying Reasons for the Global Crises

Most of the ideologies and paradigms that lead humanity towards crisis and destruction are rooted on selfishness and greediness. The conflicts and civil wars in the history were orchestrated by humans' greed, selfishness and insatiability. Therefore, one cannot think and speak of global crisis without mentioning the paradigm of globalization with its capitalist economy. In capital economy consumerism and greed function as the engines of the economy. Greater attention is given to foster productivity through more and more investments. The underlying factors in all these are greed and unfettered ambition. Houtart succinctly

18 The Global economic crisis: Causes and transmission, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2011/chapter1.pdf. Accessed on 15th May 2025.

19 Social and Political Dimensions of the Global Crisis: Implications for Developing Countries, Report of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Conference 12-13 November 2009, Geneva, 2.

20 P. DE Grauwe, "The crisis as a paradigm shift," in A. Hemerijck , B. Knapen, E. Van Doorne, ed., *After Shocks. Economic Crisis and Institutional Choice* (Amsterdam UP: Amsterdam, 2009), 75.

21 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_debt Accessed on 23 May 2025.

summarizes the fundamental logic behind the recent crises: "All the crises that have become acute in recent times are the result of the same fundamental logic: 1) It conceives of development in a way that ignores the environmental and social damage; 2) It is based on the idea of a planet with infinite resources; 3) It prioritizes exchange value over use value; and 4) It equates the economy with the rate of profitability and the accumulation of the capital, creating enormous inequalities."[22] His thinking clearly points out globalization with the capital economy as the main culprit.

Globalization originated in the ancient trade practices, stabilized with the conquest and exploitation of Africa, Asia and Latin America, expanded with the rise of capitalism and industrialization and established in the corporate takeovers of liberalization and technological development.[23] Throughout history, conquering empires created a mixing of cultures, ideas, trade, technology, and people across conquered lands, killing many vibrant cultures, languages, life styles and other diversities. Globalization sees the world as one. The popular phrases like, globalism, global village, global citizens, global governance, global development, global organization, etc., describe and reveal the uniform nature and purpose of the system. In our country, phrases like, one nation one election, one nation one ration card, one nation one language, one nation one religion etc., are expressions of this ideology. This ideology slowly but steadily alters many of the long-standing cultural significances. For example, unity in diversity was considered as a great concept in our country but it is slowly changing into unity in uniformity. Private and corporate entities are preferred today over community and public welfare undertakings. Differences that are glorified once are now seen as divisive forces. Discriminations and divisions multiply and the different communities who lived in harmony are shattered and broken into pieces.

Of course, globalization with its capitalist economy is perceived to have brought "the emancipation of the individual, human rights, the idea of

22 Houtart, "From Common Goods to the Common Good of Humanity," 87.

23 Okoro and Osunwoke, "Common humanity not common community: The solution to global crisis," 2-3.

democracy, the progress of science and its technological applications"[24] to the society. However, the hegemony of the capitalist market and the imposition of its laws reduced most of these advances to the benefit of a small percentage of people. The steps and initiatives taken by different social groups to share the benefits of globalization equally ended in failures because of the systemic defects in the paradigm. In fact, globalization has endangered the fundamental elements for the collective life of humanity on the earth; led to the over-exploitation of nature, gave birth to the capitalist market economy that invaded all aspects of life, created highly centralized politics, and developed unbridled individualism. Neo-liberalism, a political and economic philosophy that advocates free markets, deregulation, and minimal government intervention in the economy is introduced to reduce the negative effects of capitalism, but it widened the gap between the rich and the poor, with wealth concentrating at the top. It prioritized economic growth over environmental protection, leading to increased pollution and resource depletion. The consequence is that it has made more divisions and destructions.

5. Need for an Alternative Paradigm

Ordinary individuals of the modern society recognize money, material possessions, power, social status, recognition, respect, reputation, and popularity to be valuable than justice, love, and fraternity. Globalization with its capitalist market economy or neo-liberalism did not help the human community to build a just and fraternal society where there are no discriminations and divisions. The United Nations adopted "The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," a set of 17 goals in 2015 to address global challenges and promote sustainable development by 2030. Sustainability means the ability of humankind to sustain itself indefinitely. According to Brundtland Report, "sustainability entails meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.[25] R. Ulluwishewa

24 F. Houtart, "From Common Goods to the Common Good of Humanity," 88 x.

25 Brundtland Report. World commission onenvironment and development, ed. *Our Common Future* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press;1987). http://www.un-documents.net/our-commonfuture.pdf.

modifies and makes it better; and according to him, "Sustainability is the ability of any individual, community or country to meet their needs and live happily without compromising the ability of other individuals, communities, countries and future generations to meet their needs and live happily."[26] The sustainable development goals were aimed to end poverty and hunger, improve health and education, reduce inequality, tackle climate change, and protect the planet.[27]

Ten years have passed, and what is happening to the sustainable development goals? A study released in the journal *PLOS One* and shared by *India Today* revealed that no country, including India, is on track to meet all 17 goals by the target year of 2030. The researchers call for a new, systemic approach to achieve the goals that are region-specific and account for the complex linkages between goals.[28]The failure to achieve the sustainable development goals and the continuation of the crises urgently needs a radical rethinking. It means a complete reorientation, a paradigm shift. We are all connected, interconnected and I think we just need to change the paradigm to where we include 'all' of the people, instead of only 'some' of the people. The root cause of our unsustainable behaviour is our perceived separateness from fellow human beings and the natural environment, which results in self-centredness, greed, and fear. This is where spirituality, as a means of overcoming this perceived separateness by love becomes important. Universal love can regulate our behaviour and overcome the perceived separateness. The inner transformation it brings can make the behaviour of individuals, communities, and countries sustainable. Universal love can bring an end to the global crises.

6. What Is Universal Love?

Ancient Greek philosophy upheld four different kinds of love, viz. *Eros, Philia, Storage* and *Agape*. *Eros* is an intensely emotional, erratic,

26 R. Ulluwishewa, "Spirituality, Universal Love and Sustainable Behaviour," *Annals of Behavioural Neuroscience* 1/1 (2018), 66-76 (66).

27 https://sdgs.un.org/goals

28 https://www.indiatoday.in/environment/story/ten-years-on-no-country-on-track-to-achieve-un-sustainable-development-goals-2693088-2025-03-13 Accessed on 23 May 2025.

passionate, and possessive love. *Philia* is the extremely widespread kind of love that endorses communal well-being such as love of neighbour, attention, collaboration, commitment, and admiration for near people and friends. *Storage* is affectionate and gentle form of love. *Agape* is ordinarily known as the universal love. It is the purest form of love.[29] It refers to an all-encompassing and unconditional affection for all beings, transcending personal biases and social divisions. It is a concept that emphasizes compassion and kindness without discrimination, recognizing the interconnectedness of all things. Some philosophical and spiritual traditions view universal love as a manifestation of a deeper spiritual connection, a realization that we are all part of a larger whole.

Post, a professor of Bioethics and Family Medicine and President of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, in his book *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion and Service,* defines love as: The essence of love is to affectively affirm as well as to unselfishly delight in the well-being of others, and to engage in acts of care and service on their behalf; unlimited love extends to all others without exception, in an enduring and constant way.[30] Unlimited love is universal love and universal love, characterized by compassion, empathy, and forgiveness, can offer a powerful antidote to global crises by fostering understanding, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness among individuals and communities. By shifting from a mindset of separation and competition to one of shared humanity, it can inspire collective action and help bridge divides.[31] Universal love to become effective should be expressed in our thinking, in our attitudes and in our actions. In the following paragraphs I would like to highlight how universal love is practiced in the Christian tradition as well as in the Indian tradition and how it can be used as a response to the global crises.

29 Bonani Sinha, "Vivekananda's Notion of Divine Universal Love," ŚrīNālandā, Vol. II, Issue I (May 2023), 56-68 (57).

30 SG. Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), vii. https://www.templetonpress.org/books/unlimited-love. Accessed on 15 May 2025.

31 Zack Walsh, Responding with Love to a Civilization in Crisis https://www.rifs-potsdam.de/en/blog/2019/09/responding-love-civilization-crisis Accessed on 15 May 2025.

7. Social Inclusion and Fraternity

In the Christian tradition, agape love, or universal love, is equated with the love of God for humanity, well expressed by John the evangelist. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Jesus revealed it in the offering of himself without reserve and without calculation for the redemption of humanity. He manifested it through his life, words, and deeds. Love is at the centre of his teachings. "Love one another, just as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34) is the new commandment that Jesus has given to his followers. His understanding of love is even extended to the enemies (cf. Matt 5:43-47). The golden rule of Jesus, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12) encapsulate all of Christian morality into a single statement and it can be considered as a mini-commentary on Mosaic precept, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18).[32] It involves social inclusion and fraternity. Jesus loved everyone irrespective of his/her status and showed compassion to the needy and vulnerable. He had more concern and love for those who are marginalised and lived in the periphery of the society. Jesus' inclusive approach and his fraternal outlook in everything is a perfect model for the practice of universal love.

The inclusive approach and the fraternal outlook that Jesus practiced and taught his followers are carried forward by the Church through the practice of love in its different aspects. Recent Popes from Paul VI to Francis set before the world the ideal of a 'civilization of love' for practice. Pope Paul VI coined this phrase; Pope John Paul II developed and popularised the idea and Pope Francis further carried forward [33] to promote a society built on truth and love. The concept was rooted in the Second Vatican Council and has been used to emphasise the universal importance of love to build a more just and peaceful world.[34]

32 Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 117-18.

33 Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* (24 May 2015), 231.

34 https://www.ncregister.com/blog/42nd-anniversary-of-jpii-s-election-the-civilization-of-love-is-the-way-of-the-church. Accessed on 23 May 2025.

The Church as the universal sacrament of salvation seeks to advance the integral development of every person, of every humanity, and of all people, is the ultimate horizon of the common good.[35] Pope Francis who headed the Church from 2013 to 2025 introduced significant reforms, global outreach, and a focus on justice and environmental concerns. His encyclicals "*Laudato Si*: on care for our common home" and "*Fratelli Tutti*" advocating the idea of fraternity are documents that teach the interconnectedness of human society and nature.

The encyclical "*Laudato Si*"[36] released on 24 May 2015, emphasizes the urgent need for environmental protection, and called for a unified global response to address the interconnected crises of social and environmental degradation. The document highlights the intrinsic value of all creation, the importance of a spiritual connection with nature, and the responsibility of humanity to protect the planet and its inhabitants. Moreover, it speaks of the severity of climate change, pollution, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss, urging immediate action to address these issues. According to Francis, the environmental and social issues are intertwined, and solutions require an integrated approach. Social inclusion and fraternity are emphasised to build a just and peaceful world. He has repeatedly pointed out that a society in which the sense of fraternity fades away is incapable of progress and is without a future. A more authentic fraternity must be recovered in social and economic life, whereby the lived expressions of gratuitousness, gift, solidarity, sharing, and relational exchanges can be found.[37] Fraternity constitutes a true alternative that challenges and stems the fluctuations of an economy that is killing the human and nature.

His encyclical "*Fratelli Tutti*,"[38] released on 3 October 2020, advocated universal fraternity and social friendship as a way to build a better world. The encyclical emphasized the importance of compassion and

35 Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 48.

36 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html Accessed on 22 May 2025.

37 https://fotosacroconvento.omeka.net/exhibits/show/fraternal-economy/the Lord gave me brothers Accessed on 22 May 2025.

38 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papafrancesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html Accessed on 22 May 2025.

solidarity, urging individuals and institutions to prioritize common good and the wellbeing of all the people. It also called for dialogue and mutual respect, rejecting division, indifference, and war.[39] The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in collaboration with the Dicastery for Promoting Human Development recently offered some understanding to develop a new form of economy and finance, with rules and regulations directed towards the enlargement of the common good and respect for human dignity along the lines indicated by the social teachings of the Church. [40]

The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, originally published on 10th December 1948, recognises that dignity is equal for all human beings;[41] and it is the dignity of persons which enables human beings to enter into and to exist in relationships. People's recognition and understanding of their own transcendent dignity should dispose them to learn not to be satisfied with only themselves but to encounter their neighbour in a network of relationships that are evermore authentically human[42] Recognising and understanding one's dignity will make him/her to commit to the common good, the wellbeing of one and all. Thus, the Christian tradition as well the teachings of the recent Popes, very especially the teaching of Pope Francis, invites everyone to practice social inclusion and fraternity, expressions of universal love, as antidote to the global crises.

8. Realization of Oneness

Indian philosophical tradition offers different ideas to exercise universal love. I would like to highlight the concepts of three popular Indians, the concept of "*Sarvodaya*" of Mahatma Gandhi, "Spiritual Humanism" of Rabindranath Tagore and the idea of the "Realization of Oneness" of Swami Vivekananda as expressions of universal love

39 https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-10/fratelli-tutti-pope-fraternity-social-friendship-short-summary.html Accessed on 22 May 2025.

40 https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/05/17/180517e.html Accessed on 22 May 2025.

41 https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights Accessed on 22 Nay 2025.

42 Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson, "Fraternal Economy of Integral and Sustainable Development," *Horizons*, No. 27 (Summer 2024), 50-55 (51).

that can serve as antidote to the existing global crises. Mahatma Gandhi advocated the concept of *Sarvodaya*, which means "universal uplift" or "progress of all." This ideal encompassed the dignity of labour, an equitable distribution of wealth, communal self-sufficiency, and individual freedom.[43] In his view, "love is a kind of feeling of oneness, the positive aspect of non-violence, it is also the energy that cleanses one's personal life and uplifts one, and love brings some noble feelings such as sympathy, forgiveness, tolerance, kindness, etc."[44] He says, "Love never claims, it ever gives. Love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself."[45] His concept of *Sarvodaya* and understanding of love made him to champion the principle of social justice emphasising equality, non-violence, and the well-being of all individuals particularly the marginalized. Gandhiji's principles are universal love in practice.

Rabindranath Tagore promoted "Spiritual Humanism," a humanistic approach in which human relationship is worshipped as God. One cannot realize spirituality by shutting his or her eyes, ears, tongue, and five senses and chanting mantras in front of some idol but by helping others, doing unselfish works with his fellowmen in this very universe and thus spirituality can be reached by feeding poor people, serving the destitute, and loving all human beings. God is not to be found in the temple but with the poorest and the lowliest and the lost. In Tagore's spiritualism, there is no place for selfishness and narrow individualism, we are part of the 'great chain of being,' so it is important to realize our relation to the larger part of the world.[46] In his view, love is selfless, as it does not claim possession, but it offers liberty to relate oneself with others and with the world. Spiritual humanism is an expression of universal love.

Swami Vivekananda, another Indian philosopher, advocated the Realization of Oneness as universal love. In his view, the world is selfish and God is unselfish. Selfishness is a product of ignorance and it is very much earthly and unselfishness is the product of knowledge

43 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarvodaya Accessed on 23 May 2025.
44 Sinha, "Vivekananda's Notion of Divine Universal Love," 58.
45 M. K. Gandhi, *Young India* (09.07.1925), Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.
46 Sinha, "Vivekananda's Notion of Divine Universal Love," 67.

and it is the form of God.[47] He proclaimed that, "If man grows only physically and mentally but does not side by side grow also spiritually, he will actually use his strength to exploit others, express himself in violence and war, to harm and destroy others and to harm and destroy even himself. But when he grows spiritually also and manifests his ever-present divine dimension, he becomes, capable to express himself in love and compassion, becomes to radiate humanistic impulses towards not only other human beings but also animals."[48] For Vivekananda, God is present everywhere and in everything and he can be realized through love. One can find God if s/he loves living beings.

The concept that can help to realize the unity and to save the world from total disaster is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the entire world is your relation). It helps us to denounce the material ideas that are at the height of their glory and power today and to grow in our spiritual consciousness that we should love everyone "because we are all one in the Supreme Spirit known as Brahman. If we realize the innate divinity of living beings and the essential spirituality of life while running our society then we can make our society free from the bane of privilege and intolerance, inequality, and injustice, which have plagued our society today."[49] The important insight of Vivekananda's notion of love is that it does make the realization of unity. The realization of oneness is the first principle of Vedanta. The novelty of this ideas that it gives much impetus to the practical side of life, it does something positive to alleviate the sorrow of others and the realization of oneness.

9. Conclusion

We are living in a world inflicted by many crises that need immediate attention and cures. The many global crises like climate change, water crisis, food crisis, and many other crises are serious crises that are intimidating the world with the slow death of nature and annihilation of the human species. The different remedies introduced by the United Nations and the Individual countries of the world are not bringing the

47 Sinha, "Vivekananda's Notion of Divine Universal Love," 65.

48 S. Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: The Yogas and other works* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1984), 246.

49 Sinha, "Vivekananda's Notion of Divine Universal Love," 64-65.

desired results. The Sustainable Development Goals initiated by the United Nations has brought some changes in certain pockets of the world, but could not change the situation. The crises continue to lead the world towards an irreversible danger. In this condition, universal love, characterised by compassion, empathy, and love for everyone and everything, could foster understanding of a sense of interconnectedness among individuals, communities, and nature so as to realize social inclusion, fraternity, and realization of oneness. The practice of universal love in its multifaceted dimensions in the Christian tradition as well as in the Indian tradition offer us examples that universal love could serve as an answer to the global crises.

CHRISTIAN UNITY
An Ongoing Process

Francis Poovelil, MSFS

Abstract: *This article explores the theological and historical journey of Christian Unity as an ongoing process rooted in faith, prayer, and mission of the Church. Beginning with the diversity of the early Christian communities and the subsequent divisions—such as the East-West Schism and the Protestant Reformation—the paper traces the major causes of disunity, including doctrinal, cultural, and political factors. It highlights the Ecumenical Movement as a key initiative aiming to rediscover visible unity among the Churches through dialogue, cooperation, and shared faith. Theologically, the unity of the Trinity is presented as the model for Christian unity—diverse yet harmoniously one. Unity, seen as a gift of God energized by the Holy Spirit, is not uniformity but a communion enriched by diversity. The article emphasizes that Christian unity requires both divine grace and human commitment, involving humility, prayer, reconciliation, and mutual understanding. It concludes that while full unity remains an unfulfilled goal, the process of Ecumenism is a sacred duty and ongoing effort of the global Church to respond faithfully to Christ's prayer "that they may all be one" (Jn. 17:21).*

Introduction

Christian unity is a complex and deeply theological issue that has been a topic of discussion for centuries. Historically, there have been significant divisions within Christianity, such as those between Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy, as well as numerous denominational splits. These divisions have often stemmed from differences in doctrine, interpretation of Scripture, Church authority, and liturgical practices. However, the idea of Christian unity remains a goal for many within the faith. The Ecumenical movement may be defined as the movement among the Churches in order to rediscover their visible unity so that the Church may become a more credible and effective sign of unity in the world.[1] When Jesus prays, "May they be

1 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2021), 21.

one as we are one," he means that Christian unity will be rooted in the shared conviction that God is seen and known in Jesus (Jn.14:10; 17:3), that the divine name is shared by Father and Son (Jn.17:11–12). So, Ecumenism denotes the full range of activities and efforts into which Christians and the Christian Churches at every level of membership and participation, invest time and energy for the sake of unity between them, a unity that, according to the Christian Confession, is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and manifests itself in common faith and practice.[2]

The Reality of the Church

It would be a gross mistake to conceive that the early Church was a highly centralized and institutionalized religious community headed by Peter and assisted by the other apostles. The early Christian Communities were not homogeneous or uniform but diverse with different forms of ministries, different patterns of organization, different formulations and articulations of faith and different ways of worship arising from different historical, cultural and religious contexts. They were only loosely linked with each other, and conflicts and tensions were also not entirely absent between the different local Churches. But the early Christians were fully conscious that the Church is one—one fellowship in the communion of all the local Churches—that they all shared the same faith in Jesus Christ in whom they were incorporated into one Body.[3]

Diversity of different local Churches was an essential part of the original vision of Christianity. The New Testament books definitely witness to different types of Christianity existing side by side with mutual recognition and acceptance though not altogether free from conflicts, tensions and controversies.[4] From the beginning of the Church, its unity was threatened time and again by various heresies and schisms, many of which gradually disappeared from the scene, while others continued

2 R. David Nelson and Charles Rath II, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 11.

3 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism*, 31-32.

4 James D.G.Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity, (London: SCM, 1977), 21.

to exist and brought about lasting divisions in the Church.[5] The Church of Christ is necessarily one, although from the earliest times divisions of one kind or another have existed. The causes of these divisions have been manifold. The first division in the Church was caused by the effort to impose the ceremonial law upon the Gentiles, and which the Apostolic Council of A.D. 50, only partially healed.[6]

Perhaps the most tragic among many divisions happened in the Church was the separation of eastern and western Christianity in 1054. The reasons for this division were more political than doctrinal. Since the foundation of the city of Constantinople as the "new Rome" and the divisions of the Roman Empire into East and West, political rivalry between Rome and Constantinople was fermenting. Differences in language, culture, liturgy and theology gradually widened the gulf between East and West. In addition to the doctrinal controversy the *filioque* added fuel to the issue. The actual break between the East and West came in the year 1054 when a Papal delegation went to Constantinople and the chief Papal delegate, Cardinal Humbert, laid on the altar of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople the Papal Bull excommunicating the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, for his unwelcoming attitude as well as for his heretical ideas and practices. The Patriarch in turn excommunicated the Papal delegates, which perpetuated the division between the Eastern Orthodoxy and the Western Roman Catholic Churches.[7]

The next major division in the Church took place in the 16th century, within Western Catholicism as a consequence of the Protestant Reformation led by Martine Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and several others. None of these Reformers really wanted a schism in the Church; what they called for was a thorough reform in the whole Church both in its head and members. But because of the rejection of the demands of the Reformers and the total condemnation of their views by the official authorities of the Roman Church, they had to break away

5 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism*, 35.

6 Samuel Macauley Jackson. ed., *Concise Dictionary of Religious Knowledge and Gazetteer*, (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1891), 932.

7 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism*, 36-37.

from the Church and found new ecclesial communities.[8] In the Post-Reformation period, several 'Free Churches' emerged in England and Europe, and these were taken to other countries, especially to the New World by the missionaries and emigrants.[9]

What Is Unity? Is There a Unity without Diversity?

Unity refers to the state of being united or joined as a whole, emphasizing harmony, agreement, and collective purpose among individuals or groups. Diversity, on the other hand, acknowledges and celebrates differences in characteristics, backgrounds, and perspectives. The relationship between unity and diversity is often viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The concept of "unity in diversity" suggests that a cohesive whole can emerge from diverse elements, enriching the collective experience. This idea is prevalent in various cultures and philosophies. For instance, the Rig Veda conveys this sentiment with the phrase "*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*," meaning "Truth is one, though the sages speak of it in diverse ways."[10]

In practical terms, unity without diversity can lead to uniformity, where differences are suppressed, potentially stifling creativity and growth. Conversely, diversity without unity might result in fragmentation, making collaboration and shared goals challenging. Therefore, if diversity is not kept under control, it could destroy unity.[11] Thus, a balance that embraces diversity within a unified framework is often considered ideal. This balance allows the celebration of individual differences while working collectively towards common objectives. The best model of unity in diversity one may find in the early Churches. The local Churches or the Individual Churches and national Churches became spontaneously and naturally diversified as the gospel became incarnated in each place and among people with their own specific organizational structures, traditions, worship patterns and prayers.[12] In

8 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism,* 37-38.
9 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism*, 149.
10 Amish Tripathi, *The Secret of the Nagas*, (New Delhi: Westland, 2011), 26.
11 Cf. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Vol. 1*, (England: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 609.
12 Kuncheria Pathil, *Unity in Diversity: A Guide to Ecumenism,* 39.

spite of these diversities and differences, these Churches firmly adhered to the one communion of Churches.

Trinitarian Unity: A Pattern for Christian Unity

The unity of the triune God is the perfect model of the unity of both the Church and humankind. The Ecumenical movement is based on the unity of God and unity in God.[13] The unity within the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is often cited as a model for Christian unity. As Pope Paul VI said, "the Father sent the Son and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. This is how God came to us. The Holy Spirit leads us to the Son and the Son to the Father."[14] This divine unity exemplifies harmonious relationships among distinct persons, offering a pattern for believers to emulate. The Vatican document, *Unitatis redintagratio* states that the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church in relation to the mystery of human salvation is in Christ and through Christ energized in various functions by the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery that finds its highest exemplar and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, one God.[15] Unity among the Christians is the reflection of the unity of the three persons. "If there is truly one God, although a Trinity, it is only proper that there is temple in which He will live and be worshiped on earth by those who accept and firmly believe in Him."[16] The truth of Trinitarian origin of Christian unity and the awareness that God is a community of three persons make us fathom that all our efforts for the restoration of Christian unity both individual and corporate, are in the final analysis is the gift of the Triune God.[17]

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13 K.J. Thomas, *Ecumenism: A Call to Unity*, (Bangalore: St, Peter's Pontifical Institute Publications, 2007), 11.

