

LIBERATION THEOLOGES



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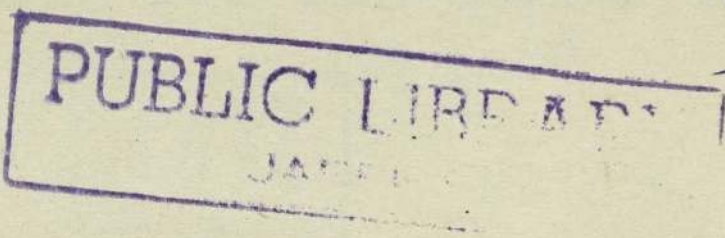


LIBERATION THEOLOGY



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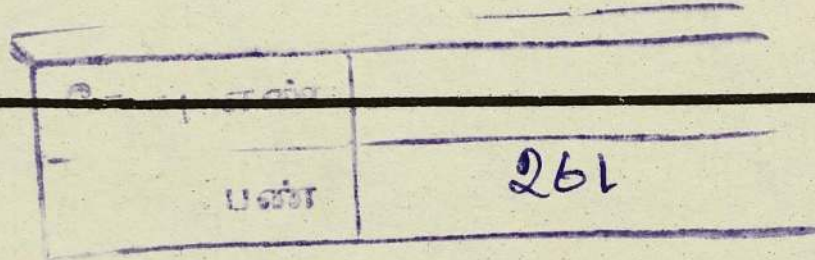
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CERTAIN ASPECTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY
THE INSTRUCTION OF THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH : SUMMARY AND COMMENT

Fr. Dalston Forbes, o.m.i.

(Former Rector - National Seminary, Kandy)

1. Introduction

1. The purpose of the Instruction is clearly stated in the introduction.

"to draw the attention of pastors, theologians and faithful to the deviations and risks of deviations, damaging to the faith and Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought." -
Introd.

Present Situation

2. The document accepts that the present economic, social and political situation is unjust and calls for radical changes. It decries poverty in the nation and between the nations. There is structural injustice.

"The lack of equity and of the sense of solidarity in international transactions works to the advantage of the industrialised nations, so that the gulf between the rich and poor is ever widening. Hence derives the feeling of frustration among third world countries, and the accusations of exploitation and economic colonialism brought against the industrialised nations." - 1,7.

The Arms race is also denounced as aggravating the situation - 1.9.

3. There is a tremendous longing and aspiration for Liberation from all this, as a cultural fact, as a sign of the times. This aspiration is world-wide, 1,1. Men feel they have the technical means to solve the problems of poverty. 1,5.

Liberation - A Christian Theme

4. The constellation of concepts used for Redemption and Salvation, both in the O.T. and the N.T., include the idea of liberation from sin, death and other servitudes. - see for example, semantic studies on 'ga'al' and 'padah' in the O.T.; 'apolutrosis' and 'eleutheria' in the N.T.

The Exodus experience of Liberation of the Chosen People from Egypt is foundational; it is political and social but also religious. This act of God has acted as a model and antitype for all liberation and redemption in the Bible.

The O.T. prophets like Isaiah and Amos give us a powerful theology of justice. In the N.T., Jesus is revealed as a free man who sets us free. St. Paul will go on to detail the various slaveries from which Jesus redeems - Sin, Death, Flesh, Law Concupiscence.

The N.T. teaching of Jesus and the Apostles on Love, Justice, Poverty and the Kingdom cover many of the theses of Liberation Theology.

5. Besides this, the Church's teaching authority has spoken about Liberation from the time of Pope Leo XIII, 'Rerum Novarum' to John Paul II - at the Puebla conference - sect.V.
6. Hence a Theology of Liberation is necessary, legitimate and authentic. There has always existed in the Church such a theology. Only the stress is different owing to the acute awareness of liberty, freedom, and political and economic liberation today.

"Thus a theology of liberation correctly understood constitutes an invitation to theologians to certain essential biblical themes with a concern for the grave and urgent questions which the contemporary yearning for liberation - ... pose for the Church." - IV,1.

"The expression 'Theology of Liberation' is a thoroughly valid term: it designates a theological reflection centred on the biblical theme of liberation and freedom, and on the urgency of its practical realisation." - III,4.

There are several kinds of theologies of liberation - III,3; VI,8.

"From a descriptive standpoint, it helps to speak of theologies of liberation, since the expression embraces a number of theological positions, or even ideological ones, which are not simply different but more often incompatible with one another." - VI,8.

Criticism of Liberation Theology

7. Only one current or strand in this movement is rejected. And why?

"In this present document, we will only be discussing developments of that current of thought, which under the name 'theology of liberation' proposes a novel interpretation of both the content of faith and of Christian existence which seriously departs from the faith of the Church and in fact actually constitutes a practical negation." - VI,9.

The document goes on to declare that there is further an uncritical use of Marxist ideology and the adoption of rationalistic biblical hermeneutics which corrupt whatever is authentic. - VI, 10.

In the following we shall indicate what the Instruction rejects.

Controversial Aspects

8. Marxist Analysis of Society

This analysis states in short that the technical and economic factors govern the social, political, cultural and religious manifestations in society. Production relations shape the form of society. We must change production relations to change all else.

As a method of analysis, this is a sociological technique similar to the so-called structural analysis used by non-Marxist sociologists like Sombart, Max Weber, Claude Levy, Strauss, Malinowski and others. It even figures in the Papal

Encyclicals like 'Quadragesimo Anno' and was known to Oswald Nell-Breuning who influenced that encyclical.

As a total ideology, this analysis requires a commitment to the full Marxist revolutionary vision and strategies of social change.

The Instruction says that you cannot separate the Ideology from the Analysis:-

"The ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it. Thus no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take up only one part, say the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology." - VII,6.

A neutral analysis is not possible.

What the Instruction finds repugnant in Marxism is:

1. Class analysis
2. Class struggle
3. Atheism
4. Denial of human liberty

9. A New Epistemology or Vision of Truth

This is also borrowed from Marxism. It states that "truth is a truth of class; there is no truth but the truth in the struggle of the revolutionary class." - VIII,5.

Truth is inseparable from praxis; it only emerges for those who are involved in the class struggle. Analysis is joined to praxis.

"The only true consciousness is partisan consciousness." - VIII,4.

1. 10. A New Hermeneutic

All theological judgements are subjected to the criterion of the class struggle. Only theology that comes from the poor in their revolutionary conflict would reveal the knowledge of the true God and of the kingdom. - X,10.

Scripture is read politically, e.g. The Exodus event, the Magnificat. Creeds and Tradition are situated in the class conflict and read from a class angle. Orthopraxis is substituted for orthodoxy in a wrong way; not as Christian life and experience but as revolutionary practice.

Theological Applications

11. Doctrine

Here are some theses of an erroneous Liberation Theology:- (Sect.IX).

- God makes history; or God is history. nos. 3,4.
- Faith becomes fidelity to history. 3,5.

Hope is confidence in the future.

- Charity is option for the poor, sharing in the class struggle.
- Universal love will only be possible after the Revolution - 7.
- The Church of the poor is equal to the Church of the proletariat - 9.
- The Hierarchy are members of the ruling class - 13.
- Ministers are delegates of the people - 13.
- The Kingdom is of this world - X,6.

12. Moral Deductions

a) Violence. A recourse to violence is sometimes advocated.

"The systematic and deliberate recourse to blind violence, no matter from which

side it comes, must be condemned. ...Violence begets violence and degrades man. It mocks the dignity of man in the person of the victims and it debases that same dignity among those who practice it." - XI,7.

Revolutionary violence only creates new problems. - XI,7.

- b) The Document weighs up the concept of structural sin - that sin springs from unjust economic, political and social structures. While not rejecting this concept, it cautions against an exaggerated use of this idea and situates sin fairly and squarely as an offence against God, freely and responsibly perpetrated. Structures do not necessarily cause sin.

"Nor can one localise evil principally or uniquely in bad social, political or economic structures, as though all other evils come from them, so that the creation of the new man would depend on the establishment of different economic and socio-political structures. To be sure, there are structures which are evil and which cause evil and which we must have the courage to change. Structures whether they are good or bad, are the result of man's actions, and so are consequences more than causes. The root of evil, then, lies in free and responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures". - IV,15.

1. 10. c) The Eucharist is celebrated as part of the class struggle; this is obviously to restrict its universal significance as a symbol of the

Last Supper, Passion and Resurrection of the Lord. - X,15.

Call to Justice

13. The warning against certain deviations of some theologies of liberation should not be read as an excuse to keep the poor in misery. The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by the love of mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might. - XI,1.

By the witness of their dynamic and constructive power to love, Christians will thus lay the foundations of that civilization of love of which the Conference of Puebla spoke, following Pope Paul VI. - XI,18.

Evaluation

1. The instruction clearly accepts the option for the poor (Int.No.6) and the call to Justice of a structural kind.
2. It accepts a legitimate and authentic Liberation Theology. Liberation theologians have the freedom of the city in the Christian Church - III,4; IV.1.
3. It sets out to guard the pastors, theologians and lay faithful against certain wrong stresses, deviations and possible future deviations. It rejects a this - worldly, immanent interpretation of Christianity in so far as revelation, faith and Christian social action are concerned.
4. While allowing that there are several forms of Liberation Theology (III.3;VI.8), the Instruction then proceeds to lump them together and to condemn them globally. - IX,1; IX,10; X.4.
5. A negative view is taken of Marxism. Marxism is a vast historical movement, both of thought and

of social and political action, as the Instruction notes, VII, 8. Is it not possible to distinguish various theses in Marxism, an early Marx, closer to Christianity, and a late Marx? Then again there are various schools of Marxism.

Social analysis of the Marxist type is rejected because connected with ideology, Marxist analysis as a rigid theory of determinism, linked to a class analysis of history and to class war is wrong. But the same analysis as a method of sociological understanding can be useful.

The document accepts:

- social stratification, IX,2.
 - allows that the analysis if open and used as a working hypothesis can be useful. VII,13.
 - allows that there is no strict correlation between Ideology and analysis - Introd. para 3.
 - But at other times suggests a strict integration between Ideology and analysis - VII,6.
6. Atheism is not the core of Marxism - VII,9; it is a derived thesis due to alienation. The basic alienation according to Marx is in production relations. From this stems the dehumanisation of man and the projections of man's essence so dehumanised on to God. Once the alienation in production relations is solved, the belief in God will automatically disappear. Marxism is thus atheistic but not primarily so.

Conclusion

While being open to the cautions of the Instruction, many Christians regret equivocations and await a fuller study from the Congregation of Faith on the vast theme of Christian freedom and liberation which will set out in positive fashion the great richness of this theme for the doctrine and life of the Church and world. Such a study is already promised. Int. para 4.

AN AMBIGUOUS INSTRUCTION

Victor Gunewardena

(Editor - Marga Institute)

The Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation" issued on 6th August 1984 by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Archbishop Alberto Bovone, Secretary of the Congregation, was published in "L' Osservatore Romano" on 10th September 1984. This comment is on the text as it appears in the English version of that journal.

It is significant to note that in the Introduction itself the authors of the Instruction say that the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not intend to deal in the document with "the vast theme of Christian freedom and liberation in its own right. This it intends to do in a subsequent document which will detail in a positive fashion the great richness of this theme for the doctrine and life of the Church."

They add: "The present instruction has a much more limited and precise purpose : to draw the attention of pastors, theologians and all the faithful to the devia-

tions and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought."

A basic methodological weakness of the document is that nowhere does it identify the forms of "liberation theology" which it disapproves of and warns against. Had the authors named specific works or quoted the deviant sections from such works then the validity of its criticism could be tested and made evident. The absence of such a technique of critical evaluation confuses the reader, especially because the document goes on to say : "This warning should in no way be interpreted as a disavowal of all those who want to respond generously and with an authentic evangelical spirit to the 'preferential option for the poor.' It should not at all serve as an excuse for those who maintain an attitude of neutrality and indifference in the face of the tragic and pressing problems of human misery and injustice. It is, on the contrary, dictated by the certitude that the serious ideological deviations which it points out tend inevitably to betray the cause of the poor. More than ever, it is important that numerous Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its fulness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed and persecuted brothers and sisters. More than ever, the Church intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom wherever they occur and whoever commits them. She intends to struggle, by her own means, for the defence and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially of the poor."

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Neutrality Condemned

Thus, it should be noted that the document far from condemning those who in "an authentic evangelical spirit" have made a "preferential option for the poor", commends them, and condemns instead those "who maintain an attitude of neutrality and indifference in the face of the tragic and pressing problems of human misery and injustice." Later in the foregoing passage there is an explicit statement of the Church's own commitment to struggle for the defence and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially of the poor.

Therefore, the objectives and thrust of the theologies of liberation (one should speak of them in the plural because there are several exponents and several theologies) are evangelical and emphasize justice, especially by action on social structures and systems that are oppressive and exploitative.

The document acknowledges that "the powerful and almost irresistible aspiration that people have for liberation constitutes one of the principal signs of the times which the Church has to examine and interpret in the light of the Gospel. This major phenomenon of our time is universally widespread, though it takes on different forms and exists in different degrees according to the particular people involved. It is above all, among those people who bear the burdens of misery and in the heart of the disinherited classes that this aspiration expresses itself with the greatest force.

"This yearning shows the authentic, if obscure, perception of the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26-27), ridiculed and scorned in the midst of a variety of different oppressions: cultural, political, racial, social and economic, often in conjunction with one another."

Then follow passages which are perceptive of situations of injustice, about which the document states "mankind will no longer passively submit to crushing poverty with its effects of death, disease and decline. He resents this misery as an intolerable violation of his native dignity. Many factors, and among them certainly the leaven of the Gospel, have contributed to an awakening of the consciousness of the oppressed."

The document then goes on to refer to the "scandal of the shocking inequality between the rich and the poor...", the "lack of equity and of a sense of solidarity in international transactions works to the advantage of the industrialised nations so that the gulf between the rich and the poor is ever widening. Hence derives the feeling of frustration among Third World countries, and the accusations of exploitation and economic colonialism brought against the industrialised nations."