14 Paul VI, General Audience, on May 18, 1966, in *Osservatore Romano*, no. 115, (May 19, 1966), 1.

15 *Unitatis redintagratio*, 2.

16 Monica Husovich, "Trinitarian Doctrine: Key to Church Unity", in *Diakonia*, vol.14, no.3, 1979, 253.

17 Cf. Avery Dulles, "Catholicity and Catholicism", in *Theology Digest*, vol.34, no.3, 1987, 205.

Christian Unity: A Gift of God

The Christian unity is a gift of God. Pope Paul VI made this idea all the more explicit when he said, "This unity appears as a gratuitous gift from God and we must continually grow in this unity, at the same time as we must continually grow in this divine life."[18] The Vatican document, *Unitatis redintagratio* states that the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church in relation to the mystery of human salvation is in Christ and through Christ energized in various functions by the Holy Spirit.[19] The document further identifies four main functions attributable to the power of the Holy Spirit in the search for the unity of Christians: First, the Holy Spirit gathers the people of the New Testament; secondly, He brings about communion (*koinonia)*; thirdly, He distributes various gifts, and fourthly, He helps the faithful to fellowship in unity through his actions.[20] Paul in his letter to the Ephesians states that through Christ, we have access to the Father by one Spirit, emphasizing the collaborative work of the three persons in bringing believers together (Eph 2:18).

The Trinitarian God-head reveals God as a unity that encompasses diversity. Herman Bavinck writes, "In God … there is unity in diversity, diversity in unity. Indeed, this order and this harmony are present in him absolutely. … In God both are present: absolute unity as well as absolute diversity."[21] The point, then, is that the ontology of the creation finds its archetype in its triune Creator-God, in whom absolute unity and absolute diversity are eternally harmonized. This divine relationship serves as a model for understanding how unity can exist within diversity, providing a framework for human relationships and community.

In essence, the unity demonstrated within the Trinity serves as an ideal for Christian unity, illustrating how distinct individuals can exist in harmonious relationship, each maintaining their unique identity while

18 Paul VI, Discourse at the Special Audience, on November 22, 1972, in *IS*, no. 20, 1973, 23.

19 *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2.

20 *Unitatis redintegratio,* 2, 3 and 4.

21 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, John Bolt ed., John Vriend, Tran., Grand Rapids, MI, 2:331-32.

contributing to a greater whole. Therefore, ecumenical movement is based on the unity of God and unity in God.[22] Certainly, human wisdom and efforts alone cannot bring about the unity which God wills for his Church. Only the Holy Spirit can. Therefore, those engaged in unity efforts will soon experience 'ecumenical' exhaustion, if human ingenuity takes precedence over contrition and obedience to the Will of God.[23]

What Stands as a Block for Christian Unity?

Christian unity is often hindered by several factors, including doctrinal disagreements, denominational divides, cultural and ethnic differences, and varying interpretations of Scripture. These divisions can lead to misunderstandings, mistrust, and a diminished witness to the broader community. However, the New Testament emphasizes the importance of unity among believers, highlighting shared beliefs and values as the foundation for cohesion. After all, in the words of John Armstrong, "unity is not singing in unison and losing all our distinctiveness instead unity is singing in harmony in a way that allows each person and tradition to enrich the others."[24] Through our baptism we become a reconciled people and from the Gospel we receive the message of reconciliation. We are not only the recipient of this message, but also the custodians of it as the message is entrusted to us.[25] Therefore, it is the task of every Christian to bring about reconciliation in the world.

St. Paul, in Ephesians 4:1-6, outlines key virtues essential for fostering unity: humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love. He urges believers to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Unity is not merely a passive state but requires active effort and commitment from all members of the Christian community. Embracing the foundational elements of Christian unity—such as recognizing one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one

22 K.J. Thomas, *Ecumenism A Call to Unity*, 11.

23 M.A. Thomas, *Towards Wider Ecumenism*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1993), 202.

24 John H. Armstrong, *The Unity Factor: One Lord, One Church, One Mission*, (Michigan: Grand Rapid, 2011), 20.

25 K.J. Thomas, *Ecumenism A Call to Unity*, 63.

faith, one baptism, and one God and Father—can serve as a unifying framework for believers. By focusing on these core beliefs, Christians can transcend superficial differences and work together towards common goals, strengthening the global Christian community.

Ecumenical Dialogue

The Ecumenical movement, which seeks to promote unity among Christian denominations, has made significant strides over the years. In the *Unitatis redintagratio*, the Second Vatican Council recognized that the Ecumenical movement is a sign of the Holy Spirit's action and said that it considered the promotion of this movement to be one of its principal tasks.[26] Documents like Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* highlight the Catholic Church's commitment to Ecumenism and the recognition of the need for ongoing dialogue and reconciliation among Christians. Dialogue with other Christians about matters of faith is more than an exchange of ideas. Ecumenical dialogue will be effective when the participants see themselves as partners in a common quest for the truth. There is a close relationship between prayer and dialogue. More profound and conscious prayer makes dialogue more fruitful.[27] Kasper asserts that theological dialogues will only be successful if they involve more than merely intellectual skills; in fact, dialogue requires trust and friendship, common prayer and "sharing on a spiritual level."[28]

Dialogue must not only be "horizontal," that is, restricted to only meetings, discussions, etc., on the human level, but it must be "vertical" too, directed to the Redeemer who is the source of reconciliation. 'Confess your sins to one another and pray that you may be healed,' says St. James. A Christian who is alone with his sins is utterly alone. What the Christians urgently need is a true reconciliation. Reconciliation is a gift of God, an initiative on His part. But this initiative takes concrete form in the mystery of Christ the redeemer, the reconciler and the liberator of man from all forms of sin.[29] The heart of the mystery of

26 *Unitatis redintegratio*, 1.
27 *Ut Unum Sint*, 33.
28 Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, (New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 45.
29 *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*, 7.

reconciliation is "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).[30]

Despite these efforts, achieving complete Christian unity remains an ongoing endeavor. The diversity within Christianity, encompassing various denominations with distinct beliefs and practices, presents both challenges and opportunities for deeper understanding and collaboration. Many believe that while full doctrinal agreement may be elusive, unity in mission and love is both possible and essential for the witness of the Christian faith in the world. The words of St. Paul should be guiding principle here, "forgetting what is behind, intent on what lies before, I press on with the goal in view, eager for the prize, God's summons in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:13-14). Hope is our guide, prayer our strength, charity is our method at the service of divine truth which is our faith and our salvation.[31]

Ecumenism: A Christian Imperative

Jesus in his high priestly prayer, expressed his desire for unity, "that they may be one" (Jn. 17:21). The desire of unity is thus bound up with our faith in Christ. It is our free and voluntary response to the divine call. So there is a pressure on every Christian to take part in the Ecumenical movement and that pressure is from God speaking in us in conscience.[32] The Canberra Assembly of the WCC had described thus, "The Holy Spirit as promoter of *koinonia* (2 Cor. 13:13) gives to those who are still divided, the thirst and hunger for full communion. We remain restless until we grow together according to the wish and prayer of Christ that those who believe in him may be one."[33]

Ecumenism: An Ongoing Process

Ecumenism is an ongoing process aimed at fostering unity and cooperation among Christian denominations. This movement

30 Cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 18.

31 Marcel Van Caster, Rober MacAfee Brown, Jean Giblet et all, *Ecumenism and Religious Education*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, Illinois, 1965), 8-9.

32 Cf. K.J. Thomas, *Ecumenism A Call to Unity*, 17.

33 WCC, "The Unity of the Church as *Koinonia*: Gift and Calling" in *Ecumenical Trends*, vol. 20. No. 3, (1991), 42.

encourages Christians from diverse backgrounds to engage in dialogue, understand each other's traditions, and collaborate on common goals. The World Council of Churches exemplifies this effort by promoting both dialogue and joint action among its member Churches. Similarly, the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission works to translate theological agreements into practical collaborations between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. These initiatives underscore that Ecumenism is a dynamic and evolving journey toward greater Christian unity.

Jesus prayed that we would be in the Father and Son and conversely that the Father, in the Son, would be in us (Jn. 17:21–23). Among other things, this means that who we are is now bound up in our relation with the One God. This is the kind of identity possessed by Jesus, whose authority, teaching, mission, and life all derived from the Father. Because of this, Jesus was not vulnerable to those who applauded him (Cf. Jn. 2:23–24; 5:41-44). Rather, he was free to love others truly rather than for what they could give him. Thus, John tells us that Jesus washed his disciples' feet because he knew "that he had come from God and was returning to God" (Jn.13:3). So, achieving Christian unity is both a divine calling and a practical challenge. Scripture offers clear guidance on how believers can cultivate unity, emphasizing humility, shared truth, love, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The unity of Christians of different ecclesial communities, sects, denominations, and Churches is a goal yet to be achieved. However, Ecumenism remains a dynamic and evolving process, reflecting the Christian commitment to unity in Christ. While the path is complex and non-linear, the ongoing dialogues, collaborations, and shared missions continue to shape the future of Christian unity. To set a time frame, as such, is beyond the scope of human beings as unity is the work of the spirit, however, from the human point of view, it can be speeded up by a sincere renewal and conversion of heart both collectively and individually, through seeking reconciliation by healing efforts, and by a sincere desire and prayer and above all by common witnessing. In

summary, Christian unity is a reflection of the Gospel—a unity that transcends differences and is rooted in humility, shared truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. By embracing these principles, believers can witness to the world the transformative power of Christ's love working in the garb of a united Church.

MAHATMA GANDHI
An Unbaptized Christian?

Joseph Thazhattukunnel, MSFS

Abstract: *Volumes can be written on the most significant teaching of Mahatma Gandhi, namely Ahimsa or Nonviolence by which he brought freedom to India from the mighty British Empire and thereby endorsed the teaching of Jesus Christ, very precisely that love of God can be exercised through the love of one's neighbor. In this article I am trying mainly to delve into Gandhian Ahimsa/ Nonviolence, and also slightly to touch upon his heart's desire to establish brotherly and peaceful co-existence between the Hindus and the Muslims and his attempt to remove the "cancer" of the Hindu Society in India in his own words, the so- called caste system. Gandhi fearlessly fought for these cherished goals all through his life till he died the death of a martyr.*

Introduction

The greatest legacy of Mahatma Gandhi to the human race is his *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence which enabled a mighty nation of 350 million to shake off the foreign yoke without bloodshed. As a passionate seeker of Truth, which is a synonym for God, Gandhi discovered that *Ahimsa* is an integral part of truth. And being so, it was Gandhi's life mission to spread the message of Ahimsa. He says:

> I have been practicing with scientific precision Nonviolence and its possibilities for an unbroken period of over fifty years. I have applied it in every walk of life, domestic, institutional, economic and political. I know of no single case in which it has failed. Where it has seemed sometimes to have failed, I have ascribed it to my imperfections. I claim no perfection to myself. But I do claim to be a passionate seeker of truth which is but another name for God. In the course of that search, the discovery of Nonviolence came to me. Its spread is my life mission. I have no interest in living except for the prosecution of that mission.[1]

1 Harijan, 06.07.1940, 185-86.

Having known the cherished goal of Gandhi's life from his own utterances we shall try to get into the deeper understanding of this concept, *Ahimsa*. Along with it, little light will be thrown into his heart's desire to establish the perennial solidarity between the Hindus and Muslims and the removal of casteism in the Indian Hindu society to probe into his deep rootedness in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Ahimsa/Nonviolence

In his teaching on *Ahimsa* Gandhi places God in the very right place. He says, "Conscious of the living presence of God within one is undoubtedly the first requisite."[2] A living faith in *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is impossible without a living faith in God. He further elucidates, "… without God's grace one won't have the courage to die without anger, without fear and without retaliation. Such courage comes from the belief that God sits in the heart of all and that there should be no fear in the presence of God. The knowledge of the omnipresence of God also means respect for all lives even of those who may be called opponents."[3] Is it not a noble thought that Gandhi brought to the attention of all that God is present not only in the temples but also in the human hearts and all over world?

The Mahatma qualifies the excellence of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence: "*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is an active force of the highest order. It is the soul of the power of Godhead within us. Imperfect man cannot grasp the whole of that essence, he would not be able to bear its full blaze, but even an infinitesimal fraction of it, when it becomes active within us, even works wonders."[4]

For Gandhi *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence in the positive sense means the utmost love, the greatest love, the greatest charity and he maintained "if I am a follower of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong doing father or son."[5] *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence

2 Harijan, 29.06.1947, 209.
3 R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao (eds.), *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Ahmedabad, 1987, 115.
4 R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao (eds.), *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 11-12
5 Thekinedath Joseph, *Love of Neighbor in Mahatma Gandhi*, Alwaye, 1973, 98.

offers no distinction whether one is your friend or enemy but all are to be equally considered as brothers and sisters from a common father.

Ahimsa/Nonviolence Is Love

In 1936 Gandhi wrote: "*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence means love in the Pauline sense and yet something more than the love defined by Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes. *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence includes the whole creation and not only the human."[6] Gandhi understands *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence as a force which he understands from a Christian perspective of total love expressed in the death of Jesus Christ, a vicarious sacrifice for the redemption of humanity. And this *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence Gandhi calls "the law of love," the great eternal law governing the human, the supreme law of our being, the *summum bonum* (highest good) of our life, the highest *dharma* (duty), and in its dynamic condition, as conscious suffering."[7] While peeping through his biblical study and appreciation for Jesus Christ it endorses Gandhi's influence on the very person of Christ.

Ahimsa/Nonviolence Works Wonders

It does not express a negative force but a force superior to all the forces put together. *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is the "eternal law of love" which is implanted in the hearts of people. This law of love will work just as the law of gravitation will work whether we like it or not. And just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the law of Nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work greater wonders."[8] Gandhi was certain beyond any doubt towards the efficacy of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence.

In his definition of true love Gandhi means "to love them that hate you, to love your neighbor even though you distrust them… of what avail is my love, if it be only so long as I trust my friend? Even thieves do that."[9] For the Mahatma "*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence in the positive state,

6 Ibid.
7 M. K. Gandhi, The Law of Love, 12.
8 Ibid, 2.
9 R. K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao (eds.), *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Ahmedabad, 1987, 11-12.

not only demands love of the enemy but also forbids the Non-violent man to consider anybody his enemy. One who follows the doctrine of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence, there is no room for any enemy."[10] The sublime perspicacity of Gandhian concept of love is unique.

"*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is the flowering of love which bursts out from the innermost recess of one's heart. It is the joy of one's real readiness to die for him. It is the creative love to the extent of sacrificing his life for the other. When we understand fully the totality of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence in its expression, even to think ill of another, is a break of *Ahimsa*/ Nonviolence, it is *Himsa* (Violence)."[11] Gandhi goes to that extent of even the sphere of thinking or imagining whereby one can be liable to go against *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence. *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence makes human beings aware of his intimate relationship to God and to his fellow-men.

Gandhi compares *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence as a force which is more positive than electricity and more powerful than even ether: "At the center of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is a force which is self-suffering… it means *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is a superior force than electricity and ether. Electricity and Ether produce natural results which are evident to everybody. But the application of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence goes much further; it enables one to realize his fellow-countrymen as his brothers. Hence the power of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence brings him closer to his fellow beings…and in this context, he said that "*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is his creed and he would pursue it in all weathers".[12] For the realization of this Creed, he dedicated his life and said: "I claim no perfection for myself, but I do claim to be a passionate seeker of truth, which is another name for God. In the course of that search the discovery of Nonviolence came to me. Its spread is my life mission. I have no interest in living except for the prosecution of that mission."[13] He substantiated this statement with his discovery of truth, which is God Himself, who dwells in the innermost recess of human heart. Therefore, he upheld that Truth and *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence are inseparably united… practically impossible

10 M.K. Gandhi, *Nonviolence in Peace and War,* Vol, 1., 143.
11 Harijan, 06.07. 1940, 185-86.
12 M. K. Gandhi, *In Search of Supreme*, Vol. II., 27.
13 Ibid.

to disentangle and separate them… are like the two sides of a coin or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc."[14] To clarity this statement further Gandhi said: "*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is my God and Truth is my God. When I look for *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence, Truth says 'find it out through me.' When I look for Truth, *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence says 'find it through me.'"[15] As a consequence of his deep reflections Gandhi had already defined God as Truth and vice versa.

Ahimsa/Nonviolence: The Supreme Duty

Gandhi was certain that *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is a means to reach the goal which is Truth. *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is the means, Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach and so *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is our Supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later…whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give the quest for Truth which is, being God Himself."[16] As for Gandhi, Truth was synonymous to God Himself.

Ahimsa/Nonviolence is the law of human race and is infinitely greater and superior to brute force. The human as animal is violent but as spirit is non-violent. The moment s/he awakes to the spirit within, s/he cannot remain violent. The moment we realize our true nature as moral beings, we feel impelled to control our lower nature. Hence *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence helps one to realize one's dignity.

Ahimsa/Nonviolence Involves Suffering

To oppose something non-violently with love involves suffering. According to Gandhi love doesn't burn others, but it burns itself. Again, he says, love never claims, it ever gives; love ever suffers, never revenges itself. Very significantly Gandhi notes that "the conviction has been growing upon me that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased

14 Ibid, 27.

15 Geoffrey Ostergaard, Gandhian Nonviolence: Moral Principle or Principles of political technique, in: V.T. Patil (ed.), *New dimensions and perspectives in Gandhism*, 78.

16 Ibid, 79.

with suffering. Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason. The real challenge of *Ahimsa*/ Nonviolence according to Gandhi consists in allowing others "the maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience to us, even at the risk of life."[17] No human in fact is capable of plunging into the underlying implications of Gandhian *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence.

Gandhi on Jesus' Suffering

Once Gandhi ascertained "Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence which rule my actions, worldly temporal… Jesus lived and died in vain, if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of Love."[18]

He said further: "God did not bear the Cross only 1900 years ago, but He bears it today and He dies and resurrected from day to day. It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you."[19] It is to be greatly appreciated if such a statement were to come out of the mouth of Gandhi who has watched the behavior of British Christians in South Africa and in India which consisted only in name. This made him utter the thought-provoking statement that he loves Jesus Christ but not the so-called Christians who do not follow his teaching.

Vicarious Suffering

Gandhi used the weapon of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence over a period of many decades. He showed that it could be used to alter the economic, social and political situations. He believed that through his own personal sufferings a good deal of progress can be brought about. He was of the opinion that through the sufferings voluntarily taken upon oneself will open the eyes of the enemy or the opponent because man shares a

17 Madan Gandhi, 'Metaphysical Basis if Gandhian Thought' in: V. T. Patil (ed.), *New Dimensions and Perspectives in Gandhism*, 211.

18 Margret Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Religious Thought*, India, 1983.

19 *On the wrapper of Mahatma Gandhi: The Story of my experiments with Truth: An Autobiography*, Reprint, New Delhi, 2024.

common humanity. The difference between voluntary and involuntary suffering was a very basic one for Gandhi. Voluntary suffering or self-sacrifice is what Gandhi puts in place of the ancient *Yajña* (Sacrifice). The reign of love is to be brought about not through the sacrificial love of God's Son on the Cross, but through every man's action of self-sacrifice. Being aware of the noble notion of vicarious suffering Gandhi said, "Sacrifice of self is infinitely superior to the sacrifice of others' and that a self-sufferer does not make others suffer for his mistakes."[20] Gandhi was quite aware of the vicarious sufferings that Jesus Christ underwent even to the extent of dying on the Cross.

Self-Suffering is highly imperative in the pursuit of Ahimsa/ Nonviolence

Besides, Gandhi asserted that self-suffering brings the desired relief quickly and with greater certainty than does the imposition of suffering on the opponent. Apart from that suffering voluntarily undergone is a means to individual self-realization because the person who undertakes suffering seeks to purify his self by purging away the dross of life, the material things which distract him from life's real purposes. For Gandhi, the sufferings of one demonstrate to the opponent the intention of the sufferer and make him aware that the opponent is fearless. This attitude of the sufferer who shows his fearlessness and readiness to death opens the eyes of understanding. In other words, "the act of not striking back, turning the other cheek, accepting injury without retaliation, has the effect, so it is claimed of pulling the opponents sharply in their tracks, leading them to question their own values and to reconsider their position as a prelude to join the *Satyagrahi*s (those who cling to the truth) in a common pursuit of truth."[21] Gandhi knew the inner dynamism of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence that can bring about a radical transformation in the people who wanted to be followers of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence.

Supremacy of Love according to Gandhi

In the thought pattern of Gandhi "Love never claimed, it ever gave. Love ever suffered, never resented, never revenged itself."[22] Love is the

20 Mahatma Gandhi, *The story of my experiments with Truth: An Autobiography*, 145.
21 Ibid.
22 M. K. Gandhi, *Truth Is God*, 37.

supreme and unique law of human life which ever feels in the depth of a soul. Gandhi held that where reason might fail, suffering could succeed to effect a change of heart. Emphasizing the importance of suffering Gandhi remarks:

> Things of fundamental importance to a people are not secured by reason alone but have to be purchased by their suffering… Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of justice for converting the opponent and opening the ears to the voice of reason. The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering—not the sword—is the badge of the human race.[23]

Extreme Need for Humility

Gandhi insists on the necessity of being humble as the dust to learn the virtue of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence. For him the votary of truth has to be humble as the dust. His humility increases with his observance of truth. Humility is the very reverse of self-assertiveness which springs from egoism and makes for discord within man and within society. "To wish to reduce oneself to zero reveals the utmost humility."[24] No doubt this deeper insight of Gandhi urges him to serve humanity beyond all imaginations. But in his deep humility he used to say, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills."[25] But the uniqueness of Gandhi is that he experimented these realities in his own life, firmly upholding all that he believed, spoke, taught, being truthful to the title of his Autobiography: *The Story of my experiments with truth, an Autobiography*.

Gandhi used to say that "service to the poor has been my heart's desire and it has always thrown me amongst the poor and enabled me to identify myself with them."[26] Love, for all categories of people was embedded in the very being of Gandhi. He says, "I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, whites and

23 Iswara Topa, *Ethos of Nonviolence*, Ahmedabad, 1964, 84.
24 M. K. Gandhi, *Nonviolence in Peace and War*, 114.
25 Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, 2011, India, 192.
26 Ibid, 181.

colored, Hindus and Indians, of other faiths, whether Muslims, Parsis, Christians or Jews. I may say my heart has been always incapable of making any such distinctions. I cannot claim this as a special virtue as it is my very nature rather than a result of an effort on my part."[27] Only a very exceptional genius is able to make such a statement of considering every human being as equal. We should keep in mind that in India casteism was prevalent from time immemorial.

While exalting the death of Christ, Gandhi said: "He who when being killed bears no anger against his murderer and even asks God to forgive him is truly nonviolent. History relates this of Jesus Christ with his dying breath on the cross he reported to have said: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"[28] The death of Christ on the cross was Gandhi's perfect example of vicarious suffering which led him to the pursuit of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence.

To the very mind of Gandhi *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is a perfect state and it is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally, although unconsciously… it is the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence…it promises peace and bliss, harmony and concord, sympathy and co-operation in human affairs…as the aspirant seeks the Kingdom of Heaven as the highest goal, *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is the highest goal of man to achieve."[29] The *summum bonum* (highest good) of life in every religion is the attainment of the eternal reward and Gandhi came to the firm realization that it is achieved through Ahimsa/Nonviolence.

To those who speak about the impracticability of Ahimsa/Nonviolence Gandhi has the following answer: "*Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is infallible. When it appears to have failed, the failure is due to the inaptitude of the votary. Then, the instrument of *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is flawless and faultless. It is the fault of man who wields it improperly and inaptly. Thus, the cause of failure in *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is man's inaptitude."[30] Through his indefatigable, unerring and sustained approach to *Ahimsa*/

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid, 199.
29 Ibid, 249.
30 Ibid, 337.

Nonviolence Gandhi proved to humanity that *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence is the royal path to the esteemed goal of liberation.

Untouchability and Unapproachability

Another vital kernel from the mind of Gandhi in relation to the Christian teaching is to study how he considered every human being, no matter high or lower origin, are all brothers and sisters. It is quite unthinkable but true that there existed "Untouchability and Unapproachability" in the Hindu society of Kerala. Gandhi did not close his eyes to stop this evil system. Untouchability refers to a practice of discrimination against individuals and groups based on their caste or social status particularly the Scheduled Castes (Dalits).

The aim of Vaikom *Satyagraha* was for securing the freedom to all sections of society through the public roads and leading to the Sri Mahadeva Temple and allow to everyone to the temple. Mahatma Gandhi also supported the movement unconditionally. Despite the authorities' attempts to suppress the *Satyagraha*, it ultimately succeeded in opening the temple to everyone. The *Satyagraha* was supported by Gandhi, which was non-violent protest against caste discrimination and untouchability.

Addressing a crowd of twenty thousand in 1924 at Vaikom, Gandhi said: "As you know, ever since I have set foot on Indian soil after a long exile in South Africa, I have been speaking frankly, fearlessly and freely on the question of Untouchability…I claim to be a *sanatani* (orthodox) Hindu. I have come therefore, to reason with my orthodox friends. I have come to plead with them… I am sorry to confess I was not able to produce an impression I expected to produce on them."[31] Gandhi met Sri Narayan Guru, a prominent leader of the Ezhava group, who propagated a slogan of "one caste, one religion and one God for man."[32] They conversed a couple of hours. Narayan Guru told Gandhi that untouchability would not end in a generation. To this effect Gandhi said: "…he thinks (Narayan Guru) I shall have to appear in another incarnation, before I see the end of this agony… but I hope to see it in

31 Ibid, 192.
32 Ibid, 341.

my lifetime, in this age."[33] Gandhi spoke of himself as optimist because he believed in the efficacy of powerful thought… When time for action has come God will give light and guidance… I therefore watch, wait and pray holding myself in momentary readiness to respond."[34] The success of Vaikon *Satyagraha* on 30 March 1926 was the result of Gandhi's unswerving opposition to untouchability and his firm adherence to *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence.

It may be appropriate to step into the shoes of Gandhi in this connection what he said about the Harijans (Dalits): "The only way we can expiate the sin of the centuries is to befriend the Harijans (Literally people of Hari or people of God) by going to their quarters, by hugging their children as you would do to your own, by interesting yourself in their welfare, by finding out whether they have the fresh light and air that you enjoy as of right."[35] Mahatma wanted everyone to understand that they are all children of God and consequently brothers and sisters, no matter in which religion one is born, to what caste one belongs, or what education one has received, or what reputation one has in the society.

Hindu-Muslim Unity

One more concluding thought in Gandhi's teaching that has very much similarity to Christian thought is his concern for the unity of Hindus and Muslims in India. It is a very vital contribution of Mahatma Gandhi for the great sub-continent, India.

In 1928 Gandhi said in Calcutta that we are sons of this land, we have to live together, and I believe that there is no progress for India until Muslims and Hindus are united. In a number of communal confrontations, Gandhi was persistent in the realization of this cherished goal. Gandhi never took rest in mentioning and finding a lasting solution to this problem. On October 1947, the last Birthday of his life, turning seventy-eight, he said he didn't look forward to another one. "Ever since I came to India" he said, "I have made it my profession to work for communal harmony."[36] And for this noble cause he fought till his last breath.

33 Ibid, 193.
34 Ibid, 199.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 248.

And, finally when India attained Independence through the untiring fight of Gandhi, there sprang up the question of paying Pakistan's share of British India's assets that the Indian Government was bound by a treaty to pay, a considerable lump sum of money. Gandhi had to intervene as there was no consensus among the Indian politicians who were unhappy to hear his oft-repeated mention of God in his conversations. He always listened to the 'little voice,' the 'silent voice,' the 'inner voice,' in other words, the 'voice of his conscience' before arriving at a decision. He declared a fast unto death and there had been many attempts from Hindus and Muslims to dissuade Gandhi from this hard step. But he said: "… I will end the fast when I am convinced that the various communities have resumed their friendly relations, not because of pressure from outside but of their own free will."[37] Confronted with the charge that his fast was on behalf of Muslims and against Hindus, Gandhi readily conceded that it was basically true. In fact, all his life Gandhi stood for the minorities and those in need. As there was an abortive attempt on his life Gandhi said: "God will keep me alive so long as he needs me and put an end to my life when he does not need me… I am only His servant. Why should I worry?"[38] In his unchangeable determination Gandhi was successful and he won the battle for Pakistan in the payment of a huge amount money, going through insurmountable hurdles.

Conclusion

Stanley Jones, an Evangelical missionary, who had over three decades of close association with Gandhi said: I am still an Evangelist. I bow to Mahatma Gandhi, but I kneel at the feet of Christ and give my full and final allegiance. And yet a little man, who fought a system in the framework of which I stand, has taught me more of the Spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West. He had no difficulty in characterizing the death of Gandhi as the greatest tragedy since the Son of God died on the cross.

37 Ibid, 341.
38 Ibid.

The self- sacrificing life of Gandhi who took the vow of *Brahmacharya* (chastity) in consultation with his wife at the age of 37 for better service to the country and his teaching on *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence and the last words from his mouth, "Hei Ra… Hei Ra…" (0! Lord Ram) at his assassination, as reported by his niece Manu is a very clear proof of his allegiance to Jesus Christ.

FORMATION-FACILITATION
To Be Counter-Cultural Signs

Kuriakose Poovathumkudy

Abstract: *Formation has been the most demanding and at the same time important task in the evangelizing mission of the Church. The challenge to formation is accentuated today with the emergence of a new culture that lure people, including candidates to go with the flow of the changing scenario of the society. Jesus had placed the Beatitudes (Mt. 5-7) at the heart of his preaching and teaching, and formed his disciples according to its stipulations. They were trained to be different and be counter-cultural signs in society. The entire formation programme should be geared to form candidates to become persons and agents of the Beatitudes to make a difference in the pastoral field.*

Introduction

In today's society one comes across unprecedented changes in almost all quarters, which have brought in discernible structural developments and have contributed much to the life of people in general. However, some of these apparent developments have neither added much progress nor contributed to the quality of life of ordinary persons; instead, some of the innovations have disrupted the normal life rhythm of everyday life. The age-old cultural ethos and traditional values that kept the fabric of society harmoniously have been torn apart and tossed aside. As a consequence, the number of fractured and dysfunctional families have increased, which has abetted the surge of individualism in society. 'Let us be like others' or 'Be part of the changing scenario' is the hushed whispers and obscured growing undercurrents. Ethical values and moral principles have become mutable and relative for many.

A new culture of homogeneity has emerged, which persistently lure people *to be like others* in life. Regrettably, such tendency has stealthily crept into the very life and worship of diverse faith traditions. It is safer and easier to *be like others* and *flow with the current* than to make a

deliberate attempt to be different, by holding on to socio-religious values. Some of the unhealthy practices have surreptitiously sneaked into Church institutions, including Houses of Formation and they have become vulnerable and susceptible to modern innovations. A humble attempt is made to see *why* and *how* priestly formation should be *different* and what type of remedial steps should be taken to train candidates to become counter cultural signs in the pastoral field.

1. The Perennial Temptation to Be Like Others

Posters and billboards have become common and they are impressively displayed in public forums to attract the attention of the people. Commercial industries have very persuasive advertisements to create instantaneous needs in customers. Many succumb to the lucrative special offers, believing that procuring the latest gadgets and devices could enhance their social status and become like the elite of the society. The prevailing trend has encouraged and prompted many companies of national and international fame to invest millions in advertising their attractive products to promote global marketing. 'Invest the least, gain the best' is the type of mantra they propagate to attract more and more insatiable customers. Similar procedures are followed in recruiting members for various training programmes, promising bright and adventurous future with fabulous returns. The lurking undercurrent is the mounting desire *to be like others*.

1.1. The Fatal Attraction of the Israelites *to Be Like Others*

To make the people aware of their unique vocation, Moses told the Israelites: "Today you have become the people of the Lord your God" (Deut 27:9). As the chosen ones, the Israelites were called to be different from the people of their neighbouring countries. During their tedious sojourn through the desert, God journeyed with them like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22); He fed them with manna from heaven (Ex 16:31) and quenched their thirst in the wilderness with fresh water from the rock (Ex 17:6). In spite of God's astounding and incredible interventions, the lure of the neighbouring countries was so intense and tenacious, that they abandoned the Covenant and its stipulations (Ex 19:7). The ostentatious

and brazen worship of the golden calf (Ex 32:4) is only a tip of the iceberg of their shameless life of disloyalty and blatant ingratitude to God. They even had the audacity to demand, "Appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations" (1 Sam 19:5). Many of their kings were ungodly and impious, ruthlessly perverse and socially callous, who brought utter ruin, sheer desolation and total disintegration of their country. The uncontrollable craving *to be like others* had cost them dearly.

1.2. The Beatitudes and the Call *to Be Different*

C. S. Lewis, scholar, novelists and author of many books, insightfully writes in his celebrated book, *Mere Christianity*: "The goal of the Christian life is not to be better, but to become different."[1] While training his chosen disciples "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3:14), Jesus very emphatically and insistently told them *to be different* and become counter cultural signs in ministry and life; they were warned of the danger of becoming clones and copycats like others. He wanted them to be salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5: 13& 14) and thus become authentic ministers of love and service. Moreover, he challenged them to be credible agents of the Beatitudes.

1.2.1. ***Be Persons of the Beatitudes***: The Catechism of the Catholic Church places the Beatitudes (Mt. 5-7) at the heart of Jesus' preaching and teaching.[2] In turn, he formed his disciples according to its stipulations. Pope Francis emphatically states: "The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card,"[3] which distinguishes a disciple of Christ from others. The teachings of Beatitudes should become the guide and compass in their preaching ministry. Accordingly, they were called to live the Beatitudes credibly in the turbulent world[4] and aspire to be different in their ministry and life.

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1 Cited in *The New Leader*, 1-15 March 2025, 9.

2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1716 & 1717.

3 Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate*, Rejoice and Be Glad (2018), 63.

4 Kuriakose Poovathumkudy, *Embarking on a Mission of Mercy* (Shillong: Oriens Publication, 2024), 134-35.

1.2.2. *Be Persons of Constant Prayer*: Jesus mingled prayer with activity and often sought after solitude: "They all went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives" (Jn 8:1). He wanted to instill the same spirit of prayer among his disciples and stressed the necessity of praying constantly: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Mk 14:38). He taught them to refrain from the usual formula and recipe of displaying petitions and supplications endlessly: "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do …" (Mt 6: 7-13); they were advised not to be like the Scribes and Pharisee (Mt 6:5), but should emulate the inner disposition of the tax collector (Lk 18:10-14). Thus, even in their prayer life, the disciples were expected to be different in order to be counter cultural signs.

1.2.3. *Be Liberal in Forgiving:* The false advocacy of 'tit-for-tat,' and 'tooth for a tooth' attitude should not find a place in the life of the disciples, for "your Father in heaven sends the rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45). It is absolutely necessary to forgive, because "if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt 6:15). Above all, they were asked not only to forgive and pray for their enemies (Mt 5:44), but forgive seventy times seven (Mt 18:22). Attitude and approach to forgiveness should make the disciples *different* from others.

1.2.4. *Be Servants to One Another:* Discipleship finds its whole purpose and meaning only by being at the service of others selflessly. Since authority is essentially service, Jesus proposed the servant image model of leadership for his disciples (Mt 20:27. It is diametrically opposed to the notion of leadership in society.

2. Formation-Facilitation Geared *to Be Different* in Ministry

In *Pastores Dabo Vobis* Pope John Paul II has categorically stated that formation is the most demanding and at the same time the most important task for the future evangelization of humanity (PDV 2). Indeed, in the present-day scenario formation has become a challenging ministry and, in many ways, it has become multifaceted task. The impact of years of focused and intense training is obviously being reflected in pastoral field, for today's candidates are tomorrow's pastoral leaders. Hence,

seminary formators have a vital role to play in training the future ministers, by instilling in them right orientation to pastoral ministry. Like a tiny seed has the potency to grow into a mighty tree, candidates in formation have the capacity to become effective pastoral leaders, provided they are given proper guidance and holistic training right from the beginning.

2.1. Ecclesial Reality vis-à-vis Priestly Formation

Challenges in the field of formation is not something new in the Church, but with the passage of time new problems, glitches and hitches have surfaced. Though not totally new, the recent events at the global level are unprecedented and have caused much upheaval and uproar in the Church and their lingering effects are resonated in formation houses as well. The main areas of concerns are the growing dissatisfaction over the type of formation imparted to candidates to priesthood and religious life and the continued unfolding of sex abuse scandal.

2.1.1. Discernible Growing Dissatisfaction: In general, there is growing dissatisfaction over the way candidates to priesthood and religious life are formed today. In spite of lengthy years of consolidated training on wide range of topics, many lag behind in competence and efficiency compared to their age groups out in society.[5] What has happened to the years of intense training? Where have the formators failed in their effort to impart holistic training to candidates? An improvised quick response would be frivolous, because these queries require prayerful reflection and serious study.

2.1.2. From Collective Innocence to Alleged Complicity: Another burning issue that has a direct impact on formation is the continued disclosure of sex abuse scandal in the Church. The presumed 'collective innocence' of priests and religious has seemingly been exposed by media reports of abuse cases in different parts of the world. It came like a thunder bolt and hit rock bottom, questioning the credibility of the Church. Many priests were the target of scrutiny, attack and insinuation

5 Orlando Quevedo, "The Human Formation of Priests," in *Human Formation of Priests–Some Current Concerns,* ed., Lawrence Pinto (Mangalore: FABC Office of Clergy, 2006) 16. Also see Paul Parathazham, "Vocation and Formation of Priests and Religious in India: An Empirical Study," *Jnanadeepa,* 3/2 (2000), 35.

by the frenzied media and some were dragged to the criminal court of law. As a result, the Church attendance began to dwindle, parishes were merged and some dioceses declared bankruptcy, unable to pay the compensation to the victims.[6] In such volatile situation, Formation Houses are held accountable for the moral failure, stating "No seminary teaches celibacy/sexuality adequately. Most training programmes value and foster naiveté and immaturity."[7] Such unilateral and lopsided loud accusations are of no help, instead, the counter question should be: are we not collectively responsible for the formation of future priests at the local level? In what way can the Dioceses and Provinces, parishes and institutions, communities and individuals involve and contribute towards the formation of future priests and religious?

2.2. Tendency to Compromise with Quality of Formation

Jesus trained his disciples to be different from others in society. In the early Church, believers sold their property and owned them in common to care for the needs of one another (Acts 4:32-37); such audacious act attracted many onlookers and bystanders to the Christian fold. The situation is different today. The lure and attraction to be like everyone else in society, in the pretext of identifying with others is very strong. To align with the changing scenario, some of the age-old traditions and devotional practices have been sidelined and left them to individual discretion. Priests and Religious have become more susceptible to these innovations than others in the Church. In short, laicization of clergy and clericalization of laity is on an upbeat note. Such developments have intruded into the premises of formation houses and the effects are reflected surreptitiously. In such an atmosphere, a paradigm shift is required, starting with the selection of candidates, their formation and ongoing accompaniment.

2.3. Comprehensive Approach to Selection of Candidates

Family plays an important role in discerning and promoting vocation (LG 11& OT 2). The axiomatic saying, 'selection is 90% formation,'[8]

6 www.catholicnews.com, March 26, 2011.

7 Richard A. W. Sipe, *Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), 46.

8 Paul Parathazham, "Vocation and Formation of Priests and Religious in India: An Empirical Study," 39.

contains depth of wisdom. It is important to have strict guidelines in recruiting candidates. Some dioceses and congregations seem to be vying with each other to recruit in big numbers, without paying sufficient attention to the aptitude of the candidates.[9] Some allege to entice the prospective candidates with the promise of spending one phase of formation or ministry in foreign countries. Some easily succumb to such lucrative offers and when their expectations are not met, they become the most disgruntled members. No one could accuse Jesus of inducing anyone with false promises of a life of sunshine and grandiosity. He openly told, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Candidates should be made aware of the type of life that they are called to embrace, which is different from secular professions; they are chosen to be different for specific ministry.

2.4. Forming and Equipping Competent Pastoral Leaders

Inept and derisory leadership causes systemic failure and the consequences are enduring and appalling. A reality check on the status of clergy during the pre-Reformation period reveals that they were spiritually wanting, intellectually incompetent and morally unexemplary. The subsequent consequences were both tragic and catastrophic, which tarnished the image of the Church immensely. Similar occurrences can recur, if the quality of formation is compromised in order to accommodate more and more candidates; such ill-conceived policy will ultimately lead to the collapse of pastoral leadership and ministry in general. Pastors in communities are expected to provide enabling leadership to people. Thus, strict and holistic approach to formation of candidates has become indispensable and mandatory.

2.5. Need of Tough and Holistic Training

The U.S. Navy's primary special operation force is called the SEAL (Sea, Air and Land). They are highly trained personnel who are specialized in high-risk, high-pressure, and high-value special operations in sea, air and land. The members are able to operate in any environment and are unquestionably reliable and dependable. In many ways, Priests

9 Ibid.

and religious are special operation task forces and are called to work in the frontiers of the Church's mission. Accordingly, they require comprehensive and multifaceted training to be ministers and teachers, builders and administrators, orators and writers, above all spiritual leaders and pastors of communities. It is a call to committed ministry, and not meant for semi-retirement.

2.6. Poke and Provoke to Elicit the Best

Big aeroplanes like Boeing 707 have built-in-instruments known as Vortex Turbine Generators, which create artificial air turbulence to help the plane perform better. They function well in rough weather and some sort of turbulence is needed for the plane to perform flawlessly.[10] Every human being has the capacity to function like a vortex generator to meet the daily chores of work load and unpredictable situations, apparent failures and frustrating events. Right approach to face various turbulences in life with serenity and equanimity will help a person to grow stronger and sturdier. Taking these factors into account, formators should create certain amount of turbulence in formees, in the form of strict discipline and hard work, demanding and engrossing study and life of frugality, which will form them adequately to take up ministry with right attitude and orientation.

2.7. Leaving Room for Self-Formation

There is a saying: "A smooth sea does not make a good captain of a ship." The gusty wind and stormy weather force the captain to learn new ways of navigating the ship in unpredictable situations. If he sails through calm and serene sea, day after day, he misses tough challenges and new opportunities. The same principle can be applied to formation. If formators become too protective, providing candidates with everything, from A to Z, and not demanding challenging tasks, they will never grow up and become energetic and mature leaders. Therefore, it is necessary to expose them to ordinary but demanding life situations, where they learn to work and struggle, prove and excel in the given situation with limited resources.

10 Aneesh Antony, "Adversities are Opportunities," *Inspirational Quote* (August 2018), 5.

2.8. The Danger of Mediocrity

According to Michelangelo, "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but it is too low and we reach it." Many intellectually equipped and talented students wallow in mediocrity, achieving little in life, because they have developed a sense of self-complacency. Mediocrity breeds sluggishness, lethargy and sloth, and leads to laziness. Formators should dare to challenge the mediocrity of their students and almost compel them to come out of their 'comfort zones and 'fossilized existence' to aim at excellence and self-actualization. This may be one of the primary tasks for the formators today.

Conclusion

In former times many social and industrial units took inspiration from the Church organizations in training their employees, because they saw unwavering commitment and qualitative difference in the life of Priests and Religious, compared to civil servants or other employees. Surprisingly, today the order is almost reversed. In some quarters attempts are made to minimize the requirements and lower the standard of formation to suit the intellectual capacity and ability of the candidates. On all counts, it is a disservice to the Church and not a magnanimous act of compassion. Instead, allow the students to fight a good fight and encourage them to walk through "fire," to unearth and discover the hidden treasures within them. The young are energetic and have the capacity to rise above mediocrity and reach self-actualization. Therefore, initiate candidates to turbulent and bumpy weather and encourage them to confront unpredictable situations calmly. The temptation to *be like others* should be transformed *to be different* to become counter cultural signs to give credible witness to the Gospel in today's scenario.

FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING
Through Metaphysical and Spiritual Inquiry

Vintu Augustine Avittappallil, MSFS

Abstract: *As emerging leaders of faith, young seminarians – adults in a formative phase of vocational and spiritual development – stand at a critical juncture where intellectual rigour, spiritual depth, and personal transformation converge to shape their vocation. This paper presents a transformative learning framework for seminary formation grounded in metaphysical inquiry and spiritual practice. Through the lens of Being, Believing, and Becoming, it explores how educators can guide seminarians to probe the nature of existence (Being), deepen their faith through reasoned reflection (Believing), and cultivate a holistic identity as compassionate shepherds (Becoming). Integrating insights from Aquinas' metaphysics, Advaita Vedanta's non-dualism, and Salesian spirituality's emphasis on divine love, this approach fosters a pedagogy that balances contemplation, dialogue, and practical discernment. Tailored to the developmental needs of young adults in seminary formation, it emphasizes experiential learning to bridge abstract thought with pastoral action.*

I. Introduction

Young seminarians, typically in their twenties, are adult learners navigating a distinctive educational journey that intertwines academic study with spiritual formation to prepare for the Roman Catholic priesthood. Their dual role as students and future pastoral leaders demands a pedagogy that fosters profound personal transformation, aligning their lives with the demands of priestly ministry.[1]The *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* underscores this holistic formation, emphasizing human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions to configure seminarians to Christ, the Good Shepherd.[2]

1 *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Vatican City: Congregation for Catholic Education, 2016), §3.

2 *Ratio Fundamentalis*, §5.

This paper proposes a transformative learning framework structured around *Being, Believing, and Becoming*, guiding seminarians to explore their existence, deepen faith through reasoned reflection, and cultivate a vocational identity as compassionate leaders. By integrating metaphysical insights with Catholic spiritual practices, the framework ensures intellectual stimulation and spiritual enrichment, addressing seminarians' needs as adult learners in a pluralistic world.[3]

II. Theoretical Foundations

A. Transformative Learning in Catholic Seminary Formation

Transformative learning, rooted in Jack Mezirow's adult education theories, emphasizes critical reflection and perspective transformation, whereby learners reassess previously held assumptions to form more inclusive and discerning worldviews.[4] Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, a foundational model in adult education, offers a robust framework for understanding how adults reconfigure their understanding of self, others, and the world through critical reflection, dialogue, and perspective change.[5] At its core is the philosophy of fundamental change in the way one makes meaning of experience, not merely the acquisition of new information. Although Mezirow's theory emerged within secular adult education, its core emphasis on reflective insight, personal transformation, and meaning-making offers valuable pedagogical insight for seminary formation. In Catholic teaching, such transformation must be rooted not only in psychological growth, but also in conversion of the heart and renewal of the mind, as St. Paul exhorts: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

Grounded in constructivist epistemology, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is informed by Habermas's theory of communicative action, which emphasizes the emancipatory potential

3 Panthanmackel, *Coming and Going*, 45–50.

4 Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 10-12.

5 Jack Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3–33.

of dialogue,[6] and humanistic psychology, especially the works of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, which highlight the role of self-actualisation in personal growth,[7]and engages developmental theorists such as Piaget and Kohlberg, recognising that adult cognition continues to evolve in complexity, particularly when nurtured by reflective learning environments.[8] Within Catholic seminary formation, this approach offers a compelling pedagogical foundation for integrating intellectual, human, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions, aligning with the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis, which envisions the seminary as a house of formation and transformation.[9]

Contemporary Catholic scholars recognize the relevance of transformative learning in priestly formation. Studies on spiritual formation in seminaries highlight that structured spiritual environments not only nurture vocational clarity but also support personal integration and resilience.[10] Studies also further support the introspection-based educational models that deepen seminarians' spiritual awareness along with academic rigour.[11]In seminary formation, such transformation is not merely psychological or cognitive but sacramental and ecclesial, forming the seminarian into an *alter Christus*. This interplay of faith and reflection echoes *Fides et Ratio*, which affirms that "faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."[12] Transformative learning in this context thus prepares seminarians not only to grasp theological content but to internalize it within the call to pastoral ministry.

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6 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984)

7 Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

8 John M. Dirkx, "Transformative Learning Theory in the Practice of Adult Education: An Overview," *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning* 7 (1998): 1–14.

9 Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Vatican City: LibreriaEditrice Vaticana, 2016), §89–124.

10 David C. Wang et al., "Spiritual Formation in Theological Education: A Multi-case Exploration on Seminaries and Student Development," *Theological Education* 58, no. 1 (2023): 5–22.

11 Jane I. Lu, "Educational Models of Spiritual Formation in Theological Education: Introspection-Based Spiritual Formation," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 24, no. 1 (2021): 28–41.

12 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Vatican City: LibreriaEditrice Vaticana, 1998).

B. Metaphysical Inquiry and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Metaphysical inquiry occupies a central place in Catholic intellectual formation, especially through the enduring influence of *Thomistic philosophy*, which articulates a vision of reality ordered by being and directed toward the fullness of truth in God. As Aquinas notes, "Being is that which first falls into the intellect."[13] For seminarians, metaphysical formation nurtures a contemplative gaze upon reality that transcends material immediacy and invites wonder, reverence, and intellectual humility.