The document next refers to the "memory of crimes of a certain type of colonialism" and of its effects which often aggravate these injuries and wounds.

Scandal of the Arms Race

The arms race is condemned as follows :

"The Apostolic See, in accord with the Second Vatican Council, and together with the Episcopal Conferences, has not ceased to denounce the scandal involved in the gigantic arms race which, in addition to the threat which it poses to peace, squanders amounts of money so large that even a fraction of it could be sufficient to respond to the needs of those people who want for the basic essentials of life."

Thus we see that the theologies of liberation are on common ground with the social teaching of the Church

in so far as it is expressed summarily in the first section of the document. The evils are identified and the sinned against are not only the "disinherited classes" but also the victims of cultural, political, racial, social and economic oppressions. They also include "poor countries", "social classes in a single nation", "Third World countries exploited by economic colonialism", the victims of "crimes of a certain type of colonialism" and all those nations and peoples affected by the "scandal involved in the gigantic arms race".

The document goes on to explain that the expression "Theology of Liberation" refers first of all to "a special concern for the poor and the victims of oppression, which in turn begets a commitment to justice." It adds that the aspiration for liberation repeats a theme which is fundamental to the Old and New Testament and that in itself the expression "Theology of Liberation" is a thoroughly valid term: "it designates a theological reflection centred on the biblical theme of liberation and freedom, and on the urgency of its practical realisation."

Ambiguities

However, the document gives rise to ambiguity in several places thereafter because it implies that the concern of the theologies of liberation is exclusively with "social sin." It does not cite chapter and verse in proof. Instead, it makes statements such as :

- (a) "To demand first of all a radical revolution in social relations and then to criticise the search for personal perfection is to set out on a road which leads to the denial of the meaning of the person and his transcendence, and to destroy ethics and its foundation, which is the absolute character of the distinction between good and evil..."

- (b) Faced with the urgency of sharing bread, some are tempted to put evangelisation into parentheses, as it were, and postpone it until tomorrow: first the bread, then the Word of the Lord..."
- (c) The different theologies of liberation are situated between the preferential option for the poor, forcefully reaffirmed without ambiguity after Medellin at the Conference of Puebla on the one hand, and the temptation to reduce the Gospel to an earthly gospel on the other."

Marxist Analysis

Note that in these three comments there is no explicit condemnation of particular theologies of liberation as being in error. In (a) it is implied that there is a wrong priority of action which vitiates the goal. In (b) and (c) the reference is to a "temptation", not to a factual statement or situation.

The major criticism of the theologies of liberation contained in the document is that they adopt the "Marxist analysis" of society and the theory of the "class struggle". Objection is taken on the ground that the term class struggle "remains pregnant with the interpretation that Marx gave it, so it cannot be taken as the equivalent of severe social conflict in an empirical sense." To those familiar with the vocabulary of social and political analysis the expression "class struggle" communicates its meaning without evoking any spectres of Marx.

The document appears not to concede that one can use the tools of analysis borrowed from a political theory without necessarily accepting the total validity of such a theory. One has to distinguish between the tools of analysis on the one hand, and on the other,

the theory itself. What is relevant is to ask whether the analysis of a given society using a verifiable methodology helps to arrive at conclusions that are valid. Modern psychoanalysis, for example, owes a great deal to Freud and Jung, although it may not go all the way with either of them.

Another ground of criticism of the theologies of liberation is that building on a conception of the Church of the People, a critique of the very structures of the Church is developed. The document states that this has to do "with a challenge to the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church, which was willed by the Lord himself. There is a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the Magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed."

It is apposite here to quote what a Latin American Catholic, Otto Maduro, Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Andes (Merida) in Venezuela says in his book Religion and Social Conflicts.

"I am incapable of remaining impassive vis a vis the millions of human beings in Latin America today who suffer under the yoke of a social organisation whose only purpose is to fatten the bank accounts of a minority. Nor am I capable of hearing the gospel as a call to impassivity. My own personal conviction is that to be a Catholic in Latin America today implies a radical, constant and collective commitment to the struggle for a community of free brothers and sisters on our continent.

"But - likewise and in equal measure -- I am aware of the fact that our church in Latin America has established such bonds with the powerful that its preaching and activity often serve to prevent persons from making

the commitment the gospel seems to demand. Accordingly, it seems to me, fidelity to the gospel also requires a strenuous, permanent and communitarian commitment to the struggle to burst the bonds that still lash the church to the chariot of the mighty."

It is unfortunate that the document which at the outset makes a strong affirmation in favour of the "preferential option for the poor", should latterly indulge in tangential criticism of the "theologies of liberation", thereby making its real position ambiguous.

LEONARDO BOFF IS SILENCED

The Vatican has imposed a period of silence on Brazil's controversial liberation theologian, Fr. Leonardo Boff. This is to be for a year during which he is not to write or discuss his work, but to "allow Fr. Boff serious reflection". Fr. Boff has accepted it "with a religious spirit". In a written statement he defended his views and declared that he was not a Marxist. "By the decision of Rome, I must remain from speaking in public for a certain time...before I enter this period of penitential silence, it seemed to me opportune to make clear some positions subject to error. I declare I am not a Marxist. As a Christian and a Franciscan, I am in favour of liberation, of rights, of religion and of the noble struggle for justice, toward a new society."

Fr. Boff said the mission of the Church should be one of liberation.

(Ref. "Chicago Tribune" - 10/05/1985)

"BIRTH-PANGS OF THE NEW AGE"

(Matthew 24.8)

Bible Study at WCC/CCPD Asia Core Group Meeting
Devasarana, Ibbagamuva, Sri Lanka
October 23rd to November 2nd, 1980

Yohan Devananda

(Director - Devasarana Development Centre, Ibbagamuva)

Asian Context

Studying the Bible in Asia cannot be isolated from the historical context. So this Bible Study will take into consideration the scriptures and writings of other faiths and ideologies too. For Christians have to live in dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies.

Fundamental Proclamation

The fundamental proclamation of Christ in the Bible is of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God and the challenge this presents to people to respond creatively to it:

"The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the Gospel". (Mk.1.15).

Concrete Involvement

Christ then proceeds to expound the meaning of the kingdom in countless parables, which are full of concrete

illustrations from the lives of all types of people - peasants and workers, "respectable" rulers, "disreputable" sinners, etc., - illustrations also from family life and from nature. He is obviously familiar with the varied problems of human existence and, above all, deeply involved in the struggles of the people for a better life. Through all this, he is intimately concerned with human relationships - with the problems of their break-down and reconciliation.

Social Gospel

In the early sixties a radical Christian group in Sri Lanka produced a book on "Social Change". A venerable clergyman wrote a scathing review of it in a church journal, pointing out that this group has neglected and forgotten Christ's primary injunction, which was "to seek God first and all other things will follow". A counter-review had to be written to point out that there was no such text in the Bible! What Christ said was:

"Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice above everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well". (Mt.6.33).

Spirit and Matter

In the same way as so-called Christians have often wrongly exalted the spirit at the expense of a proper attention to matter, even so, so-called Marxists have often wrongly exalted matter at the expense of a proper attention to spirit. In this they are being false to the original Marx:

"The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating... The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionizing practice". (Karl Marx. Theses

on Feuerbach).

What Marx did demonstrate was how the nature of a society, including its religion and culture, is determined by the way its production relations are organized. This is often misinterpreted as subordinating spirit to matter. But the organizing of production relations is not a purely material or economic business. Marx shows how the present system of society with its oppressive production relations has alienated man from man, and man himself from his true self. Man has been de-humanized. He is not a free person capable of taking free and responsible decisions and of entering into creative relationships of love with his neighbour. He is, essentially, an object at the mercy of market-forces. And commercialism has degraded his cultural heritage. But he foresees a change in this situation by a revolutionizing practice, spear-headed by a vanguard who see what is coming and organize the people to take power into their own hands and establish a new system of production relations, which will bring about a new society and a new humanity.

Utopianism

A young clergyman was once holding forth with great gusto at a clergy synod on the radical changes necessary to usher in a new society. He was interrupted by the venerable clergyman already referred to:

"We must never forget that Christianity is about something that happened 2000 years ago."

Of course it is important to remember the past and benefit from the experience of the ancients:

"Look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the quarry from which you were dug." (Isaiah 51.1).

But what do we learn from the experience of the ancients? Surely, it is how they responded to the challenge of the times and the needs of the people? Of course, without undue haste and with a mature understanding of the situation, but also with a clear sense of urgency. Now the venerable clergyman referred to was a liberal in the fif-

ties, who used to be looked up to as a model by younger clergy. But by the sixties he had become a conservative and in the seventies he was a reactionary! This is the fate of even the best clergy who keep themselves aloof from people's struggles. They become an obstacle to the Church's advance. But on the other hand, we have the example of Archbishop Oscar Romero. When he was exalted to his high office he was a safe conservative. But by his involvement in his people's struggles he came to take a radical stand and paid the price of martyrdom.

So utopianism is not something we can write off as shallow and immature, unpractical idealism. In fact, it is written all over the Bible. The Prophet Isaiah cannot be dismissed as a village romantic. Actually, village romantics are those who live comfortably in towns and dream romantic visions of village life! But Isaiah obviously knew life in the raw. In his 59th chapter there is as discerning and terrible a portrayal of the evils and corruptions of life in society as can be found anywhere. But in the chapters that follow there is a clear vision of a new heaven and a new earth and of the transformations by which this will be brought about. (Is. 61.1-6, 65-17, cf Lev. 25, Lk 4.18-19). This is a central theme in the New Testament also, as a whole, (Rev. 21, 1-5, 2 Cor 5.17, Rom 12), and, of course, supremely so in Christ himself. In Matthew 23-24 there is as scathing a condemnation of corrupt authorities and as clear-sighted a prediction of the inevitable conflicts that are bound to result, as any that can be found anywhere. And all this is leading to a new age:

"Outside you look like honest men, but inside you are brisful of hyposcrisy and crime..." (Mt. 23.28)

"You snakes, you vipers' brood, how can you escape being condemned to hell?..." (Mt. 23.33)

"Nation will make war upon nation, kingdom upon kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes in many places. With all these things the birth-pangs of the new age begin". (Mt. 24.7-8)

Social Change

All the major religions have been born in times of radical social change, when one era is drawing to a close and another is beginning to dawn. Laws and institutions which once had served their purpose no longer corresponded to the needs of the people. Thus visions were born among the oppressed, struggling to survive and evolve a new life. These were articulated by the great founders of religions, who founded new communities or churches which were to be the pioneers and models for the new society and the new humanity. Viewed in this perspective there is not such a great gap between ancient religions and modern ideology as is often supposed. There is a distinct possibility of a creative dialogue.

Dialectics

In his important work "Dialectics of Nature", Friedrich Engels says with regard to the modern understanding of dialectics:

"Thus we have once again returned to the mode of outlook of the great founders of Greek philosophy... Only with the essential difference that what in the case of the Greeks was a brilliant intuition, is in our case the result of strictly scientific research in accordance with experience". p.13

Elsewhere in the same work, Engels attributes to the Buddhists also this development in the Greeks:

"On the other hand, dialectical thought - precisely because it pre-supposes investigation of the nature of concepts - is only possible for man, and for him at a comparatively high stage of development (Buddhists and Greeks)". p.203

Then again, in "Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy" Engels points out:

"Great historical turning-points have been accompanied by religious changes only so far as the three world religions which have existed up to the present - Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are concerned," while the old tribal and national religions

passed away in due course, presumably because they did not fulfill the historical imperative of change. (Selected Works, Marx and Engels, p.343).

Thus Engels shows a certain appreciation of the ancients. Further, in his "On the history of early Christianity" he says:

"The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people". (Marx and Engels. On Religion. p.316).

Radicalism

With the domestication and manipulation of Buddhism by vested interests, the essentially radical character of Buddhism has often been obscured, just as in the case of Christianity. But as the radical liberation character of Christianity is being increasingly revealed through the peoples' struggles in Latin America, the Philippines, and elsewhere, so there are signs that the radical character of Buddhism too is being revealed through Asia's struggle for self-understanding and integral development.

Central concepts in Buddhism as well as in the life of the Buddha are often interpreted in negative terms. For instance, the concept of anicca or impermanence (one of the 6 scientific dharmas in the Vijja bhagiya Sutta). There is a rejection here of false absolutism, but this does not mean that life is devalued or under-estimated in terms of worth. It is, fundamentally, a rigorously disciplined search for the truth - going beyond the appearance of reality to the reality itself, and shows a clear understanding of the mechanics of change and the necessity for change. This was recognized by Engels.

It may be mentioned that there has been similar misinterpretation with regard to Hinduism. For instance, the real meaning of "maya" commonly translated as illusion, is creative power or the principle of manifestation:

"Maya is not properly delusion, but strictly speaking creative power, sakti, the principle of manifestation; delusion, moha, is to conceive of appearance as things in themselves, and to be attached to them ...".

(Ananda Coomaraswamy. The Transformation of Nature in Art. p.158).

There is a constant reaching out to a fuller and more meaningful existence:

"Lead me, from unreality to reality, from darkness to light, from morality to immorality". (Upanishad).

In the Christian tradition, too, there is this grappling with reality. When the name for God is sought, the answer is given in terms of reality:

"I AM: that is who I am". (Exodus 3.14).

Martin Buber in his translation shows that the future tense is called for by the context:

"I will be there as I will be there".

That is, God is defined in relational, eschatological terms.

The significance of the life of the Buddha has also been often misinterpreted. For instance, the story of the Great Renunciation is seen as an essentially negative act. However, like all true monastic renunciation, it is not basically a renunciation of the world as such but of the status quo or of what is wrong or sinful in the world, though it also involves renunciation of certain normal functions of the world too. Prince Siddhartha came to realise that it was necessary for him to leave his father's home in order to seek liberation for the people. So follows the detachment of the wilderness experience and identification with the common people. Then, after his "Awakening" he returns to a Prophet's service in society. His denunciation of caste discrimination and priestly corruption was central. Historically, he was articulating the rise of the Kshatriyas against the oppressive dominance of the brahmins. He had to face conflict

and opposition. He trained his disciples and founded the Sangha as a nucleus and pattern for a new society and he sent them forth into the world.

"Go ye forth, monks, and wander for the good of the people for the happiness of the people, out of compassion for the world. Teach, monks, the dharma, which is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely in the ending. Explain both in the spirit and in the letter the good life, completely fulfilled, wholly pure" (Digha Nikaya).

Uniqueness

Christians should have no hesitation in acknowledging what is true and good in other religions and ideologies. There is, of course, a sense in which Christ, and Christians if they are true to Christ, have a unique contribution to make to the dialogue of religions and ideologies. That is, they have something to contribute which no others can. But that does not mean that either Christ or Christians are better than everyone else.

This personifies the worst aspects of our over-individualized, competitive and commercialized society. And yet this is just how Christians have often presented Christ. Particularly, certain passages in St. John's gospel, are often taken out of context and grossly misinterpreted. St. John's gospel is, no doubt, a wonderful meditation on the significance of Christ but it is not meant to demonstrate the superiority of Christ.

It demonstrates the superiority and victory of truth over falsehood and light over darkness but not the superiority and victory of Christianity over other religions.

The characteristic note of Christ is humility and Christians are called to follow in that spirit:

"Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus ... he made himself nothing ..." (Phil. 2.5f).

"You must humbly reckon others better than yourselves ..." (Phil. 2.3).

"Give pride of place to one another in esteem ..." (Rom 12.10).

Also, it must be mentioned here that the language characteristic of Christ is the concrete, down-to-earth, though at the same time imaginative, language of the synoptic gospels rather than the more abstract, intellectual language of St. John. The famous seven "self-declarations" of Christ in St. John's gospel (one for everyday of the teaching week - part of a teaching programme) are no doubt true of Christ. We can learn and teach about Christ from these words. But it must be clearly understood that is not how he went about speaking of himself! For instance, in St. John's gospel, Christ is reported as saying "I am the light of the world", but the synoptists report him as saying: "You are light for the world". Both are true and both are necessary to understand Christ fully. But it is to the synoptists we must particularly turn to understand how Christ went about the world as a human being among human beings.

The Bible, while firmly rejecting all false doctrines, has, throughout its pages, an honoured place for other religions. There is a long line of distinguished "pagans" - men and women - and acknowledged concepts too - Melchizedek, Samson, Naaman, Ruth, Judith, the Queen of Sheba, the woman of Samaria, the woman of Cana, the good Samaritan, the Centurion, the Greek poets, the unknown God, "logos", "mysterion", "the wealth and splendour of the nations", etc.

New Creation

A word needs also to be said about religious labels. It must be remembered that the early Christians looked upon themselves as followers of "the way". Others called them "Christians", originally in derision. But what matters is that a new quality of life should be lived:

"Circumcision is nothing; uncircumcision is nothing; the only thing that counts is new creation! Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, who form the Israel of God". (Gal. 6. 15-16. Translation N.E.B. and Jerusalem Bible combined).

In other words we may say that Christian means "a new person" and Church means "a new community". Where renewal does not take place, through death and resurrection, though the label persists, the reality of Christ will be absent. Churches that do not renew themselves in response to the challenge of history and the needs of the people may more appropriately be called Homes for the Aged! And, conversely, communities that are being genuinely renewed today in the struggle for justice and liberation may not bear the label of Church but will have the reality of Christ. For we cannot but believe that Christ is present and active in the social revolution of our times, wherever it is taking place. The action of the "Cosmic Christ" is universal and is not confined to any particular race or region or period.

New Community

The essence of new community is the transformation of human relationships that goes on side by side with the transformation of production relationships. It is not a question of what has to be changed first - matter or spirit, structures or human beings. That is an idle debate. As the structures begin to be shaken, the new persons begin to emerge (first the leaders who then organize others) and as the new persons emerge the new structures take shape, through revolution as well as evolution.

The feeding of the five thousand became possible when people who had heard the Word were ready to share. It was not a magic act performed by a superman. Christ said:

"Give them something to eat yourselves". (Mk. 6.36).

Christ had faith in the resources of the people and was able to draw out the best in them. A young boy led the way. Youth to the fore!

Also, the miraculous healing of persons by Christ is in the context of the healing of relationships between people through dialogue. Both in the story of the healing of the Centurion's servant and in the story of the healing

of the woman of Cana's daughter, for instance, we may, reading between the lines, discern that here were conflict situations and the encounter with Christ brings humility and love so that the healing of the individual comes with the reconciling of relationships. The same 5th chapter in the Epistle of St. James which has the stock passage in the New Testament on prayer for healing, with confession of sins to one another and anointing (V.V. 13-18), also has one of the strongest statements of the social gospel (V.V. 1-6). The healing of individuals depend on the corporate facing up to the facts of sin and on the setting right of relationships in society. Miracles take place when relationships between people are set right. And the setting right of these relationships involves a dialectical process.

Here there is a lot of common ground between the Christ, the Buddha, Darwin, Einstein, Freud, Marx etc.

Dialogue

In the past, Christians in Asia, with some outstanding exceptions or fore-shadowings such as De Nobili in India and Ricci in China, have been slow to enter into dialogue with other religions and ideologies. This has been mainly because of the privileged positions of power they held as well as because of their lack of understanding or ignorance (which two aspects are of course, connected). But with the social changes taking place Christians have been increasingly realizing that dialogue is a necessary part of incarnation, cross and resurrection.

Marxists, too, have often been slow to recognize the necessity of dialogue. This has been because of an unbalanced attention to such sacred Marxist texts as "Religion is the opium of the people", first pronounced, incidentally, by Charles Kingsley, a Christian clergyman! But Marx and Engels, themselves, had a far greater understanding as well as appreciation of history, religion and culture, taken as a whole, than many of their enthusiastic followers. In Asia, Marxists have often under-

estimated the hold of religion and culture over the lives of the people, both in their positive as well as negative aspects. So a continuous study and dialogue of ancient religion and modern ideology is necessary.

Power

Something needs to be said, at this point, on the subject of power:

"Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

(Lord Acton).

"The love of money is the root of all evil things". (1 Tim 6.10).

Does this mean that human nature is essentially corrupt? This argument of the corruptibility of human nature is the stock-in-trade of those who oppose change in the status quo and reject ideas of the new society and the new humanity. The argument is brought forward that whatever changes are made corruption follows sooner or later. But the fact remains that at various turning points in history human beings have got together and solved certain of their basic problems of living and in doing so have made significant advances in social organization and forms of religion and culture.

It is not power, or money or human nature that is evil or good in itself. In the text given above, it is the love for money that is the root of evil - and love here means craving or attachment. It is the way people become organized in society in dealing with resources that determines whether growth or corruption takes place. Power can bring about great good as well as great evil. But, of course, the strong "gravitational pull" (Herbert Butterfield in Christianity and History) in history towards evil must be taken into account as well as the immense sources and resources of the "spirit". That is the value of the book of Ecclesiastes being side by side with the other books of the Bible. There is no room for facile and "naive" optimism. The reality is complex. So true biblical Utopianism includes a realistic understanding of evil.

With regard to corruption, it is a fact worth noting that when Marxist societies show signs of corruption, Christians put the blame for this on Marx and Marxism. But where Christian societies have shown signs of corruption they do not blame Christ or Christianity! Perhaps Marxists similarly judge Christ and Christianity?

The key to corruption is the exercise of absolute power. Conversely, the more checks on power there are through responsibility and accountability to the people, through dialogue with the people, the less are the possibilities of corruption. That is, the more a society is organized collectively, not in a doctrinaire manner imposed from above but in a praxis that arises out of participation of the people, the more likelihood there will be of healthy growth and fruitfulness.

Leaders will, of course; be necessary at all times. But they must be dedicated to service of the people:

"You know that in the world, rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority; but it shall not be so with you. Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all - like the Son of Man; he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many". (Mt. 20.24-28).

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep". (Jn. 10.11)

Humility is not a sign of weakness and folly but of strength and wisdom. "Good Shepherd" does not signify "goody-goody" shepherd as people often tend to think. In pastoral society the most powerful shepherd became king. So a more accurate, free translation would be: "The true leader lays down his life for the people".

When a ruler or ruling class becomes corrupt or when authority is usurped and peoples' needs are neglected, sooner or later someone or some group arises from among the people, rallies them and succeeds to power. Thus the

CLASSES AND CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE BIBLE

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Mention of classes and class struggle bothers some people, including Christians, a great deal. It does not happen only in Sri Lanka. In Britain, for example, where they are a common fact of life, I don't remember the very evident 'ruling class' and 'working class' ever being mentioned in the mass media, except in plays and historical documentaries. Studies show that the former has obtained, retains and uses ruthlessly in its class interests, the disproportionately large share it has of Britain's productive resources, but does not want attention drawn to the fact. In Sri Lanka, because we have not got rid of feudalism and colonialism, the 'bourgeoisie' and the 'working class' and the 'peasantry' are not easy to identify, but classes and class struggle are a present fact of life. But, like certain other 'facts of life', they are not mentioned in respectable society.

It may be that because it is part of Marxist jargon that Marx is blamed for the class struggle. In the same way, in the USA-dominated world, 'Communism' is often

blamed when classes, races and nations which are oppressed beyond endurance by imperialism and its allies rebel against them. In fact, Marx invented neither classes nor class struggle, but was, rather, part of the movement for the final abolition of classes. Class struggle has been going on ever since classes came into existence. People who lived in the time of Aristotle were reading the profoundly interesting things he had to say about the intense class struggles going on in their day. Before Aristotle, the 8th and 7th Century B.C. prophets of Israel and Judah made no bones about denouncing the iniquities (with class exploitation and oppression high on the list) of the ruling classes of their day. There is a conspiracy of silence about these facts.

It will not do today to believe in a censored version of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God. For if we do not take seriously what Jahweh (the same yesterday, today and for ever) had to say, and did, about the violence, oppression and exploitation by which a few became increasingly powerful and rich at the expense of those they made poor, we could get ourselves into worse trouble than that threatened by the National Security State.

What follows are some notes which may help to draw attention to some of the ways in which the Bible characterises certain forms of social behaviour as sin, iniquity. The situations are real-life situations. In real life, conduct is sometimes a matter of individual and personal decisions to act, speak or relate to others in certain ways which benefit or harm us or them in God's sight. But in real life people sometimes act in a manner normal, socially permissible or even required for members of their class, or 'race' or nation, or those holding certain official positions. And people are sometimes acted against, too, in the same manner;

that is, with consequences which have come in that society to be socially regarded as normal, permissible, proper, or necessary for all those who belong to their class, race, nation or occupation. The Bible makes it clear that how some people, especially the Jews, but not only they, act even when they are acting in social, political and economic roles (that is, in ways expected of their class or, in international relations, nation) is shown as central to Jahweh's concern.

Class Struggle in the Old Testament

If we read Ezekiel 22, we hear the prophet proclaiming Jahweh's judgement on 6th Century B.C. Jerusalem, 'where all the princes of Israel live, each one busily shedding blood, and a law unto himself (22:6); 'whose princes are like a roaring lion tearing its prey inside her. They have eaten the people, seized wealth and jewels, and widowed many inside her' (22:24,25). 'Her leaders in the city are like wolves tearing their prey, shedding blood and killing people to steal their possessions. Her prophets have whitewashed these crimes with their empty visions and lying prophecies...' (22:27, 28). The prophet, in this case also a priest, is of course not writing about the violence, robbery and murder of the 'criminal underworld'.

Today terms like 'ownership of the means of production', 'exploitation' and 'wage slavery' are used, and are familiar. We notice that in the Old Testament animal imagery is sometimes used with great effect to convey the rapacity, violence and inhumanity of the exploiting class and their officials and hangers-on. And their victims, the object of Jahweh's concern, are described by a few recurring terms which have profound meanings which are theological as well as sociological; but, first, it would be useful to note how representative Ezekiel was.

The animal imagery for the ruling classes deserves more study than it appears to get. So does the attack on the city. It may be useful to quote a few passages and give the references to a few others, before commenting. In Proverbs 28:15 we read

A roaring lion, a hungry bear,
Such is the bad ruler of a poor people.

The prophet Zephaniah announces that

'Trouble is coming to the rebellious, the defiled,
the tyrannical city...
The leaders she harbours
are roaring lions,
her judges, wolves at evening
that have had nothing literally,
'that leave no bone'
to gnaw that morning

(3:1,3)

Psalms 58 begins in a remarkable way:

'Gods you may be,
but do you give the sentences you should,
and dispense impartial justice to mankind?
On the contrary,
in your hearts you meditate oppression,
with your hands you dole out tyranny on earth'

Verse 6 says

'Yahweh,
wrench out the fangs of these savage lions!...'

There are other instances of this kind of use of animal imagery. Sociological concepts like class are

modern usage. The language of the Old Testament is direct, and very forceful. Those who dislike the criticism of our superiors implied in terms like 'class struggle' and 'exploitation' and deny that Christians should have anything to do with 'politics' will find its direct and violent language extremely embarrassing. No language can be more political, and subversive, than this. But, of course the meaning has come, through tradition, to be 'spiritualized'. Under 'inspiration', the prophets are just babbling about inhuman aristocrats and corrupt judges of the 6th century they could name. But they mean to denounce 'sin. Reading Zephaniah, we don't then have to think of either the Jerusalem in his time, or the 'princes' in Colombo or Washington today. When Zephaniah writes:

On the day of Jahweh's sacrifice,
I will punish the ministers,
the royal princes,
and all those who dress themselves
in foreign style.
On that day I mean to punish
all those who are near the throne,
those who fill the palace of their lord
with violence and deceit

(1:8,9)

and

Men of the Mortar, howl!
For the whole brood of Canaan has been destroyed,
the weighers of silver are all wiped out.