Recent scholarship in philosophical research has renewed engagement with Aquinas's metaphysics. Studies highlight the formative implications of Aquinas's account of efficient causality and participation in divine being,[14] and address whether moral attributes can be predicated of a metaphysically perfect God, reinforcing the theological integrity of metaphysical inquiry.[15] These themes remain vital for seminarians navigating the philosophical foundations of dogmatic theology and moral reasoning.

Dr. Panthanmackel's *Coming and Going* exemplifies the integration of Western metaphysical structures with insights from Indian philosophy, particularly Advaita Vedanta. His comparative framework enables a richer engagement with questions of being, selfhood, and transcendence.[16] This dialogical method resonates with *Gaudium et Spes* in emphasizing to scrutinize the "signs of the times" in the light of the Gospel.[17] Such metaphysical inquiry does not lead to abstraction but to existential clarity, guiding seminarians to recognise their identity as beings created as *imago Dei*, oriented toward divine communion and service.

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13 Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1.

14 Daniel J. Pierson, "Thomas Aquinas on Assimilation to God through Efficient Causality," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (2022).

15 Agustín Echavarría, "Can a Metaphysically Perfect God Have Moral Virtues and Duties? Re-reading Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (2022).

16 George Panthanmackel, *Coming and Going: An Introduction to Metaphysics from Western Perspectives* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1999).

17 Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 59, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), §4.

C. Spiritual Inquiry and Salesian Pedagogy

While metaphysical inquiry forms the intellect, spiritual inquiry shapes the heart, fostering a personal and pastoral relationship with God. In the Catholic tradition, spiritual formation aims to cultivate virtues, prayerfulness, discernment, and apostolic zeal. Salesian spirituality, as exemplified by St. Francis de Sales, promotes a theology of gentle transformation through love, humility, and fidelity to the duties of one's state in life.[18] Dr. Panthanmackel's own Salesian identity shapes his integrative vision of formation. His pedagogy of "living Jesus" emphasizes that spirituality is not ancillary to seminary formation but its animating core. This vision aligns with contemporary Catholic research that underscores the role of spiritual maturity in priestly effectiveness and highlights the need for integrated formation that unites intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral domains.[19]

Catholic formation must not only impart theological knowledge but also nurture a spirituality that animates real-world practice and ministerial service.[20] In this context, evaluation models that emphasize spiritual growth as a primary indicator of educational success in ecclesial settings gather momentum for "lived faith alone manifests joyful conviction, loving decision, and committed trust in God."[21]Ignatian spirituality, particularly the *Spiritual Exercises*, offers seminarians a structure for discerning God's will and deepening their interior life. Guided retreats and psycho-spiritual practices support emotional integration and vocational resilience.[22] These practices encourage seminarians to live

18 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. Antony Mookenthottam, Armind Nazareth, and Henry Jose Kodikuthiyil (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2012).

19 Sahaya G. Selvam, "'Moulding His Human Personality': Personality Change and Formation to Priesthood in the Catholic Church," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 12, no. 2 (2019): 232–45.

20 Antonella Poncini, "Formation Fit for Purpose: Empowering Religious Educators Working in Catholic Schools," *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 665.

21 Vivian Ligo, "Evaluation as Pedagogy: Models of Theological and Pastoral Formation," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 11, no. 1 (2007): 5–22.

22 Joseph Benedict Mathias, "Paradigms in Formation: Approaches in Priestly and Religious Training in a Globalised World," *Vinayasādhana: Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation* 8, no. 2 (2017): 5–18.

with a "pastoral heart," animated by the Holy Spirit, as envisioned by the *Ratio Fundamentalis*. Together with these streams of inquiry—transformative, metaphysical, and spiritual—there emerges a holistic formation of seminarians in fidelity to the Catholic Church's vision of priesthood.

III. The Framework: Being, Believing, and Becoming

Based on the theoretical background discussed above, this section outlines a transformative learning framework tailored for young seminarians, drawing inspiration from interdisciplinary scholarship, which encompasses Western Philosophy, Indian Philosophy, and Catholic Theology. Anchored in the Festschrift's theme—*Being, Believing, and Becoming*—the framework synthesizes metaphysical inquiry with spiritual praxis to promote holistic formation. Each component addresses a distinct facet of seminarian development, aligning with the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*'s emphasis on the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions of priestly formation. By interweaving Catholic theological traditions with philosophical insights, the framework equips seminarians to navigate their vocational calling within a complex, pluralistic society.

A. Being: Exploring Existence

1. Objective

The objective of the first level of 'Being: Exploring Existence' is to ground seminarians in a metaphysical understanding of self, others, and God, fostering a foundational awareness of their identity as beings created in the divine image (*imago Dei*). This exploration anchors their spiritual and intellectual formation, enabling them to engage with existential questions about purpose and identity—questions central to discerning priesthood.

2. Theoretical Support

Metaphysical inquiry, a cornerstone of Catholic intellectual tradition, provides a robust framework for understanding existence. Thomas Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence posits that God is

ipsum esse subsistens (subsistent being itself), while creatures derive their existence from God's creative act.[23] This perspective affirms the contingent nature of creation and the giftedness of life, aligning with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*'s teaching that human beings are created to know, love, and serve God.[24]

Indian philosophy, especially Advaita Vedanta, adds a contemplative lens to existence. Adi Shankara's teaching that the Atman (self) is identical with Brahman (ultimate reality) inspires a recognition of spiritual unity.[25] Although theological distinctions remain, the emphasis on transcendence and self-realisation enriches seminarians' metaphysical outlook. Dr. Panthanmackel underscores the pedagogical value of comparative metaphysics in his work *Coming and Going: An Introduction to Metaphysics from Western Perspectives*, bridging Indian and Western traditions.[26]

3. Methods

(a) Comparative Study of Western Ontology and Indian Thought: Seminarians engage in structured courses comparing Aquinas's metaphysics with Shankara's Advaita Vedanta. For example, studying Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* (I, q. 3–4) alongside Shankara's *Vivekacudamani* (verses 18–20) fosters dialogue on the nature of being. Facilitators guide discussions to highlight convergences, such as the emphasis on a transcendent source of existence, while respecting theological distinctions.

(b) **Reflective Exercises**: Guided meditations on *imago Dei* and *Atman* encourage seminarians to internalise metaphysical concepts. These exercises draw on Ignatian contemplation techniques, where learners visualise their place within God's creation, fostering a personal connection to abstract ideas.[27]

23 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), I, q. 3, a. 4.; Joseph G. Trabbic, "St. Thomas Aquinas on God as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*," *Religions* 16, no. 2 (2025): 140.

24 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §356.

25 Adi Shankara, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009), verses 15–20.

26 Panthanmackel, *Coming and Going,* 12-15.

27 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), no. 47.

(c) Journaling and Theological Reflection: Seminarians maintain reflective journals to articulate insights from metaphysical study, aligning with the *Ratio Fundamentalis*'s call for intellectual formation that integrates personal experience.[28]

4. Outcome

Seminarians develop a contemplative awareness of their identity in relation to God, fostering humility and vocational clarity. This metaphysical foundation strengthens their pastoral capacity to accompany others in existential inquiry.

B. Believing: Deepening Faith through Reason

1. Objective

This stage aims to foster a faith informed by philosophical and theological reflection. It prepares seminarians to articulate and defend their beliefs amid the intellectual and cultural pluralism of contemporary society.

2. Theoretical Support

Catholic theology affirms the compatibility of faith and reason. *Fides et Ratio* describes them as "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."[29] This harmonious integration forms the backbone of intellectual formation, as echoed in Dr. Panthanmackel's theological writings, including his analysis of Karl Rahner's Christology.[30]

Francis de Sales adds a spiritual dimension to belief, presenting faith as a loving response to God, rooted in the human heart's desire for divine communion.[31] The *Ratio Fundamentalis* likewise advocates a synthesis of faith that balances intellectual and spiritual development.[32] These sources collectively underscore the importance of a faith that is both heartfelt and intellectually robust.

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28 Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §57-58.

29 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §1.

30 George Panthanmackel, *Nature of Jesus Christ According to Karl Rahner* (Bangalore: Suvidya College Publications, 1997), 45–50.

31 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God,* bk. 1, chap. 1.

32 Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §116.

3. Methods

(a) **Dialogue on Faith and Reason**: Seminarians participate in Socratic-style seminars; for example, exploring *Fides et Ratio*'s key themes, such as the complementarity of faith and philosophy. Facilitators pose questions like, "How does Aquinas's rational approach to God's existence enhance faith?" to stimulate critical thinking.

(b) **Contemplation of Divine Love**: Drawing on Francis de Sales's *Treatise on the Love of God*, seminarians engage in *lectio divina*, meditating on scriptural passages (e.g., 1 John 4:16, "God is love") to internalize divine love as the foundation of belief.[33] This practice fosters an affective dimension of faith, complementing intellectual pursuits.

(c) **Case Studies in Apologetics**: Seminarians analyse contemporary challenges to faith (e.g., secularism, relativism) using Rahner's transcendental theology, which Dr. Panthanmackel explores in *One in Many*.[34] This equips them to articulate Catholic doctrine in diverse contexts.

4. Outcome

Seminarians cultivate a mature, affective, and reasoned faith. They are prepared to witness credibly to Catholic doctrine and offer pastoral guidance in complex cultural contexts.

C. Becoming: Cultivating Vocational Identity

1. Objective

The objective of this phase is to guide seminarians toward holistic growth as compassionate leaders, fully embracing their vocational identity as priests configured to Christ. This component fosters integration across human, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions to form shepherds who embody Christ's love and service.

33 Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God,* bk. 2, chap. 8.

34 George Panthanmackel, *One in Many: An Investigation into the Metaphysical Vision of Karl Rahner* (Bangalore: Suvidya College Publications, 1993), 67–72.

2. Theoretical Support

Priestly formation aims to configure seminarians to Christ, the Good Shepherd, through a journey of "becoming" that integrates all aspects of their personhood.[35] Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* provide a practical framework for discernment, guiding seminarians to align their will with God's through reflective decision-making.[36] Francis de Sales's emphasis on "living Jesus" in daily life encourages seminarians to embody love and humility in their interactions.[37]

The Second Vatican Council's *Optatam Totius* reinforces the need for pastoral formation rooted in apostolic charity.[38]Dr. Panthanmackel'scontributions to the *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy* echo this, synthesising Salesian spirituality with theological education.[39]

3. Methods

(a) **Practical Discernment Exercises**: Seminarians undertake Ignatian discernment practices, such as the *Examen*, to reflect on their vocational call and daily choices. Facilitators guide them in applying Salesian principles, such as "doing all by love and nothing by force, and loving obedience rather than fearing disobedience,"[40] to decision-making.

(b) **Service-Based Learning**: Seminarians participate in supervised pastoral placements, such as social ministry or catechesis, to apply theological insights in real-world settings. These experiences align with *Optatam Totius*'s call for practical training and are evaluated through reflective discussions.

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35 Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, §28-29.

36 Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 43 ff.

37 St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. Antony Mookenthottam, Armind Nazareth, and Antony Kolencherry (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2012).

38 Pope Paul VI, *Decree on Priestly Training (Optatam Totius)*, promulgated October 28, 1965, art. 15, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), §8.

39 *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Johnson J. Puthenpurackal and George Panthanmackel, 2 vols. (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010).

40 St. Francis de Sales, letter to Madame de Chantal, October 14, 1604, in *Letters to Persons in the World*, trans. Henry Benedict Mackey and John Cuthbert Hedley (London: Burns and Oates, 1894), 1:160.

(c) **Mentorship and Spiritual Direction**: Regular sessions with spiritual directors, grounded in Salesian and Ignatian traditions, help seminarians integrate their experiences into their vocational identity. The *Ratio Fundamentalis* emphasises the role of accompaniment in formation.

4. Outcome

Seminarians emerge as compassionate leaders ready to embody Christ's love and service in their ministry. They develop a vocational identity that is holistic, resilient, and responsive to the needs of their communities.

This framework—Being, Believing, and Becoming—provides an integrated model for priestly formation grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition and enriched by intercultural dialogue. By uniting metaphysical depth, theological engagement, and spiritual praxis, it forms seminarians who are contemplative and apostolic, capable of shepherding God's people with wisdom and love.

IV. Pedagogical Strategies

To operationalise the *Being, Believing, and Becoming* framework, three pedagogical strategies—contemplative practices, dialogical learning, and experiential application—are proposed. Rooted in Catholic tradition and enriched by philosophical insights, these strategies aim to form seminarians who are spiritually grounded, intellectually articulate, and pastorally effective.

A. Contemplative Practices

Contemplative practices connect metaphysical concepts to personal faith, fostering a relationship with God. Seminarians practice *lectio divina* on Genesis 1:26–27 (*imago Dei*), guided by de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* to place themselves in God's presence.[41] Ignatian imaginative prayer, from the *Spiritual Exercises*, visualises Christ's call (Matt 4:19) to explore vocation.[42] The *Catechism* describes prayer as essential for spiritual growth, while the *ACPI Encyclopedia* integrates Advaita Vedanta's *Atman* meditation, enriching Catholic

41 Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, pt. 2, chap. 2.
42 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 106.

contemplation.[43]Accompanied by spiritual direction, these practices align with the *Ratio Fundamentalis*'s call for intimacy with Christ, grounding the *Being* dimension.[44]

B. Dialogical Learning

Dialogical learning fosters critical engagement with metaphysical and theological themes, deepening faith through intellectual encounter. In structured discussions, seminarians compare Aquinas's distinction between essence and existence with Advaita Vedanta's doctrine of non-dualism.[45] This comparative method draws on *Fides et Ratio*, which promotes the integration of faith and reason as pathways to truth.[46] Aquinas's disputation method in *Summa Theologica* inspires critical thinking, while Dr. Panthanmackel's *One in Many* offers a framework for addressing secularism through Rahner's transcendental theology, supporting the articulation of faith in pluralistic contexts.[47] *Optatam Totius* calls for rigorous intellectual formation to prepare priests for pastoral dialogue.[48] These faculty-led sessions strengthen the *Believing* dimension, equipping seminarians to articulate doctrine with both fidelity and philosophical depth.

C. Experiential Application

Experiential application grounds theological learning in ministerial action, embodying the "Becoming" dimension of formation. Through supervised pastoral placements, such as catechesis or youth ministry, seminarians integrate spiritual and intellectual formation with real-world engagement. Inspired by de Sales's emphasis on charity and humility in *Introduction to the Devout Life*, they learn to "do all through love."[49] Service-learning projects are framed theologically using Karl Rahner's understanding of Christ's presence in human history, as

43 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2558; Panthanmackel, *ACPI Encyclopedia*, 1:15–20.

44 *Ratio Fundamentalis*, §44.

45 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 3, a. 4; Adi Shankara, *Vivekacudamani*, vv. 18–20.

46 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §43.

47 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 1, a. 8; Panthanmackel, *One in Many*, 67–72.

48 *Optatam Totius*, §4.

49 Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, pt. 3, chap. 1.

interpreted by Dr. Panthanmackel in 'The Nature of Jesus Christ'.[50] The Ignatian *Examen* is practised regularly, fostering discernment and interior freedom.[51] The *Optatam Totius* emphasizes supervised training, cultivating compassionate leaders.

V. Challenges and Opportunities

Implementing the *Being, Believing, and Becoming* framework in seminary formation presents both challenges and opportunities, requiring careful navigation. The *Ratio Fundamentalis* urges formation programs to be responsive to contemporary realities and personal development.[52]

A. Developmental Considerations

Young adult seminarians, navigating identity and discernment, require tailored formation. The *Catechism* views young adulthood as a time of seeking purpose, necessitating formation that is both spiritually grounded and psychologically sensitive.[53] The *Ratio Fundamentalis* emphasises human formation through spiritual direction.[54] Opportunities include using Ignatian *Examen* to align their affective experiences with vocational growth, fostering interior freedom.[55]Dr. Panthanmackel's reading of Salesian pedagogy in *Nature of Jesus Christ* underscores patient accompaniment, cultivating resilience in future priests.[56] Such approaches contribute to holistic formation that prepares seminarians to embody compassionate, integrated ministry.

B. Balancing Depth and Accessibility

A key pedagogical challenge lies in making complex metaphysical and theological ideas accessible without compromising their depth. The speculative insights of Thomas Aquinas or Adi Shankara may seem

50 Panthanmackel, *Nature of Jesus Christ*, 50–55.
51 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 43; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1823.
52 *Ratio Fundamentalis*, §94.
53 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §225.
54 *Ratio Fundamentalis*, §44.
55 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 43.
56 Panthanmackel, *Nature of Jesus Christ*, 45–50.

abstract to many students. *Fides et Ratio* calls educators to preserve the integrity of truth while communicating it intelligibly.[57] De Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* offers an example of profound theology expressed simply, making spiritual truths relatable.[58] The *Gaudium et Spes* advocates adaptive teaching.[59] Using analogies (e.g., *imago Dei* as God's mirror) and scaffolding content ensures engagement, strengthening *Being* and *Believing* without compromising intellectual integrity.

C. Contemporary Relevance

Another challenge is preparing seminarians to engage meaningfully with pluralistic and global realities. The *Ratio Fundamentalis* stresses the importance of pastoral relevance and cultural sensitivity in formation.[60] Dr. Panthanmackel's *One in Many* exemplifies how East-West dialogue and Rahnerian theology can be employed to navigate interreligious and secular contexts.[61] *Nostra Aetate* calls the Church to engage in respectful interreligious dialogue, urging seminarians to be conversant with diverse worldviews.[62] Grounding pastoral responses in Rahner's transcendental theology and embodying the Salesian spirit of charity outlined in *Introduction to the Devout Life* enables future priests to respond to global challenges such as poverty, individualism, and alienation with faith and compassion.[63] These practices help seminarians internalize the Becoming dimension of their vocation, fostering ministry that is both rooted and responsive.

VI. Conclusion

The *Being, Believing, and Becoming* framework offers a transformative vision rooted in Catholic intellectual and spiritual tradition. It invites

57 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §42.

58 Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, pt. 1, chap. 3; Panthanmackel, *ACPI Encyclopedia*, 1:10–12.

59 *Gaudium et Spes*, §62.

60 *Ratio Fundamentalis*, §94.

61 Panthanmackel, *One in Many*, 67–72

62 Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Vatican City: LibreriaEditrice Vaticana, 1965), §2.

63 Panthanmackel, *One in Many*, 70–75; Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, pt. 3, chap. 1.

seminarians to explore the mystery of human existence (Being), deepen their relationship with God through faith and understanding (Believing), and embody pastoral leadership through compassionate service (Becoming). Grounded in the metaphysical insights of Thomas Aquinas, and the spiritual acumen of Saint Francis de Sales, this framework fosters integral formation.[64] The *Ratio Fundamentalis* supports such a holistic vision, emphasizing the need for formative models that are both spiritually grounded and pastorally effective.[65] It aligns with the Catechism's call to prepare candidates for a vocation of love, service, and holiness.[66]

In light of *Optatam Totius*, which urges continual renewal in priestly formation,[67] educators are encouraged to adopt and adapt this framework according to the needs of their cultural and pastoral contexts. In doing so, seminaries can form priests who are not only intellectually equipped and spiritually mature but also capable of transforming their communities through wisdom, compassion, and authentic Christian witness.

64 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 3, a. 4; Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, bk. 1, chap. 1.
65 *Ratio Fundamentalis*, §3
66 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §356.
67 *Optatam Totius*, §1.

FREEDOM, DISCOURSE AND DIGNITY IN THE MODERN DIGITAL AGE
Puzzles, Perils and Possibilities

Raphael Karekatt, MSFS

Abstract: *In his maiden address to the College of Cardinals confiding to them the reasons behind his name choice, Pope Leo XIV outlined the new times and realities the church and the world encounter in our days that call for a fresh evangelization employing her social teachings. He highlighted the new industrial revolution and the developments of artificial intelligence as the new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice, and work. This reflection scans Artificial Intelligence in its various manifestations and examines how the Church, her leaders and the faithful ought to be not just familiar with AI but be equipped for the new evangelization our digital world summons us to.*

1. Introduction

The dystopian catchphrase "A Brave New World" is the preferred Buzzword of choice invariably employed across ages and eras, across societies, cultures and disciplines to describe frontier times when a host of events or phenomena happen concurrently or act in tandem to force significant paradigm shifts in human self-understanding or modes of thinking and living that humankind is accustomed to. But, by all counts, even that description, powerful and evocative as it is, comes up awfully short when employed to describe the contemporary times in which we live. Identified by the popular moniker 'Digital Age,' our era is marked by seismic shifts in the way we live and organize our lives and our living environments, and increasingly, even without our knowledge, are commandeered by machines, gadgets and an ever-evolving array of apps and applications which do the thinking and choosing on behalf of the human person. Alexa, Amy and a bevy of humanoid robots have been, since some time, taking over many of the household chores as well as similar and other roles in every domain, be it the hotel lobby and the restaurant dining areas, railroad stations, airport terminals

lounges, arrival halls and hallways of the hospitals and even corporate boardrooms and stock markets. The latest to debut is Sophia, designed to look and behave like a human, with features like realistic skin, facial expressions, and the ability to mimic human gestures and interact with humans in a natural and engaging way. Programmed with advanced AI techniques like face tracking, emotion recognition and deep neural network-generated movements and configured to simulate natural human behavior, the humanoid has turned upside down the very foundations of human self-understanding, giving interviews and interacting with 'ordinary people,' discussing every mundane topic under the sun, notching up the first Saudi Arabian citizenship granted to a non-human and, to top it all, even giving commencement address at D'Youville University instructing the graduates how to be human and thrive in a human world!![1]

'Being Human in an Age of Thinking Machines,' as the pithy headline of the Hindu Sunday Magazine on Sunday, March 09, 2025, captured it, being a free and responsible human person is becoming more than a riddle or conundrum in the modern digital epoch.[2] The very fundamental facets of being human as well as the rules of engagement and interaction in the public square as well as in one's own sacred private space have not only been challenged but they are being recast and reformatted even as I sit down to commit these thoughts to words. The times are turning more than confusing or turbulent, to say the least, that the Church herself discerned it imperative not just to join the discourse happening all around, but inform and enlighten the participants as well as issue pertinent cautions through a *note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence: ANTIQUA ET NOVA,* facilitating her age-old wisdom and insights to shine light on the way forward.[3] The following reflection attempts to join the discourse table from the author's own perch as catholic ethicist, in dialogue with *ANTIQUA ET NOVA*, and examine how we could creatively and responsibly engage the "current challenges and opportunities posed by scientific and

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophia_(robot)

2 Magazine, The Hindu, March 09, 2025, p.1

3 Given in Rome, at the offices of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, on 28 January 2025.

technological advancements," in particular by the contemporary digital and other Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated revolutions in general (*Antiqua Et Nova,* 1), without forfeiting our humanity or mortgaging human freedom and dignity.

2. Modern AI Powered Digital Epoch: An Audit

Surveying the current digital revolution, powered and piloted by AI, and its impact on human lives and societies, the Note cautions that what we are witnessing is a "new and significant phase in humanity's engagement with technology,' and all things considered, a massive 'epochal change.' There is no field, region or domain of human activity that has not felt its impact. "Its impact is felt globally and in a wide range of areas including interpersonal relationships, education, work, art, healthcare, law, warfare, and international relations." (*Antiqua Et Nova,* 4).

While 'intelligent machines' able to take over routine human chores evolved over time, the significant milestone leading to current wave of digital revolution led by AI can be traced to a summer workshop that the American computer scientist John McCarthy organized in 1956 at Dartmouth University to study the issue of Artificial Intelligence, examining the possibility of "making a machine behave in ways that would be called intelligent if a human were so behaving." (*Antiqua Et Nova,* 7). Synthesizing the insights of Kaplan, Haenlein, Russell & Norvig, Renkema & Tursunbayeva describes AI as "a set of technologies that have the ability to interpret data and learn from it to achieve specific objectives through adaptation, based on imitating natural intelligence through sensing and perceiving the environment."[4] AI is rooted in various scientific disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, psychology and statistics and is an "umbrella term that refers to systems that emulate natural intelligence characteristics sensing and learning to augment and automate human tasks."[5]

4 Maarten Renkema & Aizhan Tursunbayeva, "The future work of academics in the age of Artificial Intelligence: State-of-the-art and a research roadmap," 1 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2024.103453 (Downloaded March 11, 2025), 3

5 Ibid. 2.1

Based on its capabilities and functionalities, IBM classifies AI into Narrow or Weak AI which is what is referred to in the usual AI discourses as of now and General/Super AI which is perceived to be possible but in a future timeframe and research is underway to develop the same. The narrow AI encompasses Reactive Machine AI (RMAI) that does not develop memory, but can perform specific tasks (e.g. Netflix recommendation engine) and Limited Memory AI (LMAI) that can retain data in its library for a long period and can fuel applications that can imitate natural intelligence with a greater degree of refinement and fluidity such as Generative AI, Virtual Assistants and Chatbots. It is estimated that as of now and into the foreseeable future human workers would co-exist with AI applications with varying capabilities and functionalities whereby some activities can be fully automated, while other tasks will be supported and assisted by AI.[6] One of the avowed goals AI promoters is to pursue all avenues possible so as to develop super AI and equip it to 'imitate the human intelligence that designed it' and also 'learn and make certain choices autonomously, adapting to new situations and providing solutions, independent of those who designed it.' (*Antiqua Et Nova,* 3).