(1:11)

we can think vaguely that Jahweh is denouncing 'Sin', and not recognise that judgement is being pronounced on economic-political classes - the court and its agents,

and the merchants in their section of the city. That is to make nonsense of what Jahweh speaks. A part of the confusion has been caused by the editing of texts which was done in monarchical times and part of it by the editing which is occasionally done when in countries where feudalism, capitalism and patriarchy are all considered 'Christian' establishment scholars translate the manuscripts into modern languages. Nevertheless, the class struggle - that is the violence and exploitation and corrupt practice through which the powerful and the rich intensify their exploitation and oppression of the poor and their violence against the people - comes out clearly. So also does the social analysis of the robbery, injustice, extortion bribery through which accumulation of wealth on the one hand, and pauperisation and persecution on the other characterise society.

Zephaniah was writing in the 7th Century, in the reign of Josiah, and not long after the reign of the particularly corrupt and rotten regime of Manasseh. The longing for a return to the purity and integrity and harmony of Jahweh's way permeates his prophecies. That is the day, he tells his people, when

Yahweh has repealed your sentence;
 he has driven your enemies away.
 Yahweh, the king of Israel, is in your midst,
 you have no more evil to fear.

(3:15)

But among his people, to whom does he address his message of hope? In 2:3 it is the anawim, and again in 3: 11ff. Is he referring to a social class or, some commentators try to suggest, to a 'spiritual' category?

The Hebrew term ani, anav and derivatives occur, scholars tell us, over 100 times in the O.T. They have

a deep significance in the contexts in which they appear. There are other, related, terms: ebhyon, dal, which also occur many times. These words, connoting the condition of these who are poor, needy, lowly, oppressed, exploited, deprived of rights, etc. in the prophets, the Psalms, in Job, in the historical books, indicate a vivid awareness of the economic situation, social status, powerlessness, helplessness of a class of people who are the counterpart of - indeed, who are created by - the powerful, dominating, exploiting and ruling classes.

It would perhaps be correct to say, especially when we read the very strong language in O.T. books from which I have not quoted yet, that this message comes out clearly: Jahweh reveals himself in resisting the evil-doers, as those in the great prophetic tradition make clear.

Who were the rich and powerful? How did they become the ruling class? The prophets, in declaring Jahweh's judgement on them, answer these questions:

(a) Dispossession of the weak and vulnerable, looting, and accumulation of property and goods. Isaiah speaks of

Those who add house to house,
and join field to field
until everything belongs to them
and they are the sole inhabitants of the land.

(5:8)

Jeremiah speaks of 'loot' which fills their houses; 'they have grown rich and powerful because of it, fat and sleek...'. Amos of those in Samaria who 'cram their palaces full by harshness and extortion'. Micah said of the rich:

Seizing the fields that they covet,
 they take over houses as well,
 owner and house they confiscate together,
 taking both man and inheritance.

(2:2)

(b) The relationship between rich and poor is one of cruel exploitation by the rich. Jahweh speaks through the 8th Century peasant Micah of the 'princes of the House of Jacobe, rulers of the House of Israel' who have

...devoured the flesh of my people
 and torn off their skin
 and crushed their bones;
 when they have shredded them like flesh in a pot
 and like meat in a cauldron.'

(3:2,3)

Isaiah used similar language in putting Jahweh's question:

By what right do you crush my people
 and grind the faces of the poor?

Jeramiah confronts the king,

who makes his fellow man work for nothing,
 without paying him his wages

He denounces another king and his nobles for making slaves of their fellow citizens.

(c) A number of other practices: perverting justice by siding with the evildoer against his victim, sometimes in return for a bribe; swindling people; levying taxes which ruin the poor; and so on.

The rulers of Judah and Israel who found it profitable to behave like other ruling classes tended to abandon the worship of Jahweh, whose demands were strict, for the bogus 'gods' of others. When they didn't do this, they tended to treat worship as mumbo jumbo. Both Isaiah and Jeramiah make it clear that there is no use in doing that. The issue of idolatry is closely linked with behaving as a corrupt and exploiting class. The prophets continually raise the question what it is to know Jahweh and to please him.

The New Testament

For the purpose of this article, two or three paragraphs will be sufficient. Firstly, the Old Testament is fundamentally important in the understanding of the Gospels and some of the Epistles. We can take for example Jesus' parable of Dives and Lazarus. When Jesus began, 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day...', his audience was one which had heard him speak before about rich men and behave in certain ways towards them. The irony, and the contemporary class attitudes would have been part of the situation. The connotations of 'rich', which, in the light of what the Old Testament had to teach, made it 'logical' that the rich man deserved 'his torment in Hades' would, to some Christians, seem very extreme. '...between us and you a great gulf has been fixed', says Lazarus, That is the gulf that exploitation and oppression have made. But the 'punch line' of the parable is at the end in Abraham's reference to 'Moses and the prophets'. We cannot read this parable without looking up what Moses and the prophets had to say.

The hymn, 'All things bright...' expresses what was and is the teaching of the Church on classes. But in this parable, the class gap which, in the Song of Hannah and the Magnificat are overturned by God's action,

becomes an even more extreme distance between those who have made themselves rich and those at whose expense they have done so.

Secondly, Palestine in Jesus' day was a very complex society. Classes and class struggle and national struggle were facts of everyday life. We cannot read St. Luke's Gospel, for example, without noticing how much Jesus and his followers and his antagonists are aware of what was going on in the 'worlds' of politics and economics. For the Jews, Jerusalem was the centre of the action, as it had been for some of the prophets several hundreds of years earlier. And in Jerusalem, at the peak of class society, was the Temple. The priests, with the High Priest at their head, were no longer the ruling class that they had made themselves, with their religious prescriptions and teachings, before the Hasmoneans and the Romans reduced their power. But they were an 'aristocracy'. (Joachim Jeremias uses the term in his Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus. And Emil Schurer in The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ has an informative discussion on the priesthood as a class.) Not for the first or the last time, economic privilege and political rule worked through 'religious' domination.

Thirdly, it is on record that the great cosmic drama of salvation that was centred on Jesus' birth and upbringing, his ministry, his death and resurrection took place in a situation of class struggle. The concentration of landholdings by a few at the expense of the cultivators, the levies that had to be paid and the extortion that went on, made it necessary for the poor to struggle against the demands of the powerful in order to survive. Jesus was not vague about what stand he took (and wanted his disciples to take) in regard to the worship of Mammon, on which that oppressive and God-forsaken society was based. It is Christians who tend

to argue away the meaning of what he said about the possession of much wealth and property, and what goes with it - a concern with 'eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building' (Luke 17:28) regardless of the day of judgement; about the love of money, about the landlords and the businessmen and their stewards and tenants and hired labourers and slaves who appear in his parables; about the need for the 'rich young ruler' (probably a member of the Sanhedrin) to prove his knowledge of the Commandments by restoring to the poor the enormous wealth he and his family acquired at their expense; and so on.

WORDS OF - ST. OSCAR ROMERO OF AMERICA
BISHOP AND MARTYR

"That is why the Church has great conflicts: It denounces sin. It says to the rich: Do not sin by misusing your money. It says to the powerful: Do not misuse your political influence. Do not misuse your weaponry. Do not misuse your power. It says to sinful torturers: Do not torture. You are sinning. You are doing wrong. You are establishing the reign of hell on earth."

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SPIRITUALITY AND LIBERATION

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(This paper written at the request of the Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones in Lima, Peru, was included in a book to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the publication of Gustavo Gutierrez's pioneering work, 'Theology of Liberation'.)

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL opened the door for a comprehensive definition of what has traditionally been compartmentalised as liturgy, spirituality and secular (i.e. socio-political) commitments. Yet because of an unhappy juxtaposition of old formulas and new perspectives, a trichotomy persists between the sacramental, the contemplative and the active (or activist) dimensions of Christian 'spirituality'.

In the conservative stream of thinking, which includes some recent pronouncements of the official church, there is a tendency to take a narrow view of contemplation as spirituality "par excellence", if not also as spirituality "per se", without which 'liturgy' and more especially the Christian 'commitment' to the Paschal transformation of the world would be unspiritual.

It is this mode of perceiving 'spiritual life' that invariably reduces the trichotomy to a triple dichotomy, namely:

- (a) liturgy versus spirituality,
- (b) spirituality versus secular involvement,
- (c) secular involvement versus liturgy.

The refusal to see all these three elements at least as mutually inclusive dimensions of one authentic Christian life creates an insoluble circularity in all the attempts made so far to overcome any given 'spiritual crisis', as will be illustrated shortly. It is here that a liberation theology brings a healthy synthesis by identifying the exact locus wherein these three aspects overlap. This it does by re-focusing the Church's attention on:

- (1) the liturgy of life,
- (2) the theology of the Cross,
- (3) the historical Jesus and his humanity,

which are actually three different modes of perceiving the same mystery of Redemption.

However, no Latin American theologian should be held responsible for the peculiar manner in which I formulate the problem of spirituality as it exists in the contemporary Church or for the framework (of the 'triple dichotomy') within which I have tried to perceive, clarify and appreciate whatever liberation theology has contributed towards the theology of spirituality. This presentation, therefore, reflects my own personal assessment of the ever-new and yet ever-ancient principles of spirituality which seem to be emerging from the ecclesial life of basic communities in Latin America.

(A) Liturgy versus Spirituality

Focus on the Liturgy of Life

LET ME BEGIN with the analysis of the first dichotomy, namely, the one between liturgy and spirituality. During the five decades that preceded the Second Vatican Council, two parallel solutions to this problem were offered in the course of the well-known Jesuit-Benedictine controversies on spirituality. The newly compiled Codex Juris Canonici which was enthusiastically received in 1917 and after, has emphasised the ritual, juridical, external and hierarchically controllable elements of Christian worship while the later theological manuals extended this notion to ludicrous extremes defining liturgy as the merely sensible, ceremonial and ornamental part of Catholic worship (Navatel) or as a set of ecclesiastical controls over the performances of public worship (Callewaert). No wonder the Jesuits wanted to supplement liturgy with a personal contemplative spirituality and thus de-ritualise it.

The Benedictine School, led by Beauduin (following Gueranger of the 19th century), tried to salvage the notion of Liturgy from its overly ritualistic connotation by redefining it as the ecclesial (presumably not ecclesiastical) continuation of the Christ-Mystery, participation in which would be true spirituality. Some of them, in their critique of Ignatian spiritual exercises, insisted that a spirituality which is not liturgical is not ecclesial either; in which case how could it even be Christian? Liturgy was none other than the exercise of the priesthood of Christ, i.e. of the total Christ, Head and Members. Spirituality then is not a prelude nor an accompaniment nor a supplement to liturgy but is itself co-extensive with liturgy or Christian worship. One could say that the Jesuits brought in a personal

dimension to what they regarded as a collective 'rite', while the Benedictines restored an ecclesial character to an otherwise individualistic 'spirituality'. The Benedictines won the day.

This new understanding of liturgy found its way into the encyclical "Mediator Dei" (1947) lock, stock and barrel. From there, it was just one step to the Liturgical Constitution of Vatican II, thanks to the intervening decade and a half of 'reforms' enacted from the top and 'renewal' erupting from the base of the Church. "Sacrosanctum Concilium" of Vatican II did not hesitate to claim that the liturgy was the 'Source and Summit' (Fons et Culmen) of Christian existence. Never before has a more thorough integration of spirituality and liturgy been advocated by the official Church.

Thus, when the Liturgical Constitution was triumphantly voted in at the Council, there was an explicit hope among the liturgists that liturgical renewal would turn out to be a real spiritual renewal of the Church. But an honest assessment of the two post-conciliar decades has another story to tell. The Conciliar "Instructiones" were often interpreted and executed with a pre-conciliar rubrical mentality. While the Roman Curia failed to make the 'paradigm shift' from the canonical definition of liturgy to the 'Conciliar' understanding of Worship, many renewalists too were busy moving altars, introducing vernacular texts, composing new prayers and songs, simplifying vestments, improving on gestures, etc., so that Liturgy often became a new series of words and activities that prevented the Word Himself from speaking and acting sacramentally within the community.

What happened was a change of rite and not always a change of "life" that the Conciliar teaching on 'Liturgy'

implied. The new rite, shorn of its novelty, brought the Church back to square one. Spirituality, quite soon, had to be imported from outside to vivify the liturgy! The Charismatic Renewal and Oriental Mysticism invaded the Western Church, reinforcing not only the personal but also the traditionally "apolitical" character of both spirituality and liturgy! As far as nexus between liturgy and spirituality is concerned, the Latin Church has slipped back into the old dualism. At least in this particular respect, the post-Vatican situation, contrary to expectation, was only a little better than the post-Tridentine period during which the liturgy used to be supplemented by numerous devotions and 'spiritualities'!

Why do we constantly fall into this rut? Why this circularity? The reason according to us could be this. The Roman Church has, somewhere in the course of her history, devalued the most crucial dimension of spirituality: the "liturgy of life" which is the matrix of all sacramental expressions, since it is the context of a living encounter with God in Christ. Sacramental life and mysticism cannot be artificially reconciled if they are both uprooted from their natural environment which is the Paschal Mystery of Christ continued in the (secular) lives and struggles, in the deaths and triumphs of His members; for, Christ dies, not in the Temple, the place of traditional liturgies, but outside it: "Ubi Christus ibi ecclesia" - not necessarily the other way about. Wherever the Paschal Mystery is enacted today, there Christ is united to His loyal members; it is there that the real Church is gathered; there the true liturgy takes place; there, authentic spirituality is lived. For in victimhood lies the exercise of the priesthood of Christ.

Thus it is in the rise of basic communities in Latin America that one begins to observe this kind of mutual enveloping of 'Liturgy', 'Spirituality' and 'Secular



action', constituting a genuine renewal of the Church. This is 'Liberation Theology' in practice. It could not have come directly from Vatican II, though it is Vatican II that prepared the ground for it by creating an ethos of theological freedom and ecclesiological pluralism.

The Vatican II is undoubtedly the most significant achievement, in recent times, of the Western Patriarchate renewing its life within its own tradition. It was trying to break away from a legalistic outlook to a liberal one; from 'lapsarian' pessimism to a theology of involvement with the World. Its most 'Conciliar' document, the *Gaudium et Spes* (proposed and prepared at the Council itself) contains precious new perspectives, and has initiated a far-reaching dialogue with the modern world. But this modern world, on close scrutiny, seems to be primarily the First world, the Western technocratic world spreading its tentacles on the entire globe - not the "unjust world" which was created in the very process of building that 'modern' world! Even the highly dangerous missiology of 'developmentalism' which corrupted third world Churches with neo-colonialist triumphalism seems to have received a tacit approval in the Conciliar document on Missions (*Ad Gentes*, chs. 1 & 2) which contradicts other healthier perspectives opened up in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. Vatican II fostered in the West a 'liberal' theology, not a liberation theology; a 'progressive' theology, not a radical one.