2.1. AI: A helpful Handmaid:

Like any human/scientific innovation, the AI powered revolution is also a double-edged sword that, if used wisely can cut to heal and defend, but the slightest oversight can cause irreparable damage and even death. As mentioned earlier AI and AI based apps and applications have not only impacted human life in its various dimensions but have become an ordinary and routine ingredient of daily life. It has become an unavoidable yet helpful handmaid in the house and the field and an efficient and alert assistant at the office desk in the corporate boardrooms or in the hallways and the lecture halls of the academy. While there is no dimension of contemporary life that can safely be claimed to be insulated fromcontemporary AI digital phenomenon, there are many key areas where this impact is decisively manifest. While human communication

6 IBM. (2023). Understanding the different types of artificial intelligence. IBM Blogs. 〈https://www.ibm.com/blog/understanding-the-different-types-of-artificial-intelligence/〉 (Downoladed March 11, 2025)

and discourse, both routine as well as the focused discourse in the halls of academia , is the area where this impact is pervasive and profound and it calls for special focus and attention by itself, Agriculture, Art and Architecture, Automobile design and manufacturing, Fashion and hospitality, Medicine, and Mode and methods of Medical care and its delivery are other prominent fields which have been profoundly impacted and strenuously challenged by the evolving AI phenomenon.

Thanks to AI powered communication, the farmers from the far-flung hamlets of the Deccan through the sand-coated hinterlands of Sub-Saharan Africa to the enchanting steppes of Latin American countryside are able to access the same data that are available to the big mechanized farms and ranges of Texas or Europe pertaining to priming the soil and the seeds, fertilizing, pest control, enhancing the quality and quantity of yield, harvesting, curing and packaging and methods of marketing at the best price free from the clutches of the middle men. Katrin Lehman, the Chief Information Officer at Mercedes-Benz is ecstatic as she describes how digital twinning and AI revolutionized the whole process of automotive manufacturing at her plant. "Everything starts digitally whether it is building a new plant or a new car", reports Sujith John, and digital twin and AI guide the entire process: surveying the market demand, design and manufacturing time, crash tests, sales and planning, etc." Lehman says, "AI is being used in all departments and everywhere it's seen to be working well. It is helping to predict."[7]

Similar is the hold that algorithms, apps and AI exert in art, architecture, fashion and hospitality industries: in architecture and construction sector, from the drawing board where the blueprints are chalked out to the mixing board where the minutest tint of paint mixture is configured, AI and algorithms are not only constant companions, but have turned pilot or copilot, dictating the tints, twists, logistics relating to the material and manpower and the manner they are deployed. An array of apps is available for every step such as BIMx, Auto Cad, Magicplan, My Measures, Construction Manager. The A triad – algorithms, apps and AI – have so transformed writing and journalism that forces

7 Sujit Jose, "How Digital Twins, AI are changing automotive devpt," *The Times of India,* Visakhapatnam, Thursday, March 13, 2025, p.6.

Shivangi Sinha to mourn the gradual death of the trade: "As a writer, it scares me to see what AI is becoming increasingly capable of. … AI is not just a tool, it's evolving fast…Now AI tools are flooding the market with instant content, making it even harder for writers to earn a decent living."[8]

While Alexa, Astro, and a host of other 'intelligent machines' that 'navigate gracefully and effortlessly through your ever-changing home'[9] have enabled the homemaker in keeping the houseand its inhabitants healthy and happy, Amy the waitress, the food delivery robot – a truly multifunctional, autonomous, mobile robot[10] has taken over the traditional roles of the welcome desk in the hotel lobby as well as delivering the 'food Talis' to the anxious customer's tables in the restaurants and bistros. Daydream, the new e-commerce search engine, and StitchFix, informs Gayatri Rangachari Shah, have transformed online surfing for apparel a personal style discovery.[11] Film and movie making is another field that is being revolutionized by the A-Triad that that the reputed Spanish filmmaker Paco Torres advises that "there is no way that AI can be wished away. Things are moving faster than ever before. Don't be afraid. Surf the wave. We need to be in the driver's seat instead of letting AI completely take over content generation."[12]

Another field that has been significantly impacted by AI digital phenomena is health care across its whole spectrum and most often for the better – diagnosis, prognosis, therapeutics and treatments, new generation therapies, medicines and pharmaceuticals to preventive care and spread of care to hitherto unreached area. How AI and data driven solutions can address the ills that have been plaguing health care in this country has been a question that has been engaging the best

8 Shivangi Sinha, "The Lost Art of Writing", *The Hindu*, Magazine, Sunday, December 15, 2024, p.07.

9 The Tagline for Amazon Astro, https://www.amazon.com/Introducing-Amazon-Astro/dp/B078NSDFSB

10 https://quantumrobotics.com.au/amy/

11 Gayatri Rangachari Shah, "The ChatGPT of Shopping", *The Hindu*, magazine, Sunday, March 09, 2025, p.05.

12 Subal Chatterjee "Treat AI as an ally, not as a threat", *The Hindu*, magazine, Sunday, March 09, 2025, p.05.

minds both in medicine and the tech-sphere and the jury has given the verdict, as Akhil George/Sujit John report. The provisional consensus is: Generative AI will not solve every problem overnight, but it could fundamentally change how the country addresses capacity constraints, healthcare affordability and preventive care."[13]The general consensus among practitioners is to assign a strategic role to AI, observes Dr. Vishnu Vardhan, who works with diabetes morbidities, as it can assist to quickly "collate the data, highlight the key concerns and let doctors spend their time advising and counselling rather than scanning endless reports." Anil Kumar Madugulla, engaged in developing software for infusion systems concurs:

> Generative AI will unify disparate data streams – infusion pumps, ventilators, and diagnostic tests – into a coherent picture, The key is ensuring high reliability, since we can't gamble with patient lives in critical care. But once we combine real time device data with AI driven context, clinicians can spot early warnings for issues like sepsis and intervene faster than ever before…. We can now interpret clinical notes, lab reports, and real time vitals together. That's the kind of interoperability that's previously been missing.[14]

Despite the cutting-edge therapies and therapeutic possibilities that AI has inspired like AI Music therapy in healing critical care patients, for example, everything is not hunky-dory with AI and data-driven medicine especially with regard to its affordability, availability and its reach into the far-flung hinterlands of the country and the world at large. For it to be effective and reach the rural areas, confesses Dr. Vishnu Vardhan, you do need a certain baseline infrastructure like adequate internet connectivity, proper referral network and adequately trained local staff. Nevertheless, he says, "But if you have a smart phone and a data connection, you can do a lot of early diagnosis and continuous monitoring with AI as a backbone. It is far cheaper than building a major hospital in every taluk."[15]

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13 Akhil George/Sujit John "Data, devices, and diseases: How AI is reshaping patient care", Times Techies, *The Times of India*, Visakhapatnam, Thursday, March 13, 2025, p.06

14 As reported by Akhil George & Sujit John, cf. the report cited above.

15 Ibid.

2.2. The Elephant in the China Shop: AI & Human Discourse: Dialogue, collaboration and communication with others are critical for the growth and flourishing of the human person. Created in the 'image and likeness of God' human persons are not merely rational beings, but they are self-reflexive relational beings "ordered by their very nature to interpersonal communion with others" and with God, in whom is grounded the very quest for truth innate to the human person. This desire for truth spurs him/her to ask why things are as they are, (*Antiqua Et Nova,* 21-23) and in the process discover themselves, the community around and the world. This discovery is pursued either through routine discourse, matter of fact engagement with one another and the society around happening every day, or through a systematic, organized and focused discourse as undertaken in the academy.

I guess, I would not be stretching the facts if I say, as honest as I can be, that this discourse, in its twin modes, has been forced to endure immense strain under the marauding onslaught of AI in our times to the point of demeaning itself to be commandeered by forces in the dark space beyond the control or supervision of the human person or society and the quest for truth has degenerated into a forced diet of half-truths, engineered truths, fake reality and in effect a flight from Truth. While AI and AI-inspired digital tools and platforms have the wherewithal to enable more and more to join the table, in fact everyone, as well as enhance the conversation around it, the table talk, dialogue and discussion have degenerated into a veritable broadcast of engineered truths, demeaning bullying of one another and even 'verbal lynching', a new coinage supplied to our ordinary lexicon. Abhishek Roy Choudhary reports that the World Economic Forum Global Reports 2025 flags "misinformation and disinformation as the highest ranked short-term global threat … that can adversely affect a sizeable portion of the population, the global GDP and natural resources. The rapid rise of AI-generated content, algorithmic biases, and societal divides are making it harder than ever to separate facts."[16] Even a casual glance of the mass media – print and visual, echo chambers of the internet, social

16 Abhishek Roy Choudhary "Tackling the disinformation threat in India," *The Hindu,*Opinion, Wednesday, April 2, 2025, Visakhapatnam, p.7.

media and other web platforms – can give a bird's eye view photo frame of the toll that this AI fueled misinformation campaign has exacted in terms of lives and families destroyed, honor and dignity shredded in public, strident revenge and retribution campaigns waged with scanty respect for truth or human lives. But all is not lost, reminds Choudhary, and recommends "measures such as up skilling developers working with algorithms, improving public awareness and digital literacy, and ensuring accountability through supervisory boards and AI councils to oversee Generative AI practices" so as to steer the digital environment and all those who inhabit it into saner and safer alleys.[17]

Thanks to the vigilant and watchful eyes of those who lead the academies and institutes of learning, the discourse that occupies and echoes in their lecture halls, labs and libraries, hallways and cafeterias has been greatly shielded from this onslaught of the AI revolution to retain the focus and probity that ought to mark the academic discourse. However, as Sai Charan observes in his panel report on the impact of AI in classrooms "Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are increasingly being used in classrooms around the world" – both by students as well as educators – raising fears "that students will likely begin accepting information at face value rather than critically analyzing it," leading many to wonder if "the use of AI in education affect critical thinking skills."[18]

As in every field of human activity, AI has already not just made inroads, but has deeply embedded itself in every domain of education: knowledge generation, dissemination, research and assessment, teacher-student relationship etc. There is no domain of education that can claim to have insulated itself against the AI phenomenon. AI and apps and applications like ChatGPT, Perplexity and scores of others have become greatly useful if employed and used prudently. With regard to serious research "AI tools can provide semi-automated support," reports Maarten Renkema & Aizhan Tursunbayeva, "in tasks such as paper screening, synthesis, data extraction, generating or reviewing code for statistical analysis, coding qualitative data, descriptive syntheses,

17 Ibid.

18 Sai Charan, "Is Artificial Intelligence affecting critical thinking skills?"*The Hindu,* Opinion, Friday, March 07, 2025, Visakhapatnam, p.7.

theory development and testing". AI tools can be immensely helpful in data mining and collection, analysis and collation and "AI assistants can help also in academic writing" not only in the grammar and other language details but also in 'logically' marshalling ideas and facts and writing research papers.[19] AIED tools, employed judiciously can assist with a good deal of administrative chores like administration, content development, assessment, plagiarism checks, and feedback and free the teacher/instructor to focus more on the classroom and student oriented activities.Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that AI and its pervasive use has led to "an overdependence on AI-generated responses among students and even among faculty members," adversely affecting the critical thinking skills of the students, leading to greater incidence of plagiarism, automated research papers, and general academic misconduct, throwing the whole education apparatus itself into deep suspicion. The cautionary assessment of *Antiqua et Nova* on AI in education is worth noting:

> AI presents both opportunities and challenges. If used in a prudent manner, within the context of an existing teacher-student relationship and ordered to the authentic goals of education, AI can become a valuable educational resource by enhancing access to education, offering tailored support, and providing immediate feedback to students. … However, instead of fostering 'a cultivated intellect', which brings with it a power and grace to every work and occupation that it undertakes, the extensive use of AI in education could lead to the students' increased reliance on technology, eroding their ability to perform some skills independently and worsening their dependence on screens. (*Antiqua et Nova*, 80-81).

The deficit in social skills that is witnessed in the younger generation today and the strain they experience in their relationships best attest to the wisdom of the above assessment.

3. Innovations, Human Freedom & Responsibility

Created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27) and commissioned to 'till' and 'keep' the earth (Gen 2:15), the human person has been endowed with intelligence and freedom to guide him in the exercise

19 Maarten Renkema & Aizhan Tursunbayeva, "The future work of academics in the age of Artificial Intelligence: State-of-the-art and a research roadmap", 2.4.1

of his vocation to steward God's creation. From the earliest days of human history, the human person has plumbed deep into his innovative and creative energies so as to efficiently fulfill his vocation to shepherd the creation. Church herself has been in the forefront of the march of human creativity, always accompanying as a responsible catalyst for "the advancement of science, technology, the arts and other forms of human endeavor," viewing them as part of the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation." Our human and creative energies as well as the scientific and technological abilities that they evoke and beget are integral dimensions of being human.[20]

Nevertheless, it augurs well to remember that history also is replete with the memories of times and eras when this innovative human energy has run amok and human freedom was mortgaged to the machines, wreaking violence and mayhem, threatening even the very existence of humankind and its abode, the earth itself. History also illustrates when saner sense has prevailed, and prophets emerged to arouse the moral conscience of the world and steered humankind to walk down from the precipice of mutually assured self-destruction and redeem the human person and his dignity and freedom. The current wave of digital revolution and the confusion it spawnshas already raised enough concern in various quarters to rouse up the moral energies of humankind and converge to deliberate the way forward as was evidenced at the recent AI Action Summit in Paris on February 10-11. The Summit rightly discerned that "the rapid development of AI technologies represents a major paradigm shift, impacting our citizens and societies in many ways" and called for "an open multi-stakeholder approach that will enable AI to be human rights based, human-centric, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy while also stressing the need and urgency to narrow the inequalities" in the field.[21]

It is still reassuring that the Church with immense reserve of moral energy, resources, experience and skills at her command to be a formidable moral voice in critical situations, has also chosen not just to join the

20 *Antiqua Et Nova*, 2*;* Catechism of the Catholic Church, #378

21 Indranil Banerjie, "AI Revolution Looms: Can India Make a Difference?" *Deccan Chronicle*, Visakhapatnam, 26 February 2025, p.4.

discourse, but even streamline it. As *Antiqua Et Nova* clearly states she is resolved to "contribute positively to the discernment regarding AI, and in response to Pope Francis' call for a renewed "wisdom of heart," the Church offers its experience through the anthropological and ethical reflections contained in the note." She "invites those entrusted with transmitting the faith – including parents, teachers, pastors and bishops" as well as all "who share the conviction that the scientific and technological advances should be directed toward serving the human person and the common good" to engage this subject with critical care and attention. (*Antiqua Et Nova,* 5).

Conclusion

In his first meeting with the cardinals who elected him, Pope Leo shared with them the reasons behind the name he chose. He explained: "Pope Leo XIII, in fact, with the historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, addressed the social question in the context of the first major industrial revolution; today the Church offers everyone her treasury of social doctrine to respond to a new industrial revolution and the developments of artificial intelligence, which bring new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice, and work."[22] Beyond a mere explanation for the name he chose, those words outline a genuine manifesto and agenda for the Church and the world to rally together to redeem human freedom and dignity firmly anchored in justice informed by the Gospel. It is a clarion call to the faithful and to everyone of good will to join the mission of the Church to steer the world and humankind through these confusing times challenged and almost being hijacked by AI and its cohorts of digital tools. It is incumbent upon the leaders of the Church as well as those who train them not just to be conversant with the AI and its different manifestations, but be so trained and equipped as to guide those in their care and the society around them to engage the digital world with prudence, wisdom and diligence in equal measures and glorify God, the master of creation and the source of all Truth.

22 https://catholicvote.org/full-text-pope-leo-xiv-explains-name-choice-opens-dialogue-in-first-meeting-with-cardinals/

HEGEL'S ARENA OF FREEDOM
Exploring Conflict and Recognition in Ethical Life

Nishant A. Irudayadason

Abstract: *In Hegel's philosophy, conflict—whether human, social, or political—is not simply a problem to be eliminated but a necessary and even fruitful part of what it means to be free. Conflict is the testing ground of freedom, revealing its depth and complexity. Firstly, the article distinguishes between accidental clashes (collisions) and deeper, meaningful struggles (conflicts), and begins by exploring the issue of recognition, where the demand for mutual acknowledgement often intersects with questions of rights and the presence of violence. Secondly, it discusses socio-economic conflicts and examines how inequalities and tensions arise within capitalist society and the need for institutions and legal frameworks to manage and resolve them. Lastly, the article addresses political conflicts in the strict sense, where disagreement and contestation are not only unavoidable but essential to the functioning of a free society. The article, while underscoring the important role played by the state, nevertheless shows that the resolution of conflict is not fully achievable, thus making reconciliation fragile just like freedom itself.*

Introduction

For Hegel, conflict arises from the freedom of the spirit, not from some inherent human malice, as Machiavelli might suggest. Conflict is necessary because humans are spiritual beings, and freedom is tested in the realm of conflict, not in peaceful coexistence. The word "conflict" is rare in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*,[1] likely because not everything is conflict in the strict sense. There are also disputes, violence, disagreements, and wars. We must distinguish different types of conflicts, their essence, their context, and how they might be resolved,

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen W. Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Reference to this work will be given as a running note with the abbreviation of the book EPR followed by the paragraph number throughout this work.

reflecting on Heraclitus's saying: "War is the father of all things."[2] This discussion focuses on conflicts within society and the state, leaving aside conflicts between states.

Collision and Conflict

Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* presents a system of freedom structured by the various rights needed to make the spirit objective, creating an ethical world. This moves from the abstract (private law) to the concrete (constitutional law). Higher, more concrete rights generally take precedence over more abstract, formal ones. However, these rights can clash. Formalism occurs when a right is absolutised, prioritised over a superior right (*EPR*, § 30). Hegel notes the possibility of clashes or disagreements between rights, which he calls a "collision" (*EPR*, § 30). Rather than seeing conflicts as random, he argues they stem from a collision of rights—discord between two rights, either hierarchically ordered or of equal standing.

There are two types of conflict. First, a conflict within a right's domain, such as a violation of someone's right through violence, which negates that right and creates injustice. The rational response is judicial punishment to break the cycle of revenge. Second, a conflict arises from a collision of two legitimate rights from different orders. A collision does not automatically lead to conflict but can be its source. When two necessary rights, representing different stages of the idea of right, are incompatible, conflict emerges between individuals holding these opposing rights. This happens especially when someone insists on their right, ignoring moral considerations, and acts violently to enforce it. Resolving a violation of right requires judicial institutions, but resolving a collision of rights does not always need them. Instead, it reveals the hierarchy of spiritual rights, where a lower right yields to a higher one, as in the right of necessity (*EPR*, § 127), where property rights give way to moral rights.

2 Heraclitus, fragment 53, quoted in G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 1:279.

Hegel elaborates in his *Aesthetics*, in a chapter on collision and action. In tragedy, the collision arises from an act of wrongdoing that cannot simply be left unresolved—it demands to be addressed and overcome. However, a collision by itself does not yet amount to a full-fledged action. It merely sets the stage for action by providing its initial conditions and assumptions, while still remaining more of a situation than a deliberate deed.[3] As a spiritual, thinking being, a human's move from collision to conflict depends on their freedom and their consideration of factors like their self-image, the other, the situation, the stakes, and the goal's value. In dramatic art, beauty lies not in immediate harmony but in reconciliation through a higher harmony, requiring collision and conflict—the work of the negative. Art, such as the *Iliad* or Greek tragedy, focuses on collision-filled situations, where resolution follows the struggle of opposites.[4] However, the state is not a work of art, and beauty is not the principle of modern ethical life. Thus, while art resolves conflict into ethical reconciliation, in human life, many conflicts remain unresolved, repetitive, or aporetic. Crimes may go unpunished, justice imperfect or absent (*EPR*, § 345). Ethical life is marked by an unconquerable conflict, shaped by negativity that cannot always be transformed into positivity or reconciled, especially when collisions are deep and inevitable. While these do not always ruin the state, they shape its course.

For Hegel, conflict is a problem of the sphere of right, tied to the spirit as free will. Nature lacks right, and animal life is marked by violence and fear. Humans escape this fate through states, where rational institutions enable an ethical life free from natural violence. Yet, the ethical world is not peaceful but a place of unique conflicts, distinct from natural violence. Unlike Hobbes's state of nature, where life is defined by fear and violent death, humans in a state can live freely through good customs, laws, and institutions. While the risk of violent death is reduced, it is never eliminated. Ethical life allows for happiness and the enjoyment of the good, but it is fragile, exposed to human free

3 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2:1197.

4 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1198.

will and natural contingencies. Conflict exists within the sphere of free spirit. Persistent conflict in ethical life does not reduce human life to animal existence, except in cases of political or social calamity, but it remains exposed to various unconquerable violences and misfortunes.

Conflict and Recognition

The master-slave dialectic presents a conflict as a life-and-death struggle for recognition. Proving the freedom of self-consciousness requires risking one's life. If self-consciousness is an activity, not a thing, it proves its freedom by risking its own and another's life, showing detachment from life itself. In the *Encyclopaedia*, this struggle results in mutual recognition and universal self-consciousness.[5] This fight precedes the state, and its violence is the outward or historical origin of states, rather than their essential foundation or inner principle[6] (*EPR*, § 350). The state rests not on violence but on the right of the spirit. Violence, as in the founding acts of heroes, may have been necessary to establish states, but conflicts within the state are different. They are disputes or struggles grounded in the ethical principle of recognition. These conflicts may be harsh or even deadly, but they are not, in principle, struggles for recognition through death. In the state, murder is forbidden, and violence is prohibited to establish a universal sphere of recognition through law. However, legal and political guarantees of recognition do not eliminate all conflict. New conflicts arise, not over the freedom of the self but over power, wealth, or instituted freedom. Between states, struggles for recognition may emerge as wars for sovereignty and autonomy.

While Alexandre Kojève emphasises the struggle for recognition as key to Hegel's philosophy, Axel Honneth sees reciprocal recognition as the key to social history, revealing the moral logic of social conflicts.[7]

5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), § 432.

6 Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830), §433, Bem., ed. Bonsiepen and Lucas, (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1992), 431; *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, trans. Geraets, Suchting, and Harris, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 319.

7 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 5.

For Honneth, social conflicts stem not from selfishness or power, as Machiavelli or Hobbes thought, but from experiences of disrespect and injustice, understood as a denial of recognition, with recognition as their goal. Social conflicts matter because they contribute to the realisation of authentic forms of recognition.[8] However, Honneth overlooks that, for Hegel, the struggle for recognition is pre-state. Social conflicts arise from perceived denials of right and aim for the progress of right through the righteousness of self-consciousness, which creates right (*EPR*, § 150). For Hegel, the state is the actuality of ethical life, embodying mutual and universal recognition.[9] Some conflicts are not struggles for recognition but for its actualisation, ensuring it is not just a formal right but a living principle in customs and institutions. In civil society, conflicts should be limited, not threatening universal recognition or peace, and aimed at reconciliation through right, customs, and institutions.

Right, Law, and Conflict

Abstract right rests on the command to be a person and respect others as persons (*EPR*, § 36), prohibiting violence against a person or their rights. Non-right describes a type of conflict: interpersonal conflicts negating right, targeting a person, their property, or their enjoyment of goods. These arise because a person, as a free will, can negate right by asserting themselves against it.First, a civil dispute is an unintentional denial of right, occurring when two individuals claim a right over something, each in good faith. Both recognise right as their norm and expect recognition of their claim. This is a collision of rights (*EPR*, § 85), caused by conflicting claims. If one demands recognition at the other's expense, a conflict may arise. This conflict may be driven by hatred but remains within the framework of right and mutual recognition, resolved by a judge. Resolution is imperfect, sometimes unjust, and may disappear if one party relinquishes their claim. Second, the harshest conflicts are violence and crime, targeting a person's concrete freedom—their life, body, or property. Violence is unjustifiable, an act of free will that

8 Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 168.

9 G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, Part III: *Philosophy of Spirit*, § 432, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

denies another's freedom, violating right itself (*EPR*, § 95). Crime threatens the foundation of social and political life. In abstract right, this conflict is aporetic, leading to endless vengeance (*EPR*, § 102), contradicting the peaceful reign of right.