The Western Church's widespread over-reaction both 'for' and 'against' the Encyclical "*Humanae Vitae*" of Paul VI, and its comparative indifference to his *Populorum Progressio* is an index of this situation. This is because its 'liberalist' pre-occupation with individual moral freedom is not sufficiently rooted in the 'liberational' zeal for the total human freedom of oppressed people. In the first encyclical which deals with the

birth-control issue, the Pope resisted the modern world's technological manipulation of human life but in the second which deals with justice, he acknowledged the diabolical extent to which this manipulation goes on in the third world. The 'Progressive Theology' failed to realise that the Pharaohs who govern this modern world are over-anxious to reduce the birth-rate of their slaves whose numbers are indeed a threat to their comfort and security. Latin America's response was different. It is there that Populorum Progressio was taken seriously, because the local Churches recognised 'injustice' lurking behind the veil of 'modernity', inequalities riding on the waves of technocratic 'progress', and greed for 'wealth-control' hiding behind the zeal for 'birth-control'. No wonder they gave us Medellin; and then, Liberation Theology.

To grasp the difference between these two perspectives, one must return to the earliest Christian understanding of Liturgy, Spirituality and Secular Commitments - which Vatican II recaptured almost faithfully. I say 'almost' faithfully, because an old clericalism is yet allowed to appear in the way true worship of the whole church ('spiritual sacrifice') is made subordinate to the ministerial priesthood so as not to give full 'liturgical' value to the priesthood of the faithful, i.e. to their liturgy of life.

Obviously we have an initial difficulty here, for the word 'liturgy' is hardly used in the New Testament in the way Vatican II uses it. Since the Septuagint had restricted the word to mean Levitical worship which was of a ritualistic nature, the authentic Christian worship was seldom or never called 'liturgy' in the New Testament. Already the prophets of the Old Testament had insisted true worship to be personal and communal holiness, i.e. fidelity to the covenant, obedience to God and the practice of Justice rather than external

sacrifices (Jer. 7:22-23, 45 etc.; Amos 5:22-24; Isaias 1:10-20; Hosea 6:6 etc.) Jesus, continuing this prophetic tradition, presents an anti-Temple, anti-ritual type of worship (Jn. 4:19-26). Fidelity to the New Covenant, the Gospel of Love, becomes the criterion of sanctity.

It was practically for holding this view of spirituality that Jesus was led to death (Mt. 26:61), Stephen martyred (Acts 6:12-24; 7:47-53), and the first persecutions unleashed, on the disciples (Acts 8:1). Since the word 'liturgy' could not convey this new idea of Christian spirituality, it was avoided in the New Testament except perhaps in a couple of instances (Rom. 15:16, Phil. 2:17) and is used only once even to designate the collective worship of the Christian assembly (Acts 13:2), for which the normal preference would be "latria" or "douleia".

[See Peter MacCartin: "Theology of Liturgy", Tjurunga, An Australasian Benedictine Review 6 (1974) 93-106; 7(1974)67-75; 9(1975)89-96; 11(1976)59-72.]

Hence 'liturgy' has acquired a new sense in this 20th century, especially in the liturgical constitution of Vatican II. It means the holiness of Christian life constituting the spiritual sacrifice of the self-oblation made to the Father by the whole Body of Christ united in his spirit with him who is its head (liturgy of life), and ecclesially expressed through the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist (liturgy as 'source and summit'). It comes very close (though not close enough) to the New Testament teaching on 'Christian Worship' (more about this below). Let us recall that for St. Paul, Baptism was not a mere rite but a (mystical) union with Christ, a dying and rising with Him in one's day-to-day life. The Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving consisting of a covenantal gesture of breaking, sharing and pouring out one's life for others.

To eat sumptuously while others starved was anti-Eucharistic and anti-ecclesial: 'a sin against the Body of the Lord' (1 C. 12:21-27). To use three modern concepts retrospectively, this was a sacramental mysticism of secular commitment (in response to the demands of the New Covenant of Love), the last element being the focal point of the other two. For Sacrament and Mysticism are intensive moments (the one being ecclesial, the other personal) of the life of self-sacrifice lived in accordance with the Gospel.

When, unfortunately, Sacraments gradually became the remote-control apparatus of a clerical caste (i.e. of Ministers who 'put on' Christ's priesthood without sharing in His victimhood), and therefore, the laity abandoned the world of clerics in search of Mysticism in the desert (as it did happen in the 4th century in protest against the Church which absorbed the imperialistic worldliness of Rome), 'liturgy' of the priests and the 'spirituality' of the mystics parted company for good. If uprooted from the day-to-day struggles that the New Covenant of Love imposes on the Christian conscience (liturgy of life), then Sacraments and mysticism can never meet. This is why the post-Vatican Liberal Theology has failed to effect a marriage between them.

Chartres Cathedral offers us a sculptor's version of this dichotomy taken for granted in the middle ages. Elongated figures of 'Saints' thinned out of the world to reach a God above, and the stout, stocky figures of this - worldly artisans and peasants (the worker-class from which Jesus came) supporting with the sweat of their brows that other 'leisure-class' who have all the time and energy for liturgies and mystical contemplation, point to a conception of spirituality indelibly sculptured in the cathedrals of our collective unconscious. Only a liberation theology can deliver us from this inversion.

(B) Spirituality versus Secular Involvement:

Focus on the Theology of the Cross

Further light on this question can come from an inquiry into the second dichotomy: that between contemplation and action. As in the case of 'liturgy', here too there is a great deal of confusion arising from a shift of meaning in the words employed. In some early spiritualities action meant mental activity which initiates the psychic processes leading up to the higher realms of contemplation. In later terminology, they came to be called the ascetical and the mystical 'stages' (or more accurately, 'aspects') of interior prayer; the former emphasises the active while the latter points to the passive element in the human search for God, so that both human liberty (as in the first case) and divine gratuity (as in the second case) remain safeguarded.

In the current terminology which has received a strong advocacy in recent papal exhortation to priests and religious,* action is an apolitical intra-ecclesial ministry which, too, is deemed ineffective unless preceded and accompanied by contemplation. Obviously, 'action' which should include secular commitments is more than ecclesiastical apostolates, while the hellenic notion of 'contemplation' implied here tends to compromise the socio-political thrust of the Biblical teachings on prayer and worship. Hence, to talk of the present spiritual crisis in terms of this binomial (contemplation and action) is misleading, to say the least. Unfortunately, 'Prayer' understood as contemplation is often viewed as God-experience, as opposed to 'action' which is equated exclusively with human concern.

* I. Iglesia, S.J., 'The Contemplative Dimension in the Writings of Pope John Paul II, Introduction'. IGNIS (Bombay) XI/1 (Jan.-Feb. 1982), 13ff.

The use of geometrical concepts, 'vertical' and 'horizontal', to designate these two aspects, displays the medieval conception of a God operating from above vertically and of the human person standing in front horizontally! No wonder the aforementioned saints of Chartres Cathedral are vertically stretched out and horizontally thin, while the poor on whose surplus these saints live are vertically stunted and horizontally over-grown! The contemplatives are 'spiritual'. The workers and farmers are engrossed in 'material concerns'; they are 'serfs' who live on the spiritual crumbs that fall from the tables of contemplative 'Lords'. Indeed a feudal spirituality!

Ignatius of Loyola, who was a "contemplativus simul in actione", brought about a very significant synthesis which needs to be further broadened and deepened on the strength of his basic intuition into this problem. He subjected both prayer and action to the acid test of authenticity, namely, self-abnegation which is the negative symptom as well as the positive proof of authentic love. All genuine Spirituality flows from the spirit of Crucified (and Exalted) Christ. Both contemplation and action can be vitiated by self-seeking, by a veiled refusal to drink of the Chalice of Christ or to undergo the Baptism of the Cross. One recalls here the oft-quoted example of Ignatius' injunction to young Jesuits seeking long hours of prayer - a fashionable trend during his time, as widely indulged in then as oriental mysticism and charismatic movements are in modern times. His demand was that they apply themselves to the duties of their calling in a spirit of self-sacrifice - indeed a reflection of the New Testament teaching on Christian worship as 'spiritual sacrifice' (Rom. 12, 1-2). Once there is self-abnegation, he declared, it would not take long to find God! This precious doctrine, so deeply imbedded in the Western mystical tradition, should be recovered for our times as the authentic criterion of any genuine spirituality.

The Christological foundation of this intuition can never be over-stressed, namely (a) that in the person of God-Man Jesus, God and Man have been so reconciled as to form one indivisible mystery of salvation, and (b) that this reconciliation is effected through the kenosis of the Cross which makes visible and accessible the initial kenosis of the Incarnation, and consequently, (c) that the Crucified Christ provides, so to say, a 'short-circuit' between the Divine and the Human, so that one can always touch God in man, and reach man in God, provided one opts for the Cross where alone love for God and love for man are made convertible. Seek God in total self-abnegation and you will touch the depths of the human, your own and that of others. Conversely, commit yourself to human liberation without any self-seeking, and you have already experienced God. Without self-abnegation, both prayer and action are delusions, with self-centred introversion parading as interiority, and restless extroversion as political commitment.

The accent, therefore, should be on the hard gospel demand for renunciation, 'denying oneself', the 'taking up of the Cross', as the "conditio sine qua non" of true discipleship, that is to say, of authentic spirituality. The crisis today is not that there is not enough prayer - something that can never be empirically verified - but that the 'modern world' with which Vatican II wants us to dialogue, advocates a fictitious Christ, a Jesus minus His Cross, or seeks Him where He is not found, or eclipses the real (unjust) world where He hangs crucified, calling us to join His struggle.

Let me illustrate this with two Biblical models: Abraham's experience of faith in God and Moses' struggle for justice for his people. These two models demonstrate that a God-ward journey culminates in peoplehood and a people-ward commitment climaxes in God-experience only on the Cross where Christ stands reconciling God's People

with the People's God. In Asia they explain biblically the two models of 'renunciation' advocated by gnostic religions and socialist ideologies respectively. Let us study these models.

In the Gospel of John (8:56) Jesus is made to acknowledge that Abraham had met him in history, for 'Before Abraham was I am' (Jn. 8:58). Abraham's faith unfolds the agonies of a long search to understand the inner Voice in obedience to which he abandoned his home and hearth and launched into the Unknown. He was prepared to renounce all, even his one and only son, to that God, the God who was growing ever greater in his horizon till He revealed Himself as the God of all people. Abraham's detachment supporting his obedience to God is upheld as a paradigm of faith. Today Christians of all nations and of all times proclaim him their 'Father-in-Faith', wherever the Eucharist is celebrated. His God-ward journey culminated in the foundation of a people, precisely because he renounced all in his search and met Jesus in whom God-experience is linked with peoplehood.

Moses, unlike Abraham, started his journey from the other end, from a commitment to 'People', but ended up discovering God, because his journey began with self-negating love. This Christological interpretation of the Moses-phenomenon is clearly enunciated in the letter to the Hebrews. He too, is singled out, together with Abraham, as one who had a pre-Jesus encounter with Christ, in view, of course, of Jesus of Nazareth, the privileged point of history where the cross of Christ stands until the Kingdom of Justice and Peace is fully installed. Brought up as a non-believer, Moses had not yet known Yahweh when he encountered Christ on the Cross of heroic renunciation borne in solidarity with the Cross of his suffering brethren:

It was by faith that, when he was grown up, Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to suffer oppression in the company of God's people rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the insults endured for Christ (the Messiah and the Messianic People) greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

(Hebrews 11/24-26)

He refuses to be part of an oppressive system and opts out of it to be with the oppressed people. This option is regarded in the New Testament as an option for Christ, presumably because it was authenticated by the renunciation of his personal security. No wonder his 'love of humans' later culminated in a face-to-face encounter with Yahweh on Sinai.

Liberation Theology has restored the theology of the Cross to the post-Vatican II Church. Contemplation and action receive their authenticity not from each other as is erroneously believed, but from the Cross which stands wherever altars are built to Mammon on the graves of God's poor. True spirituality, then, is founded on self-transcendence which according to Jesus consists of a self-abnegation blooming into a self-fulfilment, (Mt. 16:25), in and through The Other; not only The Other who hides in one's own 'self' awaiting to be sought through Prayer, but also this same Other who hides in 'others' as the victim-judge of human injustice (Mt. 25:36) awaiting to be served through Action. Both Abrahamic and Mosaic models of spirituality converge in indicating that Christ can be encountered as God-Man on the Cross where God-search and human concern constitute one salvific process, that is to say, one liberational enterprise.



(C) Secular Involvement versus Liturgy

The Focus on Jesus the Man

The contrast between the liberation theology of Latin America and the post-Vatican II theology of the Western Patriarchate lies also in their respective approaches to the third dichotomy in our list: the one between the secular and the sacramental dimensions of Christian life.

Let us first of all recapture the exact relation between these two dimensions as advocated in the normative teachings of the New Testament. For argument's sake let us avoid quoting any Latin American theologian but rather hide behind the authority of one of Europe's foremost spokesmen for Post-Vatican Progressive Theology: Edward Schillebeeckx [God the Future of Man, (New York, 1968) 98-103, all emphases are mine.] In an inimitably concise summary of the New Testament doctrine on 'Secular life as Worship' (his title), he analyses the notion of liturgy within the purview of Jesus the man: 'Jesus did not give His life in a liturgical solemnity...on the contrary, in an obvious secular conflict, coloured though it was by religion, he remained faithful to God and to men and gave His life for His own in a secular combination of circumstances'. Therefore,

Calvary was not a Church Liturgy, but an hour of human life which Jesus experienced as worship. In it our redemption is to be found.