In society, the rational solution is the court, where a judge restores right and reconciles the offender with the law (*EPR*, § 220). However, courts act after the fact and cannot prevent conflicts or fully pacify society. Only moral consciences, good customs, and sound institutions can achieve this. Yet, justice itself can become a source of conflict. Judicial procedure, meant to protect rights, can be misused to deny justice (*EPR*, § 222-23). Courts may perpetuate conflicts or produce injustice under the guise of justice, as Balzac illustrates. Justice is imperfect, leaving some conflicts unresolved. Moreover, laws can be twisted into tools of injustice (*EPR*, § 3). A law establishing slavery, for instance, would be illegitimate and spark political conflicts aimed at its abolition and the removal of the power enforcing it, seeking to restore recognition.

Conflicts in Civil Society

Contractual political theories, like those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, place violence in a fictional state of nature, either as an inherent state of war or one that inevitably becomes so. They argue that the state is necessary to escape war and live in peace. For Hegel, the state of nature is a fiction of pure violence, while the state is where right becomes actual. Yet, society and the state, as realms of freedom through right, are not free from conflict. Society is not wholly conflictual but is marked by an unconquerable conflict that can only be contained or reduced, yet this conflict may paradoxically contribute to its vitality.

In society, individuals have the right to pursue their particularity under the authority of universal ethical powers (laws and institutions). This freedom exposes society to unique conflicts. Individuals act for themselves alone, seeking satisfaction that remains unfulfilled. In excess, they destroy themselves in their pursuits, and happiness eludes

them. Each seeks to dominate others while resisting domination, leading to endless struggles that may endanger the substantial (*EPR*, § 185). This general conflict, not limited to economic relations, fosters physical and ethical corruption across all classes, marked by hostility. Plato's solution—repressing individuality—is inadequate. The modern state's rationality lies in allowing individual freedom while reconciling it with universal ethical powers (*EPR*, § 260). Corruption and misery are dangers, but also tests of society's ethical vitality. If officials are corrupt, institutions meant to resolve conflicts can become tools of domination (*EPR*, § 295-297). Institutions require the morality of their members.

In society, ethical life falters when individual particularity and the universal (law, institutions, state) are separated without rational mediation (*EPR*, § 184). The individual sees the universal as a means to their ends. Only in the state are these moments rationally reconciled, making the universal the goal of all, ensuring ethical life. Society and the state are reconciled through their difference, preserving individual and societal freedom. Society's first moment (the system of needs and labour) is the realm of "atomism," an individualism vital to its energy. It allows each person to assert their unique singularity but also produces isolation (*EPR*, § 192). Far from being destructive or merely enshrining bourgeois selfishness, as Marx would claim, this separation is necessary for the development of free individuality and a differentiated social fabric. This foundational abstraction, the work of the understanding (*EPR*, § 189), creates a sphere of new, ever-renewed social conflict, latent or manifest. Peperzack observes that the universality of freedom and the particularity of individual wills form different levels, and conflicts between these levels cannot be avoided. He further states that the duality of principles that constitute the dimension of civil society explains why it contains so many tensions and contradictions.[10] Yet, in this isolation, the singular becomes a true individual: self-directed action shapes relations with others, where each is their own end, an autonomous personality enjoying a certain solitude. Individual freedom is an ethical

10 Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Modern Freedom: Hegel's Legal, Moral, and Political Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 437.

principle, allowing each to express their spiritual uniqueness, not just an economic principle for wealth.[11] Allowing individual free will causes interpersonal conflicts, but this is rational within ethical institutions, as it enables the emergence of true spiritual monads. Unlike Epicurean atoms forming aggregates, modern individuals form society through separation, associating on the basis of exclusive personality.

Modern social life aims at refinement and luxury, essential for a civilised life and social imagination. Through social labour, people become interdependent, creating universal wealth and freeing themselves from nature, but entering a new necessity—the global economic system born of the world's spirit. Labour is no longer basic but divided, relying on capital, markets, and free trade (*EPR*, § 199). Unlike Diogenes or Robinson Crusoe, modern individuals depend on this system, caught in its necessity. Economic actors face resistance from things and others, encountering a harsh reality (*EPR*, § 195). Hegel does not condemn the rich's harshness toward the poor but highlights the toughness of all economic relations—between producers, distributors, and consumers. Each asserts their free will against others, resisting others' arbitrariness while pursuing their own. Economic life is governed by competition, a unique form of conflict, not true friendship. While generosity has a place, exchange prevails, guided by justice—the equality of giving and taking (*EPR*, § 80). This harshness, not malice, reflects exposure to separation, self-sufficiency, and free competition among free wills, each seeking wealth and enjoyment.

The separation of private individuals creates a social mode enabling a unique, atomistic conflict. Economic life requires individualism—isolation and separation—tied to the rational division of labour. This socio-economic conflict is not a fight to the death but a free opposition among individuals recognised by the state and each other, within institutions that structure and prioritise functions. This mutual antagonism among adversaries, not enemies, allows each to assert

11 As Axel Honneth points out, if capitalist society tears apart the intersubjective bond and leads individuals out of the familial circle, it simultaneously strengthens the possibilities of a higher individuation, which constitutes its superiority over familial ethical life. Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel's Social Theory*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 100–01.

their singularity and gain professional honour within their corporate body (*EPR*, § 253). Social understanding separates people but reunites them through separation. As a moment of reason, the understanding reconciles within the sphere of labour and cultivated needs (*EPR*, § 189). More than an invisible hand, it distinguishes and articulates elements, uniting what it separates into a free, social being existing for and with others (*EPR*, § 192), through laws and contractual relations of gift and exchange. While each works for themselves, selfishness contributes to others' enjoyment: producing or acquiring goods or services for oneself provides others with work, money, and enjoyment, enabling a good life (*EPR*, § 199). Limited antagonism and competition benefit all, fostering universal communication of individuals, labour, and goods, establishing a society of free people. By reconnecting what it separates, the understanding creates a world of free association, peaceful through good customs, laws, and institutions.

Through the hard work of culture, human particularity is educated (*EPR*, § 187), but social individuals retain some naturalness, so civil society bears traces of the state of nature (*EPR*, § 200). Since the state of nature is a fiction, this does not mean social life is a war of all against all. Rather, it shows what resists spiritual cultivation, persisting as an unconquerable inner barbarism. As a constant source of conflicts, enmities, and violence, human society remains imperfectly reconciled, yet ethical.

The section on the police addresses socio-economic conflicts, encompassing all state functions (government) regulating society for a civilised life: education, public health, economic regulation, and more. Producers, distributors, and consumers have distinct interests to assert. Initially, their relations harmonise through market self-regulation. The rationality of labour division, laws, and production, plus actors' intelligence, establishes a just balance naturally. Free enterprise and trade rest on the just principle of laissez-faire, leading to spontaneous harmony. Yet, competing interests may diverge and collide (*EPR*, § 236), creating disagreement, not yet conflict, but its potential source. The market balances these through necessity and contingency.

While endorsing economic liberalism, Hegel stresses the need for political intervention. Perperzak traces the need for political intervention to the struggle for supremacy between utilitarianism and respect for persons.[12] However, the French thinker Bourgeois argues that in a rational state, what matters is the respect for persons.[13] For Hegel, the political intervention happens in two ways. First, the state must establish intelligent regulations, not to hinder or favour one element, but to impartially safeguard concrete freedom and its right, ensuring a free economy that upholds justice and the common good. Second, the liberal state must anticipate and guide the economy's general course, considering international aspects and the world's future. Hegel rejects a dirigiste, totalitarian state that exhausts society, advocating an ethical liberalism that balances economic self-harmonisation with necessary state action.

Social conflicts, rather than leading to painful or violent outcomes, can be thought through and resolved collectively, or better, prevented. Without state action, collisions of rights and interests could become social conflicts, causing losses or destruction—business failures, unfair dismissals, strikes, violence, poverty, or mass misery. Socio-economic life faces dangerous convulsions (*EPR*, § 236) and relying solely on blind economic necessity is irrational. Honneth affirms that more clearly than any other philosopher of his time, Hegel perceived the dangers that necessarily inhabit an uncontrolled sphere of the capitalist market, recognising its tendencies toward social disintegration.[14] However, one must not forget the reconciling role of spirit in this sphere, nor that of law, the police, and the corporations, which ensure that it is not an uncontrolled sphere or a purely atomistic one.

The state's wisdom, with and for social actors, works for justice ordered to freedom. In its ethical role of reconciliation through mediation, the state transforms economic necessity into freedom: through thought, it prevents or mitigates crises, seeking intelligent, lawful solutions. Adriaan Peperzak emphasises the necessity of state intervention to

12 Peperzak, *Modern Freedom*, 434.
13 Bernard Bourgeois, *Hegel, les actes de l'esprit* (Paris: Vrin, 2001), 112.
14 Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*, 121.

address the contradictions brought about by industrial capitalism. However, he argues that this section of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* ultimately ends in a deadlock rather than achieving reconciliation or synthesis. The deeper issue, then, is to understand the nature of this state intervention.[15] Bernard Bourgeois offers a perspective by suggesting that the state eventually comes to recognise that its social interventions are merely palliative, and that the true site of human reconciliation lies beyond the social realm, in the political.[16] Hegel's state is liberal in its socio-economic actions: it does not replace social actors, which would make it totalitarian, but lets society organise itself, reconciling it through law, regulation, and foresight.

While the division of labour is good, extreme division—reducing work to repetitive, unskilled tasks—is harmful (*EPR*, § 243). Workers face job loss and poverty, and widespread fragility creates extremes of great wealth and a disengaged, excluded populace (*EPR*, § 244). This endangers society, fostering social and political conflicts if large masses are excluded from economic and political life. Such masses, forming an inorganic will, would exert mass violence against the state (*EPR*, § 302). Excluded from the state's life, they would see it as a hostile power, not their universal concern (*res publica*), failing to support their rights and happiness. If the state becomes an Other (*EPR*, § 268), a surprising socio-political conflict emerges, threatening internal ruin through disarticulation, dispersion, and hostility to ethical powers. This conflict concerns the actualisation of recognition, which the state owes its citizens by enabling their participation.

Conflicts in the Political State

An idealistic view of Hegel's state sees it as the fulfilment of ethical life, a sphere of reconciliation above all conflict. Yet, it not only addresses civil society's conflicts but is itself the site of supreme political conflicts—concerning decisions, governance, power acquisition, and the state's very meaning. Society is a place of individual confrontation, not a Hobbesian war of all against all or a battlefield leading to violent

15 Peperzak, *Modern Freedom*, 465.
16 Bourgeois, *Hegel, les actes de l'esprit*, 114.

death, but a battleground (*EPR*, § 289): a public space for rivalry and struggle, governed by right and institutions. Echoing the Greek *agôn* and Kant's unsocial sociability, Hegel sees civil life as driven by a conflict rooted in freedom, beneficial as a society of competition and mutual emulation. It is an agonistic space where each asserts their singularity to excel. The state institutionalises a unique conflict in its governmental power, managing society's conflicts. These include individual conflicts, conflicts between private and higher corporate interests (local communities, trade bodies, unions), and conflicts between these and the state's supreme interest. This conflict has its seat in government. Far from a transcendent, peaceful universal, the government is a concrete universal confronting and mediating this unconquerable conflict through its ministries. It must consider possible or actual conflicts, resistances to its plans—sometimes individualistic or corporate, varying in intensity—and guide particularities and corporate bodies to true ethical life through right. These conflicts stem from collisions of rights, where the state's supreme right should prevail, but without violating legitimate interests, reconciling them lawfully. Resolution depends on the wisdom of government, private actors, and subordinate authorities.

A society reduced to pure atomism would be irreconcilable, with the political One and social Many in immediate, disastrous conflict. But society, while valuing free individuality and atomism, has its own legal constitution and institutions, notably corporate bodies, which are self-governing and independent of the state. These mediate relations between individuals, private interests, and the state, playing a major role in ethical life. There are no violent masses facing the state in general conflict, but corporate bodies that, beyond their economic role, mediate state relations and foster peace. Individuals are neither isolated nor alone, as members of legitimate bodies, caring for their common good and thus the state's universal good, gaining a sense of the state. The spirit of the state is rooted in the spirit of the corporation (*EPR*, § 289). The state-society relation is one of political and civil institutions, grounded in instituted freedom. The ethical community is not a conflictual, self-dissolving aggregate of atoms but a spiritual system articulated by the

state. The state's spirit reconciles ethical spheres, letting them develop independently and uniting them through political institutions, notably parliament and representation.

In examining political conflict, the state's constitution is crucial. Modern states' greatness lies in conceiving the state as a differentiated whole of powers. The understanding sees this as separation, each power independent and in inevitable conflict: each poses a potential threat, requiring limits to prevent abuse (*EPR*, § 272). Each is self-sufficient, opposing others' encroachments in a negative relation of mutual limitation. The constitutional problem becomes one of balancing powers as checks and balances, a view from Locke and Montesquieu, treating power as a mechanical issue among hostile forces. Each power is a part, seeking total control in a negative relation, as seen in the French Revolution (*EPR*, § 286).

Differentiation alone is not enough; it must be rational. For Hegel, unified power divides into three powers, each a syllogism, forming the state's single syllogism (*EPR*, § 272-273). Each is the whole power, defined by a specific function, in transparent and fluid ideal moments, continuing itself in the other. Three activities follow: deciding (princely power), governing particulars, and legislating. In this syllogism, each is alternately the mediating term and the mediated extreme, interlinked. Power requires differentiation and mediation in an articulated whole. Far from hostility, each is effective only by producing the others and being active for them. In the state's organic spirit, each is a member of the unified whole, preserving others to preserve itself. Absolute separation into mutually exclusive units would render power impotent, in constant internal conflict, or lead to one's arbitrary dominance. The constitution is not an aggregate, conflictual by nature, but an original unity that differentiates and remains one, identical in its ideal differences. Rational division ensures public freedom and institutional peace, making power abuse impossible—unless the constitution is violated.

The legislative power involves three moments: the prince, the sovereign apex deciding and signing laws; the government, drafting and defending laws before parliament; and the political estates in two

distinct chambers. These represent social estates, enabling the masses to gain a sense of the state through participation. Parliament's key role is mediating between the prince and government and the people (*EPR*, § 302), reconciling individuals and society with the state. Without public participation through representation (unlike ancient Athens), the prince would appear isolated, risking arbitrary domination. This lack of mediating participation would make the state's life structurally conflictual. Representation elevates civil society to the state's life, completing the power's syllogism. Society is not dissolved into masses or pure atomism, nor an irrational will (like ochlocracy) that tends toward violence against the state, appearing as a foreign power. Mediation ensures that particular interests are considered, satisfied non-violently, as rational elements in a free whole.

The chambers' effective freedom allows them to conflict with the government (*EPR*, § 302). But what is this opposition? In a rational constitution, where each is interlinked, mediating and mediated, this conflict is not structural: the chambers cannot be inherently opposed to the government and prince. Such principled hostility would ruin the state through impotence or self-destruction. In the state's syllogism, the chambers are an organic moment, true only as mediators, united with the government for the state's universal good. Parliamentary opposition is limited, concerning specific projects or actions, not the constitution itself. Constitutional disagreement would be a substantial conflict, endangering the state's life, as in the French Revolution. In a rational state's ordinary course, the chambers cooperate with the government in intelligent, constitutionally aligned opposition. This is not principled hostility but the legitimate exercise of legislative power in its difference, examining, amending, and voting on laws and budgets, as exemplified by England in Hegel's view. Ordinary state operations show conflict is not substantial: political conflict is emulation or competition for high office. Opposition to the government reflects disagreement on policy, a desire to display political wisdom, and a struggle for high office from the prince. In this limited power struggle, the prince, in Hegel's constitutional monarchy, remains the sole sovereign apex, free from passions, factions, and the struggle for power (*EPR*, § 281).

Bicameralism is vital for institutional peace. A single chamber opposing the government would lead to immediate confrontation and frequent political crises. The assembly would stand against the government hostilely (*EPR*, § 313). In such a conflict, a disavowed government would resign, or the prince could dissolve the assembly, causing permanent instability. With two chambers—one upper, focused on preserving the living good, and one lower, attentive to modern change—opposition occurs between them. Their opposition is fruitful and lawful, fostering a parliamentary life of genuine pursuit of the universal good through passionate but non-violent debates, mature deliberation, and reasonable decisions. If both chambers approve a government project by free vote, it gains authority, confirmed by the prince. If they reject it, their view is likely reasonable, and the project must be abandoned or revised. This opposition signifies sensible disapproval of a specific project, not the government itself.

Citizen participation in state affairs is crucial for peace. Mediating institutions allow conflicts to be expressed, considered, and resolved. Public parliamentary debates, essential for an informed public opinion, provide ministers and politicians a stage (*EPR*, § 315) to display their political intelligence and will against others. Society's arena is answered by the agonistic theatricality of parliamentary life, a political stage where the state's drama, freedom, and historical meaning are played out publicly. This political theatricality helps resolve conflicts by elevating them to their true meaning and enabling genuine public debate.

Hegel's political thought is not a theory of conciliating opposites to avoid conflict but a doctrine of reconciliation through negativity and rational mediation. It acknowledges the inevitability of conflicts and seeks reason in their resolution. Against dreams of a wholly peaceful world, Hegel highlights the beneficial nature of some conflicts and the persistence of conflict in ethical life. Reconciliation occurs as the spirit's freedom is realised. Conflict fosters freedom when it actualises the spirit's truth in a fragile, hard-won peace. While art resolves conflicts in beauty, ethical life reconciles in truth and the living good, exposed to evil and unconquerable conflicts. This reconciliation is not passive acceptance but the work of thought recognising the spirit's actualisation in its events.

WHITEHEAD'S PROCESS METAPHYSICS OF ORGANISM AND ECO-HARMONY

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Abstract: *Whiteheadian metaphysics of organism presents a speculative description of reality. In this metaphysical description of reality, he tried to explore the deep structure of the natural world and its formation. Whitehead, like atomists, conceives the world as the constitution of the atom-like entities which he calls actual entities or actual occasions or experiences. The actual entities are organisms and therefore, they are vital principles of the world. Unlike Leibniz's windowless monads, Whitehead's actual entities vibrantly involve in a dynamic process of self-construction. On the completion of their self-determination, they continue to become the data for the further constructions of the actual entities. By virtue of their defining characteristic of the interrelatedness, the actual entities become constituting parts of the things of the natural world. Thus, the whole universe becomes the construction of the basic building blocks, i.e., actual entities. This is the natural process which Whitehead speculatively postulates as fundamental for the becoming, self-sustenance, and productivity of the natural world. The article claims that whole process maintains the harmony both at the origin and completion of the world. However, when this natural process is tampered with the human scientific and technological activities, the so-called being, sustainability and productivity of the natural world are diminished and incapacitated. Thus, the eco-harmony is destroyed.*

Introduction

The eco-harmony which we are in need of, generally and theoretically speaking, is a balanced whole in the ecosystem. In concrete terms, it can mean a balanced development and consequently a balanced earth. We need to talk about a balanced development or a sustainable development because our propaganda of development is mostly anthropocentric. It means that human development mainly focuses on socio-political,

cultural, and economic development. We focus on activities centred on human needs irrespective of the environmental carrying capacity. We need to preserve the carrying capacity of the environment for our future generation through a sustainable human development. The environmental disasters as reported worldwide show that we can no longer continue the anthropocentric unsustainable development. On the other hand, amidst many warnings given by the nature itself, we force our activities either by polluting the environment or by exhausting the un-renewable natural resources such as air, water bodies, soil, and fossil fuels. The extinction of the ecosystem and the biodiversity cautions us about the disproportionate, excessive, improper, and irrational human intervention in the natural process of the ecosystem, the importance of the re-conceptualization of the human development, and the demand of the human effort to maintain eco-harmony.

To correct the mess-up in the ecosystem requires our effort. We must, first of all, re-conceptualize human development to incorporate a development, common to all living and non-living beings in the light of Whitehead's metaphysics of organism. Added to this re-conceptualization of human development, maintaining a good balance between our organismic idea about the natural world, modern scientific development, and technology can surely put us on the right track towards this new vision of sustainable human development or rather a holistic development. Sustainable development preserves eco-harmony, i.e., the harmonious co-existence of all beings.

Whiteheadian metaphysical ideas about organism uncover the existence of the miniature realities of the world, their processes, and their interrelatedness, bring out metaphysical justification to the co-existence of nature and to the holistic development of all, and finally emphasize on the importance of eco-harmony for the betterment of all.

1. Whiteheadian Process Metaphysics of Organism

Whiteheadian metaphysics of the organism, as it is given in his major work, *Process and Reality*, is essentially a philosophy of nature. It is all about investigating the processual nature of the organismic world. Whiteheadian process metaphysics of organism is a newer version of

the age-old philosophical theory of Greeks. It is the combination or the mixture of ancient Platonic, atomic and Heraclitan process theories. It gives a more concrete, scientific and deeper meaning about the natural world, its functioning, and its purpose.

For Whitehead, the term 'organism,' means an organized physical structure or a living thing especially one that is extremely small or a system consisting of parts that depend on each other. The following couple of questions will serve as a starting point for the exploration of the organism: Why does whitehead talk about 'organism'? What does that word stand for in his metaphysics of organism? Whiteheadian process philosophy is anchored on the ultimate principle known as 'actual entity' (Whitehead, 1985, p. 35). An actual entity is nothing but an atom-like reality, of which the world is composed. In other words, the actual entities, like the atoms in atomic theory, are the building blocks of the universe. Whitehead understands these fundamental organismic units of the natural world as "processes," "events," "happenings," "occasions," and "actualities" (Hosinski, 1993, p.9). As per the size of these entities, he describes that an actual entity has the size of a millionth part of a centimetre (Whitehead, 1967, p. 126). According to Whitehead, these actual entities are microcosmic realities, of which this gross world is constituted. The atoms and the so-called subatomic particles of modern atomic physics are far bigger than the size of actual entities. In fact, whitehead calls the atoms and subatomic particles as societies of actual entities (Whitehead, 1985, P. 35). It means that they are already combinations of actual entities. The things that we see and experience in the world are enormously complicated societies composed of numerous societies of actual entities. Each cell in any body is a society of actual entities. Actual entity is incapable of further analysis into independent entities because it is deprived of further divisions (Whitehead, 1967, p. 177). But at the same time, an actual entity is not simple; it is composite. It is an ultimate type of composite unity, and all other compositions are derivatives or exemplifications of actual entities (Whitehead, 1985, P. 148). In simpler terms, we can understand the actual entity as a microcosmic or quantum unit of this actual world.

Whitehead's fundamental assumption is that the actual entities are basically organismic and processual (Whitehead, 1985, p. 7). As actual entities are organisms, they are capable of development, growth, annihilation, and reproduction. The actual entity is organismic, because in the traditional sense, it is the 'Form' or 'Actuality,' but always changing and dynamic as opposed to static nature of traditional metaphysical sense; and in Whiteheadian sense, it is "[…] at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences" (Whitehead, 1985, P. 29). Actual entities, as subjects, constitute themselves to be substantive realities and as *superjet*s, i.e., on the completion of their self-construction, they perish as constituting subjects and become the data (object) for future constituting actual entities. By becoming data for future actual entities, actual entities as *superjets* or objects that never perish; they are immortal (Whitehead, 1985, P. 29). The subjective activity of self-construction and objective passivity of becoming data for the construction of other subsequent actual entities inevitably make actual entities as organisms and processes.

2. Process and Actual Entities

Actual entities are basically processual because, they are constantly creating themselves; and in creating themselves, they come to exist as entities. Once they accomplish their task of creating themselves, they become constituting elements for the forthcoming actual entities. They become constituting elements not only for the immediate next generation of actual entities, but also for the endless generation of actual entities. Actual entities, once constructed or concretized or constituted, never perish. In this sense, there are two types of process according to Whitehead: process as 'becoming' or 'concrescence' and process as 'transition.' The distinction between these two processes can also be called as internal process (process of becoming) and external process (process of transition).

3. Process of Concrescence or Process of Becoming

Etymologically, the word, 'concrescence' can be divided into the constitutive words: *cum/con* (*together*) and *crescence* (to *grow*). Therefore, 'concrescence' is the central idea in Whitehead's philosophy

of organism which generally entails the fact of *growing together*. It is a fundamental processual activity of the actual entity in which the universe of many things is objectified and appropriated or incorporated to become part of the self-constitution of a novel entity. The process of becoming or the internal constitution (self-creation) of actual entity is what spelled out by the term 'concrescence' (Whitehead, 1985, p. 210*)*. "'Concrescence' is the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the 'many' to its subordination in the constitution of the novel 'one'" (Whitehead, 1985, p. 85*)*.