Now, according to the interpretation given in the letter to the Hebrews, Schillebeeckx thinks that 'it is possible to speak of a secular liturgy'. Cult, he argues, has acquired a new meaning in the New Testament, and a new concept of worship is offered to us: 'Human life itself experienced as liturgy or as worship of God'. For 'on the basis of Jesus' self-sacrifice, the Christian's life

in this world can now become worship'. Thus 'the New Testament clearly lays stress on secular worship'. Then he rightly concludes that 'Christian commitment to the ordering of human society here and now and the Christian opposition to all injustices that disrupts peace among men' are not only scripturally justifiable but are to be 'experienced as that secular worship required by the Biblical essence of Christianity', wherefore 'Christian faith is not a flight from the World to the Church's liturgy'.

Schillebeeckx here seems to use the word 'liturgy' in the sense in which it occurs in the Vatican II, namely both as 'secular liturgy' (i.e. his own term for secular commitments lived as worship) and as 'Church's liturgy' or 'liturgical solemnity' (i.e. his terms for the sacramental expression of the secular liturgy, especially the Eucharistic celebration). Then he raises the most crucial question that engages our attention here: is Christianity merely an 'intensified human solidarity' (obviously he is referring to the secular liturgy) or is it also a 'song of praise' and a 'festal gathering' (the Church-liturgy, specially Eucharistic celebration)?

The Conciliar theology seems to have the answer clear: the Church-liturgy is the 'source and summit' (fons et culmen) of the liturgy of life. The Christian commitment, i.e. living the Gospel in a spirit of self-sacrifice, as "sequela Christi", both originates and culminates in the official liturgical gathering of God's People celebrating their redemption sacramentally (specially in that Song of Praise called the Eucharist wherein the Church offers herself 'through Him, with Him and in Him' in the oneness of the Spirit as an act of praise to the Father).

This emphasis on the Church-liturgy as the 'source and summit' is understandable if it is accepted that

this doctrine germinated in the monastico-clerical ethos of pre-Vatican liturgical renewal. First of all a subtle over-emphasis on the hierarchical role in the liturgy seems to weaken somewhat the baptismal basis of liturgy so that the 'secular liturgy' (to borrow Schillebeeckx's terminology) has to participate in the liturgy which seems to pre-exist in the hierarchically constituted Church (i.e. in the Christ-liturgy, to use Schillebeeckx's terminology again). Secondly, it looks as though the Church, as God's People who continue the mystery of Jesus' humanity by being the locus and subject of Christian worship, is made subordinate to the symbolic presence of Christ in the institutional Church and in the institutional liturgy. Here, in the words of the Council, we hear the voice of Odo Casel and perhaps also de la Taille.

How would all this appear in the context of a life-and-death struggle for justice, where 'festal gathering' and 'Song of Praise' constitute privileged moments of strength and joy, a profound contemplation and joyous celebration of the mysteries revealed in the humanity of Jesus, as is known from the Gospels as well as through one's own personal encounters with Him? In such a perspective (that is to say, if the liberationist's logic is to be adhered to with rigorous consistency) we presume that the liturgy of the official Church would originate and culminate in the liturgy of life which is the primary guarantee of salvation/sanctification; and not the other way about!

This logic is based on the primacy that a liberation theology would accord to the humanity of the historical Jesus and the subordination of the 'Church' to it. The adage "Ubi Ecclesia ibi Christus" is not only reversed to "Ubi Christus ibi Ecclesia", but this Christ in whose company the authentic Church is found, is clearly perceived as the Incarnate Christ of History continuing

His presence 'sacramentally' in the flesh and blood of human beings (His least brethren) crying, if not also striving, for the dawn of the Kingdom of Justice, and not primarily in a Gnostic Christ legitimisingly present in an institutionalised community with an institutionalised Worship.

The ministerial Church is, of course, invited to offer the occasion to transubstantiate this human flesh and blood, broken and shared in the struggle for true peace, that they may become the 'Celebration of the Eucharist': Jesus' own song of thanksgiving and hope. If she is so structured as to be utterly incapable of offering this occasion - which is what we mean by 'Church liturgy', then it could be that she is cut off already from her Head, the Christ. She would cease to be the Church, and much less would she be the locus of the "fons et culmen" of secular worship! True perception of Jesus in His historical human dimension leads to a search for the true liturgy of the authentic Church. The ministerial Church, by converting herself to these "ecclesiolae" or 'basic communities' where Christ enacts his Paschal Mystery in spirit and in flesh, 'learns' to be the authentic bearer of Christ's presence (ecclesia discens) and thus retrieves her lost authority (ecclesia docens). This is the 'ecclesiological revolution' that liberation theology generates by subordinating Church liturgy to the liturgy of life. It was Jesus' style of building the Church through Calvary, through that hour of human life which he experienced as worship.

To bring out in bold relief the novelty and the challenge of liberation theology in this regard, one would do well to recall the manner in which the humanity of Christ is re-affirmed from time to time within the non-liberational perspectives of classical theologies. Humanity of Christ is eclipsed in theology wherever the human element is neglected in spirituality. Then there

arise waves of secular humanism which percolate into the conscious centre of the Church in the form of a 'cult of man' in the supreme sense of the term, i.e. cult of Jesus, the most human God and the most divine Man. Every search for liberated humanity coincides with the innate thirst for 'God-Man' Christ. Every humanism in being 'Christianised' is immediately transfigured into a 'Jesus movement'.

In the late medieval times the non-humanistic tendencies were registered in a theology which filtered God through scholastic abstractions; in disincarnate spiritualities which reduced the God-Man encounter to a mystical merging of a human soul (minus the body) with the Divine Spirit (minus Christ's humanity); and in a juridicism that diminished human persons to mere papal 'subjects'. Along with those tendencies, one sees also the surging of popular devotions to the humanity of Christ, restoring sanity within the Church. The devotions to Corpus Christi the Precious Blood, the Five Wounds, etc. were a liturgical re-education of the Church in the basics of Christianity. The Franciscan devotions to the crib and the Cross still keep us firm on the essentials.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart which has its remote origins in the writings of the medieval Saints Gertrude, Mechtilde, etc. is certainly the most widespread and, theologically, the most argued-out cult of Jesus' humanity. It was found in the bosom of the Church when the Jesuits especially articulated in theory and praxis, compensating for the lack of Christocentric devotions in the clerical liturgies of the time, which were far removed from the people. The magisterium listened to the theologians and made the devotion its own and even issued one encyclical on it. If the devotion has lost its relevance today it is because the liturgy, as renewed now, makes it redundant.

Our hope is that a similar process takes place in the Church with regard to the new emphasis on the humanity of Christ that comes from the praxis of the basic communities. May the magisterium make it its own. Let me immediately say why.

While a theology which is non-liberational could produce 'devotions', a liberation theology stimulates 'commitments' to Jesus who is God-become-our-neighbour. It is a shift from the Christ of one's contemplation to the Christ with flesh and blood. Strange as it may sound, the classical devotion to the Sacred Heart revolved so much round the theory of 'reparation' for the damage done to that Heart, that it could easily lead a person to a pathological inversion unless he/she really found that there existed in reality a Christ capable of suffering damage and, therefore, reparable. Liberation theology puts us in touch with such a Christ, whose bleeding heart demands brave deeds of love, a Christ hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, homeless, and fettered by social chains (Mt. 25:31-46), Christ the labourer's son (Mt. 13:55), Christ without a place to be born in (Lk. 2:7), to lay His head on (Mt. 8:20) or to be buried in (Mt. 27:60), Christ who is a threat to Herod's security and, therefore, hunted out by him (Mt. 2:13-15), Christ calumniated before the Court of Law (Lk. 23), Christ in chains in the praetorium (Mk. 15:16), Christ tortured by the army (Mt. 26:30), Christ a criminal among criminals (Lk. 23:39), Christ the victim of priestly fanaticism and political opportunism (Mt. 27:25-26), and Christ the unwanted leader (Jn. 19:14-16).

This human Christ responds to the Christian humanism of our times which enlightens us about the hidden roots of dehumanisation; which proposes an alternative model of society where human growth rather than profit accumulation (Mammon) is the motivating force; and which spells

out a process of discernment not different from the classical method: identification of the enemy, choice of strategy, and struggle for the Kingdom with confidence and hope in Divine Grace. The Christ that emerges from this humanism is not merely a Good Friday Christ, who would inspire us only to a pathological messianism in social questions, with no space for humour, aesthetic experience and person-to-person intimacy which are all ingredients of a genuine human growth. Rather, it is a figure of Christ brightened up with the light of the Resurrection; it is a Christ that calls dust to life, a Christ that heals, a Christ that feeds the multitude, a Christ that removes social stigmas (leprosy) and re-integrates outcasts into society - in short, Christ the restorer of all things! It is a Christ that suffers pain but struggles in hope. A Christ exalted even on the Cross.

Would that the theologians who articulate this devotion to the humanity of Christ and participate in His Paschal Mystery in the liturgy of life, be heard with sympathy by the official Church as it used to be in the case of mere devotions in the past.

"Theology is no longer simply an academic discipline to be engaged in by seminarians; it has become a tool for enlightenment and critical understanding used by the Christian base Communities to reflect on their journey together as a Christian community."

- Leonardo Boff

THE URBAN POOR AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Sr. Christiane Crohain, F.M.M.

A queue of some 200 of the poorest of the poor women of the Summit Pura* shanty town of Colombo North...They come to get one or two bags of 'triposha' a wheat and soya blend for ill-nourished children; some of them pathetically underfed and under-developed.

Some of the women are resigned, unobtrusive, grateful for the bit they get, others are arrogant, loud-speaking, demanding...The kids are crying and the only thing they have to offer is their breast... I know personally half of them. Many are in situations of distress because they are alone to fight in life : their husbands, or at least the men with whom they stayed for a longer or shorter period, have left them... Maheswari, with four highly rickety children has decorated them with the best Catholic names she could find: Rose-Mary, Anthony - and was ready to change her Hindu religion to be married to her Catholic mate, but the man left her callously with those feeble little kids, whom a gust of wind could throw on the ground, so weak are they.

* The shanty town of Summit Pura was formed during the preparations for the Non-Aligned Nations Summit in 1976, when squatters of various unauthorised settlements were resettled in Colombo North.

A good number have their men in remand, or in jail : many fights are taking place in the area, and some lead to a fatal end...Ganja-selling is a profitable business, and as always, the police catch the sprats, leaving the whales to swim free... : Sellamma's husband had been several times in Welisera (T.B. Hospital) and their string of kids never could go to school because of their acute poverty. I noticed a marked improvement four or five months ago - the rotten planks of their hut had been renewed - the seeming luck was short-lived: "kudu" (narcotics) having been found on their premises, Nazarene is now in jail.

The promiscuity is intolerable : many of the shanties built on two perches are sub-divided into four little rooms; those situated at the back of the huts are specially dark. Even for this quarter hut, the advance rent to be paid ranges from 600 to 1,000 rupees. In this obscure little hole families have to cook, sleep, relax. What can a man do there when he comes back tired from work? How can he have a happy moment with his wife and children? Can we blame them for going away in such circumstances or when they are unemployed or under-employed and have nothing to bring home for the family meal and their wives get frustrated and scold them? How can school children study and do their home work in such surroundings. Is it strange that half of the kids go only sporadically to school, if they do go at all?

What is liberation for them? What is the fuller life they are dreaming of? What does liberation mean for them? Are they even dreaming of liberation? To have Rs.20/= today to feed the kids and themselves seems the only dream they are capable of. Seldom are the women liberating themselves at the expense of their kids. Very few will abandon them to follow another man and start a new life...

Liberating themselves as a group is a thing they have difficulty in grasping. Having never crossed the threshold of an absolute individualism, this seems stepping into the unknown. I have tried again and again to widen the horizon of the women of my "Kantha Samithiya" (Women's Group) they may see the individual problems of their neighbour, but to unite to change things, they do not seem to grasp as yet.

Some of them go to the Middle East and bring back sophisticated gadgets. They get some recognition and status for it. Are they liberated afterwards? But for a few who were able to put a few thousands aside and break the infernal circle, finding a more inspiring environment elsewhere, the bulk of them fall back to the starting point after a few months.

The wealthy people who pass that side, accidentally, on some errand, feel uneasy; they would rather ignore this other side of Colombo; it is a silent reproach, a contestation against all the beautiful speeches made about the wonderful economic development in the country; notwithstanding all the improvements in the infrastructure made by the UDA, it remains an eye sore. Is it possible that people live like that? All dumped on top of one another like the garbage heaped along the side of the road?...

Liberation for the thousands, what does it mean? God? the Church? What does it mean for these people? The Parish priest, until recently had almost ignored them. When they were uprooted from their own surroundings and resettled in that vast marshy land some nine years ago : a mass of around 700 families of mixed origin and doubtful virtue, they were looked upon as an unwanted burden by the institutional church and the social structures of the place which were already facing enough problems of their own.

Who is God for most of them?

"For us you are God" some people, whom I had helped, told me...Not at all an exhilarating experience. What is the liberation I can offer? Some Triposha the money needed for renewing a leaking cadjan roof, some help for the children's schooling or for the elderly over 70... My help would be a mockery for their misery if it was not done with love and concern. Can this fraternal sharing be extended to satisfy the needs of all? Is it going to change society in a lasting way? Does it make them better people or does it provoke jealousy among those to whom I do not give because they do not fall into my category of beneficiaries?

What is the kind of God they dream of? If he be the Almighty, why does he reserve all the good things for a few only, throwing only crumbs to the masses? Is this the image of Him we are projecting?

Trying to find them employment, training the young for some trade or skill, launching into small projects of self employment. It may help temporarily 10 to 20 people : small businesses in vegetables, fruits and fish grow like mushrooms, with a mini-capital, and collapse as quickly as they have started...Competition, the rat race - is too much for the new comers; they are too easily cheated and the profits are too meagre for a daily income. I am still searching for the miracle formula which could provide employment and income for a number of families on a cooperative basis or otherwise. Where could we find a market for their products and ensure a steady flow of capital till the project is viable? How could development at their level take place? Would it not be worthwhile to fight the MNCs on their own ground, by investing the money which comes from abroad for the people's liberation or development in a money-making venture in which they would be co-sharers, with only the necessary minimum expenses put into the organization? This could be meaningful for them

and more readily understood than liberation-discussions at intellectual levels.

The gap between the rich and poor is dangerously widening. If there is little open class struggle in Sri Lanka, the drifting apart of the wealthy from the have-nots could erupt anytime when the mass of the poor would understand that the ethnic issue is only distracting them from their vital issues. If they become aware that it is useless for them to wait for a benevolent wealth redistribution through allowances, food stamps, and other palliatives, then they might rise up and appropriate to themselves their dues through violent means. God save us from this! But all the people cannot be fooled all the time and they are loosing hope of getting some crumbs from the miracle development supposed to take place in the country.

In this mass of people which, in Summit Pura, could be around 900 families with the young generation getting married and new comers renting a room in the existing houses, perhaps 100 to 120 families have Catholic members; only a handful are church-goers - but all are God's children.

Is the idea of the Fatherhood of God relevant for them? Specially for the young who are frustrated and among whom suicides are not infrequent? How should his messengers be witness to His universal fatherhood if not by working for their liberation? "Creation waits with eager longings"* for this liberation to be revealed. But this liberation is not going to fall, ready made for them, from the skies. Liberation has to come from the people themselves. The task of the theologian or the one who goes to the people in God's name is only to help in the process of the birth of a new society for which the people are groaning in pain. The people have to become artisans of their own destiny. Every birth involves some violence for the liberation of life.

* Rom 8:22

Actually they are sheep without a shepherd. They would need enlightened guidance for the formation of a mature leadership. Here like everywhere else, those who progress, do so usually at the expense of others. Politicians come sporadically there and other groups too. They consider it a "chasse gardee" trying to win the favour of the people. Whatever be their purpose, the people consider them as the cow-to-be-milked, trying to get help rather than seeing in them an inspirational leadership. Marginalized and frustrated as they are, they seek only material benefits for themselves and are little interested in ideas, religions or ideologies : empty stomachs have no ears - and even those among them who are not hungry physically are hungering after social recognition. The work of liberation should be gradual and devoid of self-interest if social change is to be achieved : idealizing romantically on the poor will not help. Their cupidity is the outcome of the fact that from their childhood they are the "sinned-against" who have always been at the receiving end of a structure which favours those who have and rejects those who have not.

How can my theologizing on their need of liberation help them to achieve it? Conscientizing them off and on, I do. Organizing them for uprising, surely not. It would only lead to hard repression as experience has shown. What can be done is only patch work. Free education too has failed. It has become out of reach for the majority of poor children and even if they complete their GCE (O/L) or (A/L) the job prospects are bleak, and so the hope of a brighter future is only for a handful among thousands.

What is the Christian meaning, (according to the Vatican instruction or not) of the total liberation for the masses of urban poor in Third World countries, in keeping with their dignity as children of God:

theoretically I grasp it, and want it with all my strength. But practically I can see only small actions, helping only a few people when the occasion arises; and this may remain meaningless, even for them, as a drop of water in the ocean. We and they have to wait till "Mammon" the heartless money-God of the capitalist system is converted, which only a few idealists might think possible, or till it is crushed down as it happens to all systems which have erected themselves as gods over the ages. We have to wait till the Kingdom of Justice and love come in our midst and enable all people to share as brothers and sisters in a society where all would be equally loved and respected.

"We are all called on to transcend our narrow particularities in order to arrive at a higher, wider, and deeper level of sharing among all human beings. This calls for a transformation of ourselves from within our innermost being to accept all others as sisters and brothers. Our growth to a planetary dimension is an invitation to spiritual deepening, a purification from selfishness to a more universal communion in real life, to our own humanization. Insofar as we do so, we shall become more truly civilized, approach the ideals of the best in all our religions and cultures, and pursue the deepest and best aspiration of every human heart and mind."

- Tissa Balasuriya, OMI

Source: "Planetary Theology" - p.95

SOME REFLECTIONS
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF ETHNICITY

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There is nothing too small and nothing too big in the world that does not need to be thought through theologically. To think through theologically means to think of the matter in relation to how God's self-realization in history appears in it. To think through theologically does not mean to think that the word we utter is the Word of God. It is an expression of our understanding of God's presence and action in history and through the reality that we are considering. God's presence and action in history exists whether we acknowledge it or not.

In this reflection there are two points of constant reference. On the one hand, there is the normative record of salvific events in the Scriptures together with tradition. Of necessity, this record and this tradition has been influenced by its own cultural dimensions. Nevertheless, they provide perspective and a spirit against which our present Christian forms of knowing, willing and living need to be constantly evaluated. On the other, hand, there is the context of the reality

that is being considered. This context is sustained by a world view. It reinforces pathologies of knowing and loving. The present paper deals principally with the first point of reference. But it is important to remember that the context always colours our reading of the Scriptures and our interpretation of tradition. But whatever may be the human limitations under which we labour in theological reflection, the model of all existential reflection is rooted in Jesus Christ, who reveals the fulness of the human person not in domination or escape, but in a yielding to one's own humanity and a breaking out of encapsulation into the intimacy of the other. Thus, human knowing is the medium of full experiential participation in the mystery of one's humanness and an openness to the other. Human affectivity and action is the inherent exigency to give one's self away in love, in service, in the joys of covenant.

This acknowledgement of the working out of God's revelation in history is necessary for us and for our salvation. But to be truly a salvific and salvation-communicating acknowledgement, the word (logos) that we articulate has really to flow from a commitment to the God (theos) whom we accept. There is the constant need that we who have been created in the image and likeness of God do not return the compliment by creating a God in our own image and likeness. This is a constant danger if the scripture is read from an existential situation that does not correspond to it. Perspective is all important in reading the Scriptures. The Almighty is merciful when he exalts the lowly and is merciful when he brings down the mighty. Both happen through the vicissitudes of history that is made by people.

"Race" which is the reality under consideration is in the first place a biological concept. It is characterized by genetically transmitted differences, which can be empirically verified e.g. blood traits. I do not

think that there is any word in the Bible that corresponds to this concept of race. The closest that we do get is the word "tribe" (phoule). This would be closer to what we would call an "ethnic group" e.g. Macedonians, Croats etc.

That fact that one belongs to an ethnic group is simply a fact of life that is quite independent of human free will. But racism or the exclusivity of such ethnic belonging is quite a different matter. In modern times, the theory whereby man's worth is derived from racial speciality and the destiny of peoples is regarded as following from inequality of races, derives especially from Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) in his work: Essai sur l'egalite des races humaines (1854). While it is true to say that ethnic differences are willed by God and are an enrichment of humanity, ethnic exclusivity is a deviation and a corruption resulting from human selfishness and sin. The Jews were conscious of their being a "special group", but at the same time, they were also aware - or at least, that is part of the record in scripture - that they were the instrument of bringing God's salvation to all men. It is important to keep these two considerations - diversity/particularity, on the one hand and unity/universality on the other hand - in mutually enriching tension. Diversity can be understood only in terms of unity and unity is meaningless without diversity.

Ethnic Groups within the History of Salvation:

In Christ, the "last times" have dawned. In him, we have the radical revelation of what will be revealed at the end of the ages. The record of this final "eschatological" revelation as found in the Book of Revelation is significant: "After this, I looked, and behold, a great multitude (ochlos = crowd) which no man could number from every nation (ethnous = national grouping), from all tribes (phoulon) and peoples

(laon = people entrusted with a special mission) and tongues (glosson = languages) standing before the throne and before the Lamb..." (Rev. 7:9). This is the diversity that will be carried over into the last times. But they are united in the worship of the Lamb (cf. Rev. 7:9-12). Besides this diversity there is also a very fundamental unity of all men in Christ Jesus, which stands amid all diversity. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

In the pilgrim Church, there is the interplay between this diversity and this fundamental unity. One such moment of enriching encounter was the day of Pentecost, as described in the Acts. There were gathered together in Jerusalem, Jews "devout men from every nation (ethnous) under heaven. And at this sound the multitudes (phoules = tribes) came together and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language (dialektoi = dialect)...we hear them telling in our own tongues (glossais) the mighty works of God" (cf. Acts 2:5-13). The description applied to Jews of various tribes, who experienced an unity that transcended tribal differences without negating their tribal distinctions.

Christianity began as a "sect" within Judaism itself. Christ was a Jew and attended the synagogue. After the resurrection, the Apostles go to the Temple and the synagogue is their ready made forum for proclaiming their teaching. But when the "Nazarene sect" of Judaism was in the process of becoming a faith for all men, there was deep conflict among the followers of the Way, a designation for the Christian faith and group. Jesus had preached and taught the good news from Galilee, Samaria and throughout Judea till Jerusalem (Lk 23:5). The disciples are told to continue this

mission (in a reverse order) from Jerusalem in all Judea, Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth (Lk 24:47, Acts 1:8). Yet the conflict as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles was real with committed followers of Christ on both sides of the issue. Nevertheless, it is through the pain of this conflict that Christianity became truly universal and enriching.

The perspective of Vatican II of realities that are in the process of being perfected in the pilgrim Church is significant. "The renovation of the world has been irrevocably decreed and in this earth the Church is marked with genuine though imperfect holiness. However, until there is a new heaven and a new earth where justice dwells (cf. 2 Pet 3:13), the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, takes on the appearance of this passing world. She herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God." (LG 48). This ambiguity within which all the realities, amid which the pilgrim church exists, are thus characterized by a genuine holiness, but a holiness that should be perfected. When this aspect of openness to perfection is excluded, then, there is the "halting" for oneself or for the group of the salvific process. Ethnicity too is a reality that conditions one's individuality and yet it is also a reality that always has to be open to perfection in interplay with the human race.

Ethnic Groups and "Strangers":

In this salvific journey, tied to the forms of this world, one has to acknowledge the fact of one's ethnic origins. It is a different matter whether these ethnic origins can be historically traced or whether they are based on some kind of myth. The fact is that every ethnic group has its real or so-considered origins. Moreover,

within each race, there are sub-divisions where heads of families have an important place.

When the Scriptures give the example of a liturgical recollection of ethnic origins in the confession that accompanied the offering of first fruits: "My father was a wandering Aramaean...", this recollection is linked to the joy that is experienced not only by those of the Israelite race itself, but also by the sojourner (cf. Deut 26:5-11). On the other hand, we have in the NT a recollection of ethnic origins that is the very reverse of this "recommended" recollection - a recollection that refuses to acknowledge God's new revelation in Christ by a self-affirming, self-sufficient kind of recollection (cf. Jn 8:31-45).

The law in regard to the stranger is clear enough. "When a stranger sojourns with you, you shall do him no wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as a native among you and you shall love him as yourself. For you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Lev 19:33). In the reference to the concern for a stranger as recorded in the Book of Exodus, the perspective is much more telling. "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (23:9, cf. 22:20-21). The word "oppress" used here is the same as that used in Ex 3:9 in regard to the oppression by the Egyptians. It thus offers a new perspective in regard to the relation that must exist between the Jew (now the possessor of the land) and the stranger (who has merely the right to residence). The invitation is to look at things from the point of view of the other and not to repeat the oppression which the Jews experienced while they were residents in Egypt.

Here perhaps it may be important to reflect that the condition of being a "stranger" or the condition

of being "a possessor of the land" says nothing. The issue is how the other is perceived - how the stranger looks at the possessor and how the possessor of the land regards the stranger: What the stranger perceives to be a value in the possession of the land; by what right the possessor perceives his existence in possession of the land. It is important that the perspectives of both the stranger and the possessor be in accord with biblical values. Not to oppress the stranger involves all this. As such, it cannot be invoked simply because one considers oneself to be oppressed. From a NT viewpoint one can say if either party (whatever be his actual condition as stranger or possessor) considers the other as quantifiable, manipulable, expendable, the legitimate object of hatred and violence, by that very fact such a one is an oppressor at heart and guilty of oppression (just as the person who looks at a woman and lusts after her is guilty of adultery in Mt 5:27).

What we can say then is that in the recollection of ethnic origins and inter-ethnic relations, the incipient call of the Bible is the invitation to respond to others (whether less fortunate members of their ethnic group e.g. widow and orphan, or non-members of their ethnic group e.g. strangers). This is motivated for the Jews by their consciousness of what the Other (God) has done for them. "Being a stranger" in Egypt was for the Jews a passing stage of their existence, which God overcame in their favour. In fact, Paul would assert very strongly that the mere fact of being a Jew was no guarantee of salvation for them (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-5). God can raise up children to Abraham from these very stones (cf. Mt 3:9).

The interplay between the particularity of one's ethnic origins and respect for the personhood of the others takes place in the OT against the perspective of the experience of oppression, which is not to be re-

peated. The NT perspective actually transcends the OT perspective by placing not merely ethnic origins and inter-ethnic relations, but also all action and living within the context of love (agape). The NT commandment of love (cf. Mt 22:37-39) is not new in its elements. These are found already in the OT (Deut 6:5, Lev 19:18). It is new in its synthesis: "And the second is like the first..." (cf. Mt 22:39).

The operation of this commandment in several incidents reported in the NT is not just simply one in which Christ makes excuses for the marginalized or disinherited. Rather, Christ points out the defect in relationships. The theory of these relationships and the new climate which they have to create is found in the Sermon on the Mount (especially Mt 5:21-48). Its practice can be detected in several incidents - the Samaritan woman (Jn 4), the adulteress (Jn 8), the woman who barges into the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7), the Canaanite woman (Mt 15). To assess these incidents, the Scriptures have to be searched not to find where and how the actors in the various incidents could claim to be right, but to let the word of the Scripture point out where they had failed and left undone what should have been done. The Samaritan woman had to realize that God is not confined to a place (Mt. Gerazim), the accusers of the adulteress that it was those without sin who could throw the first stone and so on. In other words, the categorization of persons does take place in practice, but love operates in such a way that no categorization should lead to marginalization and discrimination. All categorizations have to yield to God's plan, which challenges each to love his God and his neighbour with the same kind of love. This process moves into a situation (as enunciated in the sermon on the mount) not only where there is no murder, adultery etc., but also to a situation where this is not possible. There could be no murder, when there is no hatred in man's

heart. There could be no need for oaths, when a man's word always means "Yes" for "Yes" and "No" for "No". Thus, there is the constant challenge of hearing the Word of God today. "Today", if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Ps 94). Similarly, in the NT perspective, the incarnation is an event that implies particularity. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." But in this event, "we have seen his glory, the glory, as it were, of the only-begotten Son of the Father" (Jn 1).