The 'process as becoming' means 'coming to be' or 'coming into being.' Whitehead describes process of concrescence as, "That *how* an actual entity *becomes*, constitutes *what* that actual entity *is*; […] its 'being' is constituted by its 'becoming.' This is the principle of process" (Whitehead, 1985, p. 23). This 'becoming' is always becoming of a creative advance into novelty (Whitehead, 1985, p. 28). This is the originative phase in the process of the world whereby, determinate definiteness of actual entities is achieved. Concrescence is also primary and qualitative phase because it creates the individual essence of the actual entity (Nobo, 1986, p. 31).

More particularly, concrescence is concerned with the genetic formation of actual entity. It is a fundamental characteristic activity of actual entity that determines the being and the nature of the actual entity. It is an activity in which the formative elements of an actual entity interact with other actual entities, and out of this interaction there comes out the concrete actual entity. The concretizing activity of actual entity ends in the completion of its construction—the perfection of actual entity. Whitehead calls this as building up of determinate satisfaction.

> The concrescence is thus the building up of a determinate 'satisfaction,' which constitutes the completion of the actual togetherness of the discrete components. The process of concrescence terminates with the attainment of a fully determinate 'satisfaction; and the creativity thereby passes over into the 'given' primary phase for the concrescence of other actual entities (Whitehead, 1985, p. 85).

There is a definite end to the process of constitution of the individual organisms or actual entities, but these completed organisms in return contribute to the on-going process of the creation of other actual entities by being their constituent elements.

3.1. Prehension

The important term to understand the process of concrescence is prehension. The root word for the 'prehension' comes from the Latin word, *prehensio(noun* form for prehension). The word, *prehensio* has its root from *prehendere*, which means 'to grasp.' Prehension, according to Whitehead, is a processing activity by which an actual entity carries out its own concretion, i.e., an activity of knowing or grasping the data[1] and synthesizing or appropriating them into its self-constitution or concrescence (Whitehead, 1985, P. 52). By the act of prehension, the other actual entities with their formal existence are included objectively in the activity of becoming an actual entity. By way of prehending, an actual entity is in perfect and eternal bond with the rest of the things of the world. Alternatively, whitehead also uses the word, 'feeling' instead of 'prehension' to mean the functioning through which the actuality which is in concrescence appropriates the datum to make its own (Whitehead, 1985, P. 164). Whitehead explains how the act of prehension works in a cell theory as follows:

> In the genetic theory, the cell is exhibited as appropriating for the foundation of its own existence, the various elements of the universe out of which it arises. Each process of appropriation of a particular element is termed a prehension. The ultimate elements of the universe, thus appropriated, are the already constituted actual entities, and the eternal objects (Whitehead, 1985, P. 219).

In the above-mentioned passage, Whitehead mentions about two types of the ultimate elements of universe appropriated. These two elements

1 The word, 'datum' stands for the other actual entities which have completed their self-formation and the eternal ideas. These two things constitute the data for the prehension of actual entities. We understand about the actual entities which have completed their self-constitution, but we may not understand the term, 'eternal ideas' for now. We may understand about it later when the term is explained in the paper. Eternal ideas, according to Whitehead, are simply the immaterial elements of the reality or actual entities over against the material ones.

constitute the datum for the prehension. The first type is the already-constituted actual entities and the second is the eternal objects. The former type is about the past actual entities and they are objectified as constituting elements by the current actual entities which are concretizing themselves. The latter type which is about eternal objects or ideas is like that of the Platonic forms. These eternal ideas are prehended or appropriated into one's own formation by the mind. And therefore, the prehension of these eternal ideas is called 'mental prehension' while the prehension of the past or objectified actual entities is known as 'physical prehension.'

3.1.1. Two Species of Prehensions

Actual entities do not appropriate all the data or information posited by the objectified world of past actual entities. They appropriate only the data relevant and pertinent to their nature and avoid the irrelevant and inappropriate ones for their constitution. Whitehead explains this phenomenon of appropriation by introducing the two species of prehensions: positive and negative prehensions. Positive prehension is the definite inclusion or incorporation of data in the progressive constitution of an actual entity. Negative prehension is the definite exclusion of the data from the positive contribution to the internal constitution of the actual entity (Whitehead, 1985, p. 25 & 41). If there are no positive and negative prehensions in the concretizing activity of the actual entities, there may not be beauty, plurality and variety of things and this world may turn to be monotonous, homogenous and disordered. It is for this reason that Whitehead claims that prehension is not a homogenous activity of the actual entities. Actual entities prehend or appropriate not the same way and not the same set of data. There is fundamental difference in the prehension. Certain things are appropriated and certain other things are avoided by the actual entities. For example, plutonium is chemically toxic to human body. Therefore, human bodies do not incorporate or appropriate or prehend it to make it their own constituting element. It means that it is negatively prehended.

3.1.2. Two Sides of Prehensions

Actual entities are basically bipolar: physical and mental. It means that actual entities are constituted of both physical (material) and mental

(psychical) elements. Whitehead explains this constitution of the physical and mental elements by introducing two sides of prehensions: physical and conceptual or mental prehensions. These two are essentially interrelated for the reasons of process, self-construction, novelty, purposiveness, and values in actual entities. Whitehead transforms the age-old mind-body problem by giving altogether a different explanation for the union of body and mind in his conception of the ultimate fact (actual entity). He considers the actual entity as one, single, individual, and distinct unit, namely the actual entity. He writes, "The integration of the physical and mental poles into a unity of experience is a self-formation which is nothing but the process of concrescence and which by the principle of objective immortality characterizes the creativity which transcends it" (Whitehead, 1985, P. 108). Though mental and physical poles are there in the constitution of an actual entity, they are not two different real activities, but two aspects of one and the same concretizing activity of the actual entity.

Physical prehension means that during the concrescence, the actual entity grasps or appropriates to itself the physical data, i.e., the already settled or objectified actual entities. These actual entities have finished their subjective or self-constitution and have become objective data for the prehension of the presently concretizing actual entities. Mental or conceptual prehension is the act of absorbing eternal objects which are actually 'qualities,' 'forms or essences,' 'values,' 'theories,' 'principles,' and 'God' for the determination and specifications of the actual entities (Dunham, 2010, p. 141). In this sense, Whitehead understands eternal ideas as constituents of the primordial nature of God (Whitehead, 1985, p. 46), for, it is God who consolidates, and ordains for the prehension of the actual entities. Eternal objects are those entities which make it possible for there to be anything in the world of space and time which can be a definite 'this' or 'that.' It means that they are formal determinant factors, i.e., non-temporal, non-empirical and spiritual elements of actual entities. Hall delineates five functions of eternal objects—universality, abstractness, permanence, identity, and potentiality (Hall, I930, pp. 29-44). Due to the reason of eternal objects, determinate definiteness of actual entities is achieved. Conceptual prehension is qualitative

because, the qualitative aspect, i.e., the individual essence of the actual entity is created (Nobo, 1986, p. 31). Mental and physical prehensions explain how everything in this world is constituted of psychical and physical characteristics and how these characteristics are gained from the previous generations.

3.2. Process of Transition

'Transition' entails a passage from one actual entity to another actual entity – from one generation to another generation of actual entities. When one actual entity accomplishes the process, it becomes the constituting principle for subsequent emergence of actual entities. Whiteheads writes:

> The other kind is the fluency whereby the perishing of the process, on the completion of the particular existent, constitutes that existent as an original element in the constitutions of other particular existents elicited by repetitions of process. This kind I have called 'transition.' (Whitehead, 1985, p. 210)

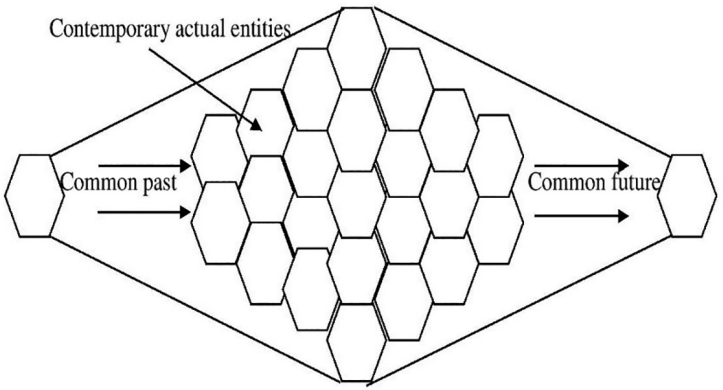
In this fashion, process of transition connects past, present, and future actual entities. The past actual entities are unavoidable for the concretization of the present ones and the present ones are as important as the past ones for the future actual entities. In short, the past is the constituting principle of the present and future. This temporal dimension of coming together of actual entities creates the world history and its process. In this sense, every creature that exists presupposes an earlier creature (Whitehead, 1985, p. 68). Whatever the world is synthesizing or experiencing now is going to be a drop of experience for future world and an unalterable context of the future (Lowe, 1962, pp. 18-19).

In this sense, the origin of the present world is always in conformity with the power of the past world (Whitehead, 1985, p. 210). Since 'transition' creates new occasions and objectifies in them the superjects which are already in existence, repeatability which is important for the continuity of the history of the world is maintained in the process of 'transition,' so that, each new actual entity does not have a breakaway from the old or from the universe whence it emerges to be. Transition also supports the principle of creativity and by virtue of which the

universe is involved in its on-going creation. Finally, the process of transition is relational because it connects past, present and future.

4. Interrelatedness

Interrelatedness among contemporary actual entities



Relatedness or connectedness is the characteristic feature of the actual entity whereby, each actual entity essentially maintains its connection with the universe of other things (Whitehead, 1968, p. 66). Whitehead writes, "But no two actualities can be torn apart: each is all in all" (Whitehead, 1985, p. 348). This relatedness is concerned with the prehension or appropriation of objectified actual entity (finished processes) by the actual entities which are active in the process.

> The positive doctrine of these lectures is concerned with the becoming, being, and the relatedness of 'actual entities.' […] All relatedness has its foundation in the relatedness of actualities; and such relatedness is wholly concerned with the appropriation of the dead by the living—that is to say, with 'objective immorality' whereby what is divested of its own living immediacy becomes a real component in other living immediacies of becoming (Whitehead, 1985, p. xiii-xiv).

Relatedness can be conceived at two different levels: microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. At the microcosmic level, there is interrelatedness among the contemporary actual entities. Therefore, all things are simply the products of the interrelatedness among various actual entities. This

interdependence or mutual immanence among contemporary actual entities is not causally initiated because no two contemporary actual entities are in any direct relation to efficient causation. They can be only related by way of common past and common future. The diagram explains the mutual immanence of contemporary actual entities and their common past and future. From the diagram, we understand that the past is objectified or incorporated in the present and the future is immanent in the present; or in other words, the present constitutes the future (Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 194). "The actual entities originate from a common past and their objective immortality operates within a common future. But the immediate activity of self-creation is separate and private, so far as contemporaries are concerned" (Whitehead, 1961, p. 195).

As he insists on the interconnectedness of actual entities, Whitehead never compromises with the subjective freedom of the actual entities. For, Whitehead says, "The mutual independence of contemporary actual entities lies strictly within the sphere of their teleological self-creation" (Whitehead, 1961, p. 195*).* The purpose of the subjective freedom of the contemporary actual entities is to create their future. Each contemporary actual entity is responsible for its future. This is why the purpose in actual entities is always geared towards their teleological self-creation. There is freedom at the same time responsibility—freedom of creating oneself and responsibility for creating the common future, that is, the future of the world. Actual entities by creating themselves create the universe—the future of the universe. The principle of interrelatedness also explains the relation between macro-realities of the world, simply because the macro-realities are the societies of actual entities.

5. Nexus

A nexus is a group of actual entities. "Any such particular fact of togetherness among actual entities is called a 'nexus'" (Whitehead, 1985, P. 20). In other words, a nexus or a society[2] is a collection of actual entities, that are unified by means of their prehensions of one another

2 The term, 'society' in place of 'nexus' can be used even though Whitehead slightly differentiates these two.

(Whitehead, 1985, P. 24). Whitehead says that the nexus is the correlate to the concrescence. “The nexus of actual entities in the universe correlate to a concrescence is termed 'the actual world' correlate to that concrescence” (Whitehead, 1985, P. 23). Actual entities are by nature nexus due to their natural characteristic of coming together through the activities of prehension and objectification. Whitehead asserts, “That a nexus is a set of actual entities in the unity of the relatedness constituted by their prehensions of each other, or, what is the same thing conversely expressed, constituted by their objectifications in each other” (Whitehead, 1985, p. 23).

To form a nexus, the actual entities should be temporally related. In other words, they should possess the quality of endurance. The principle of endurance needs antecedent and subsequent actual entities (Whitehead, 1985, P. 34). Actual entity only becomes and perishes, but a nexus changes according to the changing circumstances. The nature and quality of nexus depend on the mutual immanence of its members. Everything in this world is a nexus and the whole universe is composed of nexuses. In this sense, there is nothing which does not have value, and there is nothing which is valuable in its isolation. The universe achieves its existence, meaning, and value by the reason of its interrelatedness or coordination between nexuses. Whitehead describes all entities and the universe at large as solidarities of many actual entities. As nexus, when an actual occasion synthesizes the many data which are already self-created actual entities and unifies them into its subject, it experiences the solidarity of other actual entities (Whitehead, 1985, p. 40).In this sense, everything in this world is a solidarity of many actual entities. Everything is interrelated and there is nothing isolated in this world.

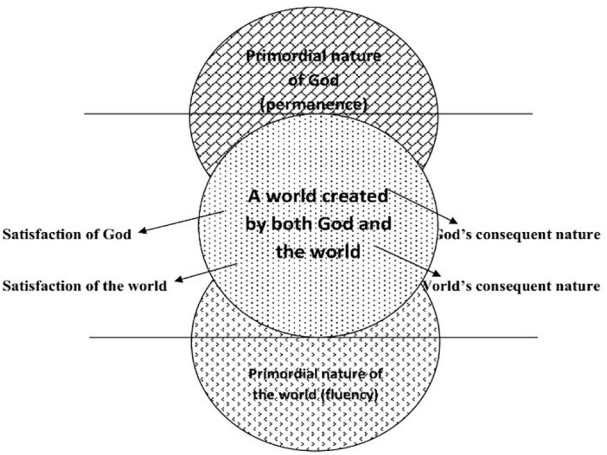
6. Primordial and Consequential Natures of God and the World

In Whitehead’s understanding, God and the world are not entirely opposites. In Whiteheadian system, even though God and the world maintain their own separateness and uniqueness, yet there is an interaction between them. One may question what makes God and the world to mutually interact. Whitehead explains the mutual fulfilment of

both God and the world by introducing their primordial and consequential natures (Whitehead, 1985, pp. 342-351). God in his primordial nature is transcendent, absolute, unchanging, and infinite. God's primordial nature is like Aristotle's conception of God as Unmoved Mover. God in his primordial nature is not moved by the love and hate of any corporeal being (Whitehead, 1985, p. 105). It means that God is not touched by the world. But his consequential nature is just opposite whereby he becomes immanent, fluent, determined, incomplete, consequent, everlasting, fully actual and conscious (Whitehead, 1985, p. 345). Whereas, the primordial nature of the world is constituted of its finitude, limitations, imperfections, and change, its consequential nature consists of its everlastingness (Whitehead, 1985, p. 349), and perfection.

Both God and the world are undertaking a process—process of self-constitution. God constitutes his consequential self by incorporating whatever the world has achieved or perfected so far. God is fulfilled only when he constitutes his consequential self which is God's union with the world. In the same way, the world also moves towards its perfection when it transcends from its primordial nature to its consequential nature, i.e., the world's union with the consequential nature of God. Hence, both God and the world cannot be fulfilled without each other's contribution—a mutual fulfilment (Whitehead, 1985, p. 32).

God's transitional process from his primordial nature to his consequent nature is initiated by his experience of the physical world. He goes through this experience by feeling and objectifying the material world into the constitution of his consequent nature (Whitehead, 1985, p. 345). The world constitutes its consequential nature, namely, its fulfilment, its perfection and its everlastingness especially when God assimilates the world into himself or in other words, when he objectifies the actual world for the construction of his consequential nature. He realizes the actual world in himself. He incorporates the world to himself by being the object for the becoming of the world. His consequent nature is the unification of his experience of the physical world with his primordial nature.



> The consequent nature of God is the fluent world become 'everlasting' by its objective immorality in God. Also, the objective immorality of actual occasions requires the primordial permanence of God, whereby the creative advance ever re-establishes itself endowed with initial subjective aim derived from the relevance of God to the evolving world (Whitehead, 1985, p. 347).

In this consequential nature of God and the world, both God and creatures meet each other, fulfil each other, and feel mutually fulfilled and satisfied; and there exists everlasting union between God and creation (Whitehead, 1985, p. 347). In Whiteheadian philosophical system of organism, God is panentheistic. God is both immanent and transcendent. It implies that there is an interrelatedness and interdependency between God and the world. Whitehead goes to the extent of saying that God creates the world and conversely the world creates God. Though it looks rather perverse, yet there is truth in it. The world needs God for its self-creation and in return, God needs the worldly creatures for the constitution of his consequent nature which is assumed or incorporated later by his primordial nature. (see the figure)

> In God's nature, permanence is primordial, and flux is derivative from the world. In the world's nature, flux is primordial and permanence is derivative from God. Also the world's nature is primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial datum for the world. Creation achieves the reconciliation of permanence and flux when it has

> reached its final term which is everlastingness—the Apotheosis of the World (Whitehead, 1985, p. 348).

Whitehead requires the concept of God as the principle of concretion which is the primal activity of the basic organism in his system as Aristotle required him as Prime Mover to his system of cosmology (Whitehead, 1967, p. 174). In his primordial nature, God is the ground of all potentialities. By being the reservoir of eternal objects God orders the eternal objects according to their relevance for the process of the self-constitution of the actual entities. God, by establishing the subjective aim and the initial object of desire to the constitution of the actual entities, becomes the lure (appetite) for the feeling of prehension of actual entities. It means that God is the reservoir or the holder of all values, qualities, virtues, and ethics. Even though, he provides eternal objects to the actual entities, God never determines the actual course of the actual entities. He only provides them a universe of eternal objects to choose and concretize.

God, in his consequential nature, leaves his status as transcendent and comes to the creatures as their constituting part. He becomes the constituting principle of concretion by being the initiator of the concrescence of the actual entities or organisms and the provider of the possibilities. God is responsible for all novelty in the actual world, for, the objectification of the already concretized actual entities is done in God himself. Therefore, the novelty that the present actual entities are aiming at, are already presupposed in the objectification of the actual world in God.

Whitehead's naturalistic theism says that "all things are in God," and the world is an essential part of the divinity. Hartshorne confirms that Whitehead's God is the soul of the world and therefore the existence of the world is no more contingent but an essential part of the divine essence (Hartshorne, 1984, p. 59). David Griffin reaffirms that the relationship between God and the world is beyond the will of both God and the world and is founded on the necessity of the nature of God and of the world (Griffin, 2007, p. 27 & Whitehead, 1961, p. 168). In other words, the relationship between nature and God is in a way

necessitated. Divine influence in the on-going creation of the world is a necessary dimension of the process of creation.

7. Whitehead's Metaphysics of Organism and Ecoharmony

Whiteheadian metaphysics of organism comes under theoretical metaphysics. In a way it is a kind of description of what the reality is in its microcosmic and macrocosmic levels and how the actual entities construct themselves and come to life and by doing so through their characteristic principle of interrelatedness, form this visible material world. This material world is simply the combination of those actual entities. The microorganisms (actual entities) are continuously creating themselves in the primary phase and by entering in relationship with other actual entities, they form nexuses in the secondary phase. The nexuses of actual entities constitute the world and its things. This is how Whitehead explains the formation of the world using his metaphysics of organism. This formation of the world is a processual one which is unending. This processual formation of the world is explained by the metaphysical principles of organism such as, concrescence, prehension, teleological transition, interdependence, and nexus.

The article holds that Whiteheadian metaphysics of organism is the origin and the summit of the ecoharmony. The harmony which is the need of our time is not foreign to the natural world. According to Whitehead, harmony is there already at the genetic level of the organism or actual entity (at the level of the self-construction of the organism) and at the transitional level, i.e., the teleological level of the nexuses of organisms (at the level of the formation of the gross realities of the world, i.e., nexuses of actual entities). In other words, harmony is found both at the microcosmic and macrocosmic level of the construction of the natural world.

As Anaxagoras, Whitehead believes that in everything, there is a portion of everything. On this ground, he confirms that every organism incorporates everything else either by way of its fundamental characteristic activity of prehending or by becoming objects for the prehensions of the other organisms. In this sense, the organism by nature is in harmony with everything else in this world. Consequently,

the world as the constitution of the organisms, is also in perfect harmony with all that constitute it. This harmony has to be maintained as it is. It means that any change that humans bring should be in consonance with the already existing natural harmony. It is the need of the time and it is what most governments wish today.

In 1972, Lovelock developed Gaia[3] hypothesis which establishes that all living organisms together with the atmosphere and the oceans constitute some kind of super-organism that controls chemical changes in the environment. Gaia controls temperature, oxidation-reduction potential, and Hydrogen-iron concentration, and other chemical realities in the environment. Overall, Gaia creates an optimal or a positive condition for life in the atmosphere. This Gaia hypothesis is based on the fact that biological processes affect the chemical and physical environment on the surface of the earth (Fenchel, 2002, 149). It proposes that all living organisms interact with their inorganic surrounding to form a cooperative or interactive and self-regulative complex system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the favourable conditions for life on the planet. Gaia claims that the earth is a self-regulative system and demands that the physical and chemical environment should be optimal for life. In this way, Gaia explains the harmonious eco-system and its interaction with the habitation of different life-forms. It claims what Whitehead strongly believed to be the reality. In his metaphysical description of the nature, like Gaia Whitehead confirms that there is a deeper level interaction between the basic organisms and the macrolevel environment and ecosystem.

> It seems possible that there may be physical laws expressing the modification of the ultimate basic organisms when they form part of higher organisms with adequate compactness of pattern. It would, however, be entirely in consonance with the empirically observed action of environments (Whitehead, 1985, p. 150).

As long as the natural interaction between the microorganisms and the outer environment is healthy, both microorganisms and the outer environment remain environmentally fit and productive. Any unwanted and unhealthy interference with the natural interaction or the process

3 Gaia is a primordial earth goddess in Greek myth, literally, "earth".

of the outer environment will necessarily bring alteration in the nature of the microorganisms and consequently in the macrocosmic world. When our scientific and technological activities empty the non-renewable natural resources, pollute the environment, and inflict toxic and other harmful materials emitted into the surface, we must know that the microorganisms get damaged, diminished, weakened, and made impotent. In fact, we need scientific and technological development to meet the rising needs of human society. However, excessive scientific and technological intervention in the natural process of the world brings unwanted and negative impacts on the environment, contributing to various disasters such as, global warming, whether extremes, and the extinction of some of the living organisms.

Whiteheadian systematic metaphysical interpretation of the organism explores the harmony which is very fundamental to the nature. There is harmony in the formation of the actual entities which are the building blocks of the world. This harmony which is there at the beginning of the organisms is being extended in a teleological fashion to the world as the macro-organism. This ecoharmony should not be tampered by human irrational intervention. Any harmful and unwanted intervention in the process of the macrocosmic world will affect the process or self-creation of the microorganisms. The affected microorganisms will become incapacitated, devitalized, malnutritional, weak, unproductive, and degenerated as mentioned above. This negative impact will be carried on to the next generation of organisms especially when affected-microorganisms become objectified data for the constitution of the future organisms. At the end, many micro worms, and vulnerable beings will be extinct, generations will be weakened, and at large the world will have a shortened lifespan.

Often, we intervene in the natural process of the world either consciously or unconsciously, especially when we throw the used polyethene, use pesticides, fertilizers and so on to increase the harvest, use refrigerators and other machineries in our kitchen, eat all kinds of junk foods, drink chemically charged soft drinks, and consume excessive amount of water and electricity. In this fashion, when we introduce elements foreign, unwanted, and harmful to the organisms, they appropriate them

and construct themselves accordingly. These stuffs which are forcefully introduced into the self-construction of the organisms become part of their being and when these organisms are objectified for the construction of the future organisms, the future organisms get devitalized, made unproductive, become impotent as mentioned above. These genetic deficiencies caused in the macrocosmic organisms by anthropogenic activity will be reflected in the microcosmic organism. Some may argue also saying that the world, as Gaia believes, heals itself. But when the damage goes beyond the viable level, the organisms get deteriorated and there happens the collapse of the ecosystem.

Conclusion

Whitehead excavates the organism in order to give a rational and processual explanation to the reality of the world. His excavation into the very nature of the organism helps us understand that world is organismic, processual, and harmonious. These characteristics of the world tell us that the world is naturally a harmonious and organismic system and we cannot simply carry out human development without considering all the inhabitants of the world, because any harm done to any of the elements of the world will have its effect on the whole organism of the world. Since the actual entities or the organisms are the moments in the life-histories of all the enduring entities (living and non-living) and of the whole ecosystem, the harmony of the actual entities must be preserved to enhance the self-preservation of the lower beings and promote the sustainable human development.

As we all have to play a part in conserving the harmony in ecosystem, first of all, we need to involve ourselves in aligning our choices and behaviours with the concepts of ecological balance and sustainability. Secondly, we must encourage sustainable development for conserving environmental sustainability. Thirdly, we need to support international organizations, such as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) to bring about international collaborations to battle against climate change and to maintain a harmonious ecosystem. Fourthly, we have to support scientific researches and monitoring programmes to better understand

the ecosystem and retain its healthy condition. Fifthly, we ought to raise awareness about the environmental issues and advocate for policies on state, national and international levels that promote sustainability. And finally, we need to educate people to reduce pollution industrial, agricultural, and of urban sources to protect the quality of the natural resources.

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THE STRUGGLE OF HERMENEUTICS IN THE FERTILE DESERT OF SUSPICION

Annie Kunnath

Abstract: *This paper clarifies the concept of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," improving our understanding of how suspicion and trust interact when interpreting oral, written or human texts. This is achieved in three stages. The Prefiguration stage contextualises the concept historically and discusses its development at various points in history. The Configuration stage critically examines Paul Ricoeur's double hermeneutics of destruction and reconstruction. The reconfiguration stage is open-ended, with a couple of reflections on the ongoing ball-game relationship between the hermeneutics of suspicion and trust.*

The aim of this article is to make the concept "hermeneutics of suspicion" intelligible. This will lead to a better understanding of the dialectical relationship between suspicion and trust, and their non-negligible interplay in today's world. Clarifying the concept requires an understanding of its historical context, in other words, a re-view of how it emerged at different points in history, especially in the mid-twentieth century. This forms the first part of the paper, which I will refer to as the 'Prefiguration' stage. The second phase, the 'Configuration' stage, critically examines Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of destruction" and "hermeneutics of reconstruction." Ricoeur refers to this as a "struggle." The third and final part of the paper, the 'Refiguration' stage, concludes with a couple of reflections.[1]

1. Prefiguration

The term "hermeneutics of suspicion" has been misinterpreted, misunderstood, simplified, lost in translation and in interpretation. Various versions of the hermeneutics of suspicion are in circulation.

1 Paul Ricoeur uses these three terms—"Prefiguration," "Configuration," "Refiguration"—in his theory of triple narrative mimesis. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

To recover the original meaning of the expression, we need to make Husserl's call our own: "Go back to the things themselves" (*zu den Sachen selbst*).

1.1. Etymology of the Word "Suspicion"

The etymology of the noun "suspicion" is from the Anglo-Norman *suspecioun*, which corresponds to the Old French words *suspeçun*, *sospeçon* ("mistrust," "suspicion"). It refers to the "act of suspecting," "unverified conjecture of wrongdoing," "mistrust," "distrust," etc. While all the above meanings are related to trust in some way—whether that be a lack of trust, a suspension of trust or a negation of trust—it is interesting to note that, in other Indo-European languages, words for 'suspicion' tend to be derived from words for 'think' or 'look,' with prefixes denoting 'under' or 'behind.' Examples include the Greek *hypopsia* (*hypo* 'under' + *opsis* 'sight'), *hyponoia* (*hypo* 'under' + *noein* 'to think'); Lettish *aizduomas* (a*iz* 'behind' + '*duomat*' 'to think'); Russian *podozrenie* (Slavic *podu* 'under' + Old Church Slavonic *zireti* 'see', 'look'); Dutch a*chterdocht* (*achter* 'behind'+ *denken* 'to think'); German *Hintergedenken* (*hinter* behind, after + *gedenken* to think).

What often comes up is the notion of thinking behind; that is, suspicion contains within it this meaning of thinking behind something; or seeing under; or looking under. This implies that suspicion compels us to see beyond what is literal, present or evident to the eye. There is something more; something behind. Some thinking behind is called for. Therefore, suspicion does not only mean a lack of trust, disbelief or doubt; but also the necessity of looking beyond what is evident.

Historical Routing of the Expression "Hermeneutics of Suspicion"

The expression "*maîtres du soupçon*" (masters of suspicion) is attributed to Ricoeur. He is thought to have first used it in his book *De l'interpretation: Essai sur Freud* published in 1965.[2] What I want to highlight here is that this expression in fact predates Ricoeur's

2 Though published in 1965, the book was completed at least six months prior to this date. Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation. Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Seuil, Coll. «L'ordre philosophique», 1965).

work on Freud. Ricoeur uses the expression « *maîtres du soupçon* » in his lecture "Démystification de l'accusation" during the colloque Castelli in Rome from 7-12 January 1965 on «"Démythisation et morale,"[3] where interestingly Raymond Panikkar too participated. However, the most interesting part is that, in his paper *Le Conflit des herméneutiques: Epistémologie des interprétations* presented at the *Societé de symbolisme* in 1963,[4] Ricoeur refers to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as "the three great masters of modern hermeneutics" (*les trois grands maîtres de l'herméneutique moderne*). Ricoeur continued to use this description in his latter works. The paper was later re-edited and printed as parts of certain texts in his book *Conflict of Interpretations*.[5] However, the original text of this talk is in the archives of Ricoeur, the Fonds Ricoeur.

But, was Ricoeur the first to use this expression, or was he the only one? Michel Foucault, a fellow French philosopher and contemporary of Ricoeur, whose work focuses on the self, sexuality, madness, relationship between power and discourse, has also used the term "masters of suspicion," which Ricoeur first introduced in 1963, as well as the expression "two kinds of suspicion." However, Foucault's approach differs from Ricoeur's. While Foucault speaks of "two kinds of suspicion," Ricoeur analyses "two great styles of hermeneutics" in his 1963 talk.

At the Round Table discussion held during the Seventh International Philosophical Colloquium in Royaumont, a suburb of Paris, from 4-8 July 1964, and which Ricoeur does not appear to have attended, Foucault presented a paper entitled "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx." Note the order

3 Enrico Castelli, *Démythisation et morale: Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre international d'études humanistes et par l'Institut d'études philosophiques de Rome*, Rome, 7-12 janvier 1965, Numéro 5 (Paris: Editions Montaigne, Aubier, 1965).

4 The edited version of the talk is found in: Paul Ricoeur, «Le conflit des herméneutiques: épistémologie des interprétation», *Cahiers Internationaux de symbolism*, 1/1 (1963): 152-84.

5 Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations. Essays in Hermeneutics* (Series: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy), trans. of *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique* by several translators with an introduction by the editor D. Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1974).

of the three names. Foucault puts Nietzsche first, followed by Freud and Marx. While Ricoeur, in all his references to the three, follows the chronological order and places them historically: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud. Perhaps Foucault did this because of the great influence of Nietzsche's writings on his life and works.[6]

Foucault's paper primarily focused on some of the interpretation techniques employed by Nietzsche, Freud and Marx. He begins by discussing his idea for an encyclopaedia of the history of interpretation techniques, from the Greek grammarians to the present day. He then states that, in at least Indo-European cultures, language has always given rise to two kinds of suspicions. Now, these two types of suspicion can already be found in ancient Greek literature.

The first suspicion is that language conceals. What it says is not necessarily what it means ("*le langage ne dit pas exactement ce qu'il dit*"). Nor does it say what it really means. The meaning one grasps, which manifests itself immediately, "is perhaps in reality only a lesser meaning [*moindre sens*] that shields, restrains, and despite everything transmits another meaning, the meaning 'underneath it' [*d'en dessous*]."[7] Examples of this are allegory and hyponoia. Rather than the literal meaning, there is a hidden or deeper meaning of the text, perhaps discovered through careful reading.

The second suspicion that language gives rise to is that there are non-verbal articulations, that go beyond verbal language. There are many other things in the world that speak without being verbal: "After all, it might be that nature, the sea, rustling trees, animals, faces, masks, crossed swords all speak. Perhaps there is some language articulating itself in a way that would not be verbal. This would be, if you wish, very crudely, the *semaïnon* of the Greeks."[8]

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6 The paper that Foucault read was published as "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," in *Nietzsche, Cahiers du Royaumont* (Paris: Les Editions du Minuit, 1964):183-92. It was reprinted in: Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", in Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, (Albany: SUNY, 1990): 59-67.

7 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx": 59.

8 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx": 59.

A system of interpretation is needed, along with its associated approaches, techniques, and methods, due to the suspicion that: 1) language has more meaning than is apparent, and 2) language exists beyond language itself. An example of this would be a rainbow. This 'language beyond language,' which I call the '*extramuros*' of language, or 'surplus language,' the 'more,' also speaks to and challenges us. To use Ricoeur's expression, I would say that these *extramuros* languages give food for thought. According to Gadamer, there is truth outside of method, including in art. Has the innocent smile of a child not captivated us? Has the symphony of crashing waves not stirred a primal longing within us that transcends us?

Aware of the game of hide-and-seek that language plays, Foucault points out that every century has brought forth its own techniques of interpretation. In the nineteenth century, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud developed new interpretative techniques that had a "shock effect," disturbing people and placing them "in an uncomfortable situation." Perhaps, in Kantian terms, these new methods woke people of the twentieth century from their dogmatic slumber. According to Foucault, these new interpretative techniques put us "in an uncomfortable situation, since these techniques of interpretation concern ourselves: since we interpret, we interpret ourselves according to these techniques."[9] Furthermore, as we use these same methods to interpret the works of the three thinkers who gave us these methods, "we are always returned in a perpetual play of mirrors."[10]

Foucault identifies four characteristics of modern hermeneutics: 1) depth: profundity; 2) essential incompleteness of interpretation: interpretation is never final. It is an ongoing, unending process of correction, and the birth of new interpretations; 3) this essential incompleteness is due to the fact that an interpretation is always fragmented, non-originary, *with the capstone in yet* another interpretation; 4) *the non-originarity of interpretation* implies the obligation to interpret and correct endlessly.

9 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx": 61.
10 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx": 61.

Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche are masters of suspicion, not because they questioned the ideas of their time, but because of their concept of depth and profundity, and the unfinished nature of their work, which always calls for another beginning and interpretation *ad nauseam*. Thus, Freud's subconscious is limitless, which leads Ricoeur in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*[11] *to identify the subconscious with the unlimited. Marx's profundity takes the form of "platitude," of banality that the bourgeoise hold for money, capital, labour, and value. In Nietzsche, profundity is evident: "There is in the works of Nietzsche a critique of ideal depth, the depth of consciousness that he denounces as an invention of philosophers. This depth would be a pure, interior search for truth. Nietzsche shows how depth implies resignation, hypocrisy, the mask. It is necessary, therefore, that the interpreter descend, that he be, the good excavator of the underworld."*[12]

It is "above all in the works of Nietzsche and Freud, and to a lesser degree in those of Marx, that we see delineated this experience [this never-ending character of interpretation], which I believe to be so important for modern hermeneutics, that the further one goes in interpretation, the closer one approaches at the same time an absolutely dangerous region where interpretation is not only going to find its points of no return but where it is going to disappear itself as interpretation, bringing perhaps the disappearance of the interpreter himself."[13] If we follow Foucault's thinking, there is nothing new under the sun. The suspicion that language cannot be trusted, that it does not reveal everything, and that it reveals less than we think it does, dates back to classical times. The same applies to the second suspicion: that there is language outside of spoken or written discourse. We see this in allegory.

In his 1984 article "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,"[14] Gadamer recognises Nietzsche, the Counter-Enlightenment philosopher as the

11 Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Series: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy), trans. and introduction by E.V. Kohak of *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1966).

12 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx": 62.

13 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx": 63.

14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Man and World*, no.17 (1984): 313-23.

'inaugurator' of the school of suspicion. It was continued in the critique of ideology of Marx with its struggle for power and dominance, followed by the Freudian psychoanalysis. Gadamer rejects both the critique of ideology and psychoanalysis as interpretative methods, partly because of the asymmetrical relationship and the unequal standing of the interpreter and the text. Thus, a psychoanalyst is in a superior position to the patient by virtue of his mastery of the situation. He knows the techniques of interpretation and is therefore unable to engage with the patient on an equal footing.

Scientific interpretation, i.e., the methodology of interpretation, especially of art and poetry, is too invasive due to its objectivising attitude. It violently rips open to uncover what is veiled. It is intrusive, unmasking too much in blinding/glaring light (*überhellen*), until there is nothing left to mask. Would I be wrong in saying that, in the process, scientific interpretation has trespassed on sacred ground with sandaled feet?

Interestingly, Nietzsche also uses the veiling-unveiling metaphor, and its associated danger of too much light: "unveil, uncover, to put into bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons… we no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and 'know' everything."[15] For Nietzsche, Friedrich Schleiermacher, is literally the 'veil maker'—from the German *Schleier*, 'veil,' and *machen*, 'to make'—which was, according to Nietzsche, perfectly suited to a German idealist.[16]

However, the history of the "masters of suspicion" does not end here. Freud mentions two others (apart from himself), who proved that the self is not master of its own self. Who are these two other "masters of suspicion"? They are Copernicus and Darwin.

15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. and commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974): 8.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is*, §3, trans. Walter Kaufmann of *Ecce homo: Wie man wird, was man ist* (New York: Vintage, 1967).

In his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (delivered as lectures in 1915-1917, and first translated into English in 1920), Freud writes:

> Humanity, in the course of time, has had to endure from the hands of science two great outranges against its naïve self love. The first was when humanity discovered that our earth was not the center of the universe, but only a tiny speck in a world-system hardly conceivable in its magnitude. This is associated in our minds with the name "Copernicus," although Alexandrian science had taught much the same thing. The second occurred when biological research robbed man of his apparent superiority under special creation, and rebuked him with his descent from the animal kingdom, and his ineradicable animal nature. This re-valuation, under the influence of Charles Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, was not accomplished without the most violent opposition of their contemporaries. But the third and most irritating insult is flung at the human mania of greatness by present-day psychological research, which wants to prove to the "I" that it is not even master in its own home, but is dependent upon the most scanty information concerning all that goes on unconsciously in its psychic life. We psychoanalysts were neither the first, nor the only ones to announce this admonition to look within ourselves. It appears that we are fated to represent it most insistently and to confirm it by means of empirical data which are of importance to every single person.[17]

The great master of suspicion, who ripped the self from its nest of security and revealed that it dwells in an unfathomable chasm of interpretations, has enough self-belief to claim that it was his psychological research that delivered the third and bitterest blow to humanity!

Have I reached the end of my ferreting? Well, my work would be incomplete if I failed to mention Emil du Bois-Reymond, a German physician and physiologist who described Copernicus and Darwin as deflators of human self-regard. The fact is that Freud was inspired by du Bois-Reymond's writings on the limits and potential of science, and on the limitations of human reason.

17 Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (edited and published by PDF BooksWorld): 250-251.

One final word, that of Ricoeur's. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud were not the only masters of suspicion. In a 1988 interview,[18] Ricoeur added another name to his list: Ludwig Feuerbach, the German philosopher and anthropologist whose book *The Essence of Christianity* provided a critique of Christianity in particular and religion in general.[19] In fact, both Nietzsche and Marx were influenced by Feuerbach.

2. Configuration

What did Ricoeur mean by the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion'? Did he imply doubt, questioning, distrust, critique, scepticism, or reflection? Or did he intend to convey something else?

In *Le Conflit des herméneutiques: Epistémologie des interprétations* Ricoeur argues that, in our meditation on symbols, we must constantly reconcile within ourselves the struggle between two opposing hermeneutics: 1) a hermeneutics of reconstruction and recollection, which restores meaning, and 2) a hermeneutics of destruction, which demystifies meaning and is probably necessarily destructive, akin to a Puritanical approach to symbols.

Hermeneutics of reconstruction and recollection (remythification) requires the interpreter to be willing and attentive when listening to and engaging with the text. This involves being receptive without prejudice, and absorbing as much as possible in order to restore meaning to the text. It implies highlighting meanings that are present in the narrator's narrative (face value). The primary trait of this hermeneutics is mindful listening. Ricoeur calls it the "hermeneutics of hearing" (*herméneutique de l'écoute*).[20] This hermeneutics adheres to Husserl's call for a return to things themselves (*zu den Sachen selbst*). Rather than explaining, it

18 Paul Ricoeur, « J'attends la renaissance », Entretien (propos recueillis par Joël Roman et Etienne Tassin), dans Jacques Message, Joël Roman, Étienne Tassin (dir.), *À quoi pensent les philosophes ?* (Paris*, Autrement revue*, Coll. « Autrement », n°102, novembre 1988) :174-183.

19 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (London: John Chapman, 1854).

20 For an interesting study on hearing and listening and their role in philosophical and biblical hermeneutics see: Jean Greisch, *Entendre d'une autre oreille. Les enjeux philosophiques de L'herméneutique biblique* (Paris : Bayard, Coll. « Bible et Philosophie », 2006).

seeks to describe, revealing meaning rather than discussing causes and functions. This kind of hermeneutics is guided by trust and faith, as well as good will to allow the symbols to speak.

In the second kind of hermeneutics—the hermeneutics of destruction, with its demystification of meaning—there is wariness and an unwillingness to trust the symbol. The symbol has obscured the real and the interpreter is doubtful. There is a need to decipher the narrative and get to its roots, a process which often uproots the person from the narrative and gives rise to a new one. The end result is liquidation. All three masters of suspicion advocated and practised this second kind of hermeneutics. All three viewed consciousness as false to one extent or another, believing that something more profound lay hidden and could only be understood through critique and reductive interpretation. Destructive hermeneutics requires training to understand hidden meanings. Biblical exegesis, for example, requires specific methods and approaches to interpretation, while psychological analysis demands particular interpretative tools.

According to Ricoeur both tasks, demystification and remythification, must be tackled simultaneously.In both kinds of hermeneutics, the role of the interpreter is what matters. And it is this role that distinguishes between them. Can the interpreter listen to the text, let it speak and bring forth its meanings? Does the interpreter trust the narrator's account? Is the interpreter keen to discover meanings that lie in the depths of the subconscious? Does the interpreter go beyond literal meanings and try to clarify faithfully? Is the aim to decode the meanings with minimal presumption and distortion? Is there empathy? Or is there a desire to know more than the participant and impose this knowledge on the participant?

From the outset, language is distorted and reveals more than it intends; it is polysemic. This touches on the first of Foucault's suspicions regarding language. However, it is not only language that is distorted; consciousness is too.

All three "masters of suspicion" introduced a new art of interpretation. They revealed to the world types of deception. They all intended

to view consciousness primarily as false consciousness. All three returned to Cartesian doubt. Things are doubtful; things are not as they appear. However, for Descartes, the one thing that withstood doubt was consciousness. Now, with these three, we are taught to doubt consciousness itself. Nevertheless, they are "not masters of skepticism." In the Heideggerian sense, they are "destroyers," because every destruction is a new beginning, and a foundation for something new.

All three "masters of suspicion" distrusted immediate consciousness because they perceived it as a form of false consciousness. Through his writings on alienation and class struggles, Marx sought to demonstrate that freeing the thought process is vital to freeing labour. Nietzsche's analyses of the will to power, the Superman, the eternal return, Dionysius and so on were in fact a conscious attempt to empower the individual, rather than deceiving oneself with false humility. Freud desired to free his patients so that they could live better lives once the hidden meanings in their subconscious had been revealed to them:

> What is essential is that all three create with the means at hand, with and against the prejudices of their times, a mediate science of meaning, irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning. What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their 'conscious' methods of deciphering coincide with the 'subconscious' work of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism.[21]

Ricoeur recalls one of the earliest sobriquets for psychoanalysis: "healing through consciousness." Guile is thus met by double guile.[22] Can we call this the homeopathic principle? The present always configurates the narration of the past. The meanings of past events become evident, gain new significance and insight, in the process of retelling. Most often than not, a new story is created. Thus, the past is rewritten and reconstructed through narration because narration is always retrospective and is interpretation. In this interpretative process, the stories told would take

21 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970): 57.

22 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*: 57.

on a life of their own, partly due to the distanciation and alienation in time between the events that happened and the narration.

These two seemingly conflicting interpretations actually share a profound unity. These two styles of interpretation converge on the inexhaustible nature of symbols. This nature itself testifies that one can never finish interpreting; that no single interpretation can claim to have the final word, and that we must accept that our interpretations are always limited and often irreconcilable. It is a dialectic of suspicion and trust with oneself, between oneself and the other, and between different cultures and civilizations. This is not in the same as Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations,[23] but rather a dialectic of consent and affirmation of the other. It is only through this ongoing dialectic, this ongoing ball game of suspicion and trust that we have decided to continue playing—in spite of, and because of—that prevent conflict and a war of hermeneutics.

3. Refiguration: Some Things Left Unsaid

3.1. The finitude of human knowing

Plato affirms this intrinsic characteristic of knowledge in his *Letters* (7).[24] It is also endorsed by the philosophy of human finitude, as espoused by Gadamer, Derrida, Ricoeur, and Levi-Strauss. This limitedness applies not only to texts, but also to oneself. A hermeneutical critique of the maxim "Know thyself," inscribed on one of the columns of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, reveals that the injunction itself conceals the limits of self-knowledge. Interestingly, this is only the first of the three entrance maxims. The second reads "Nothing in excess." I think the fulcrum on which the dialectic of suspicion and trust (of critique and conviction) pivots is this second, lesser-known, and more obscure maxim: "Nothing in excess." When it comes to hermeneutics, an excess or dearth of suspicion or of trust is inappropriate. The same applies to knowledge.

23 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

24 Plato, Seventh Letter, in Plato's Seventh and Eighth Letters, ed. R. S. Bluck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), trans. W. Hamilton, in *Plato: Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

3.2. Masters of Suspicion – '*Les maîtres du soupçon*'

In French, the word '*maître*' holds not only the meaning of "master," but also that of "teacher." The Sanskrit word '*guru,*' translated into French as '*maître,*' means 'weighty' or 'grave', and is therefore used to denote an 'elder,' 'teacher,' or 'mentor.' It is derived from '*gu*' referring to 'ignorance,' 'darkness'; and '*ru*' meaning 'remover.' A *guru* is therefore someone who removes or eliminates ignorance / darkness.

Thus, 'master' or '*maître*' does not necessarily refer to someone who has mastered the art of something, of anything. In our context, it could refer to someone who has mastered the art of suspicion (or trust). After all, 'master' could also mean 'teacher of suspicion': someone who guides us in asking the right questions and not taking meanings for granted; someone who teaches us to pause before leaping and not to be naive or gullible. They guide us in mastering the art of creative criticism, which entails neither breaking a bruised reed nor quenching a faintly burning wick. These masters practise Socratic *maieutics* helping us birth meaning (justice) in trust (faithfulness).[25]

This is because our historical condition as fallible and recognising humans teaches us to be conscious of the fragility and limits of knowledge. If interpreting and understanding is a capability,[26] this capability to correctly interpret and understand the Text (whether written, oral, or human) is fundamentally a figure of anxious-worry. We are caught in the Fowlers snare of anxious-worry: of being misunderstood; of having misinterpreted, or misinterpreting; of breaking instead of healing. We never let go. Worried and anxious, we tread on the hamster wheel in this unending quest to grasp the right meaning of words, texts, contexts; to capture the correct meaning of the worlds of the text: behind, before, and within. But if we let go of this worry, become like little children filled with suspicious-trust (another oxymoron), we will become masters of suspicion and trust. And we must do this as Judeo-Christian philosophers. Because the Lord of the hermeneutics of suspicion taught us that we must "consider how the lilies of the field grow. They do not

25 Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20.

26 Neither interpretation nor understanding feature in the list of capabilities presented by Ricoeur in his writings.

labour or spin. Yet, not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned like one of these."[27]

So, the struggle is over. We are in the embrace of infinite care, freed from anxious-worry, like the lilies of the field, and the birds of the air, who neither spin nor labour. Like Jacob the heel-grabber in the arms of *Ish*, depicted in Rembrandt's painting. At the ford of Jabbok, the struggle is over. *Ish* has touched Jacob's hip socket and wrenched it when he realised that he could not overpower Jacob. Day has broken. And Jacob has wrestled all night and received his blessing: henceforth, his name will be that of a people, Israel. A name which means "struggled with God and humans and prevailed."[28]

We are all Jacobs, wrestling with the *Ish* of Texts, at fords that are crossroads of multiple interpretations, where suspicion and trust converge and diverge; struggling to glean the blessing of understanding. We are broken in the process; yet we hardly let go, until we return with a blessing, and a change in name that will become the name of a nation.

27 Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27.
28 Genesis 32:22-32.

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