Ethnic consciousness is part of the human structure. Communalism or exclusivist ethnic consciousness is the product of sin infiltrating into ethnic consciousness. Since this admixture of sin always tends to be present in human structures of the pilgrim Church, the constant invitation to renewal is the invitation to move towards that situation where disharmonious relationships based on ethnic consciousness or any other reality are no longer possible.

The Problems in the Ethnic Consciousness in the Pilgrim Church:

The invitation not to "oppress" the stranger, the one who belongs to another ethnic group (Ex 23:9), understood against the framework of the NT background of love is the path which leads towards the non-exclusivist ethnic consciousness of the eschatological Church. But this path is a path that is tied up with the unfolding of relationships between human persons. It involves the capacity for observing when and where ethnic consciousness enmeshed with sin, both at the personal and collective level, is in the process of being liberated. It is not merely a problem of logic. It also involves an option. But unfortunately, there is a constant danger that logic may take precedence over option.

A rational (logical) ethic brings the needs of others into equal consideration with those of self. The religious Christian ethic (an ethic flowing from an option) insists that the needs of the neighbour be met on their own terms (cf. Good Samaritan Lk 10 and Last Judgment Mt 25). The first ethic tries to set our perceptions of the needs of others, their grievances etc. within the framework of similar consideration in regard to ourselves. In this perspective, there is always the danger of trying to respond to a legitimate demand by trying to gain political mileage through granting the demand or conserving political advantage by attributing sinister motivation to those who make the demands. There is similarly the possibility of handling a crisis situation simply by appeasing the feelings and sentiments of the majority. Basically, a merely rationally inspired ethic tends towards being one that is self-affirming and introspective.

The Christian on the other hand, who insists on meeting the need of the other has to look at the need from the perspective of the other. For "whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me" (Mt 25). Marx in his wildest dreams, humanists in their most articulate flights, secularists in their vaunted claims have not reached the heights of this demand. It requires that the Christian see faith and justice and charity as mutually constitutive. In this way the social and cultural content of theology and spirituality is not only acknowledged, but also acted upon. The NT texts on charity point out the importance of an option for the other. Christ gave the clue in saying: "Greater love than this no man has than that a man lay down his life for his friend" (Jn 15:13). One might say that there would be greater love, if one laid down one's life for one's enemy. But in that case the personal option (the psychological perfection of the act of commitment to the other would lack the intensity, which it does have when the other for whom one sacrifices oneself is one's

friend. Where this psychological perfection of the act may not be possible, the Christian is still invited to love with agape, but not necessarily to like or be fond of, his enemy (Mt 5:44).

The object of Christian faith is the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:17). The resurrection is the affirmation of life - that transcends whatever limitations it had in this present age. But the price to pay for that affirmation of that life is death. Hence, the Christian in handling the problems that arise from an ethnic consciousness, which remains closed to its inherent openness has to flow through this programme of affirming life in its fulness. This affirmation merely at a personal level may not always be sufficient. One has to affirm it also at the level of its moving towards integration in the patterns of societal and communal living. In this kind of affirmation, the question surfaces again and again whether the churches both as institutions and as individual members are willing to die. This question has been posed in several declarations of the World Council of Churches in its 1975 assembly at Nairobi and in its 1983 assembly at Vancouver.

Devotional practices are an insufficient response to the problems of life which have an inter-personal dimension. Devotional practices basically function against two metaphors: self-protection from evil and blessings for oneself. There is the need to emphasize "devotion" - devotion to God in love and to one's neighbour in an extension of that same love.

Looking at some of my own experiences during the communal problems of July 1983, it would seem to me that individual Sinhalese treated Tamils who were threatened with compassion, even at risk to their life and property. But, as a group and under group pressure, even such Sinhalese went along with the destructive mob. This

underlines the dichotomy between individual commitment and collective values. Similarly in the area of religious practice, a similar dichotomy could be detected. In one place where Christians set fire to a house, they removed the statues to a safe place away from the fire before setting the torch to the house. Even after such destruction, the participants saw no contradiction in assisting at Mass and receiving Communion barely a fortnight after the events.

The Scope of Ethnic Problems:

The scope of ethnic problems touches the entire range of human life. Some aspects that are referred to below would seem to be significant in the context of Sri Lanka.

a) It is important to realize that ethnic consciousness is integral to human self-consciousness. Where ethnic consciousness becomes exclusivist, the human dignity of both the one who is exclusivist and the manner in which such a one deals with the one of the other ethnic group is destroyed. The self-perception is not that of persons, but of "things" or at best of animals fighting a cruel battle for survival. The World Council of Churches, in its Nairobi Assembly has declared:

Racism is a sin against God and against fellow human beings. It is contrary to the justice and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It destroys the human dignity of both the racist and the victim. When practised by Christians, it denies the very faith we profess and undoes the credibility of the Church and its witness to Jesus Christ. Therefore, we condemn racism in all its forms both inside and outside the Church.

There are several areas of racism enumerated by the World Council of Churches that may well be used to examine

the foundation on which the Christian Churches in Sri Lanka take their stand in regard to racism. It is possible to use appropriate compassionate phrases to comfort those who are victims of racism. But a question that needs to be faced is whether the focus of our reflections is Christian. There is the need to move from "elite" universals (abstract concepts) to "people's" universals (concepts that derive from praxis being clarified in the journey towards eschatological perfection) in regard to ethnic consciousness.

To our shame, Christian Churches around the world are all too often infected by racism, overt and covert. Examples of it include the following (a) Churches and congregations have been and are still being organized on racially exclusive lines (b) congregations welcome to their fellowship warmly those who are like the majority of its members, but easily reject those who are different (c) many argue that they are free of racism as if its reality could be undone by ignoring it (d) Churches frequently contribute to the psychological conditioning of the racially oppressed so that they will not sense the racism imposed upon them (e) they are more willing to support struggles against racism far from home than to face the racism which is practised on their doorstep (f) Churches often reflect the racially prejudiced attitudes of their governments, their elites and self-pretensions, while presuming that their own attitudes arise out of Christian faith (g) in leadership privileges and programmatic priorities, Churches tend too easily to indulge in racism without recognizing it.

We recognize that the Spirit of God does break through structural and other barriers, so that Christian communities do from time to time rise

to challenge their own racism and to seek models of commitment to a non-racist Christian faith, even if for every such sign of hope there remain too many examples of denial.

Besides the racism that takes place within the Churches, the Nairobi assembly points out that there are many forms of racism "imbedded in institutinal structures that reinforce and perpetuate themselves, generally to the great advantage of the few and the disadvantage of many". It goes on to say:

Institutionalised racism, in its many structural forms, resists most challenges with careful concessions calculated to preserve its power. We reject a conspiratorial theory of history that oversimplifies the complex struggles of humanity for liberation by describing all institutions with power as pernicious and all powerless peoples as virtuous. This does not, however, make us blind to the evident inclination of current power structures to perpetual racism. All these institutional forms of racism need to be carefully analysed and as Christians we need to attack them with prophetic word and action.

In the context of our own country, it is important to remember that "many" and "few" should not be considered only against the framework of the statistics of Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil population are in a minority compared with the Sinhalese population. But the population of those who speak Tamil (in Sri Lanka and India) far outnumbers the population of those who speak Sinhalese. This factor affects the consciousness of both the Sinhalese and the Tamil speaking people. The fears and anxieties of the ruling classes (who are from the actual majority population from Sri Lanka) are embodied in many of the institutional and adminis-

trative norms that govern organized life in Sri Lanka. It is the Christian's prophetic task to point out that perfect love casts out fear. Fear has no place in agape (1 Jn 4:18).

b) The joint pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka, p.30 points out that Sinhalese and Tamils have antagonistic perceptions of history and contemporary reality which keeps the majority of each group suspicious of each other.

It is well to note here that one of the important constituents of the self-perceptions of the Sinhalese is the connection between religion and race. "Up to the 16th century, the term 'Sinhalese' meant also 'Buddhist' and there was no self-reference term for the latter. The self-reference and identification was Sinhalese and Sinhalese was ethnic identity" (Gananath Obeyesekere).

In the context of these antagonistic perceptions, from a Christian point of view, it is necessary to experience these self-perceptions in the manner in which "the stranger" (Ex 23:9) feels about it. What is its foundation? What are the consequences that the person and/or group experiences? Is the disadvantage real or imaginary? etc. etc. In Sri Lanka, from the point of view of actual statistics of Tamils versus Sinhalese resident in Sri Lanka, the Tamils are a minority and so feel "strangers". But viewed against world population statistics, the Sinhalese are a minority and so feel "strangers". In fact, in Sri Lanka, the Christian community has members in both the Sinhalese and Tamil population. These can be called to practise the "justice" of the gospel: "If any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles..." (Mt 5:41). It is true that in a "sinful" situation, such gospel justice may be taken to mean weakness. But the

clarification of values should take place in terms of gospel values, where it is personal values, the importance of the person that is affirmed. This should be linked to a denunciation of a person being treated as a "thing" subjected to domination, manipulation, retaliation, punishment, competition, devaluation of life etc...

One area in which each group feels disadvantaged is in terms of access to life goals. These goals pertain to three important areas: (a) Growth - contributing to an increase of material output, self-reliance etc.. Here, the question of education is important. (b) Equality - contributing to reduction of inequality, elimination of poverty, satisfaction of basic needs etc.. (c) Participation - involving distribution of power, participation in decision making, institutionalization of dissent etc.. This touches issue about language, the right to political dissent etc.

There is need to consider to what extent a majority who belong to a particular ethnic group are sensitive to the aspirations of a minority. At the same time, the aspirations of the minority have to be evaluated in terms of their openness to the other ethnic groups who share Sri Lanka's territory. For the Christian, the evaluation of values that are espoused by each group is important. Otherwise, the "liberated" of one generation become the "oppressors" of the next generation. The reason for such a situation is that in the inter-relation of the ethnic groups, what has been pursued is the balance of power and not an honest commitment to values. The Christian perspective regards power as a form of service to others (Jn 13). The only time in the gospel of St. Matthew where Christ uses the word "power" in regard to himself (All power is given to me... Mt 28:18) is after he had undergone the self-emptying of his passion and death. It is in this process of clarification and authentication that

the Christians of this country need to be engaged. It may not be the most acceptable approach at a point of time when feelings are high. But it is the approach that Christians have to keep at if they are not to lose what is their specific contribution as Christians. The Christian has to seek for the truth and expose it as he sees it without fear of consequences. A situation changes because people choose to change it. Creative flexibility is needed, which does not mean an opportunism that has a total disregard for principles. From an increasing number of alternatives, one chooses those which most accord with one's Christian perspectives and invests one's energies in trying to see them carried through into action. One is born into an ethnic group without one's choice being involved. One tries by choice to create a climate where every ethnic group can live without domination or subordination.

c) It would seem to the present writer that one has to move towards the creation of a system of values that hold together a pluralistic society - This system has to be created not merely by means of religious symbolism, but also by means of other emotive and evocative symbolic forms e.g. drama, films etc.

Together with this, the outlines of a society that is in some way based on equality of access to the life goals of individuals and groups needs to be worked out. In some way, it will have to be seen and it will have to operate in such a way that (i) people will be treated according to their merit. The merit required is not simply production and marketability, but also the value of the human person. (ii) the distribution of goods will have to take place on the basis of need. The Exodus legislation focusses on the widow, the orphan and the stranger, as being the disadvantaged of that time. Those who are disadvantaged today need to be liberated.

d) Several practical measures that may be implemented are found in the joint pastoral of the Catholic Bishops (10th June 1984). In fact their concluding sentence outlines the link between theological reflection and action: "In giving ourselves unselfishly to this cause, we will also find ourselves much more integrated within the joys and sorrows of our peoples; 'He who loses his life will find it'." This is the real challenge to religion - both personal religion and institutional religion. Otherwise, religion stands in the danger of being invoked in times of crisis to convey a message of peace and harmony. When the crisis eases, religion is silent and accepts the status quo or worse still legitimizes it.

"The concern of the church is not Christians but the poor; its struggle is not for itself but for the liberation of all men and women who are held captive. ...The task of the church is to champion a whole new social order."

- Samuel Rayan (India)

"The only authentic response to the one true God is not the religious one, but the human struggle on the side of the poor and the oppressed. ...Surely here we have a christology "from below" (with a vengeance!) which is almost wholly functional to liberation theology and liberation spirituality as well."

- C.J.Arevalo (Philippines)

Birth-Pangs...

(Continued from page 30)

corrupt giant Goliath falls before the onslaught of the apparently comparatively slight and young David. Power must respond to the needs of the people. It is the strength of the people that gives birth to power and gives it legitimacy and stability.

Violence

All violence cannot be equally condemned. There are different kinds of violence so that we have to distinguish between and evaluate these different kinds.

Violence is an inseparable part of life. A child is brought into the world by a violent process, in which there is shedding of blood. A surgeon wishing to heal his patient uses a knife to operate on him. A parent correcting a child may have to occasionally use some force. The functioning of a police force involving, for instance, arresting, handcuffing and imprisonment of people requires the use of force. The maintenance of armed forces for defence of the State from internal as well as external enemies involves force. Even the concept of a "just war" has been generally accepted.

Especially, at a time of decisive social change violence is inevitable. It has already been pointed out how all the great founders of religion and ideology have lived at such periods of change and how Christ himself described this process very clearly (Mt. 24. 7-8). Further, it has been pointed out how their doctrines came to birth out of direct involvement in such changes.

It is sometimes said that no good can ever come through violence. But though the Emperor Asoka waded through blood to his throne, the regime that was subsequently established is one of the best examples in history of a "righteous society". In more recent times, it must be remembered that the modern British conventions of

democracy and peaceful social organization came to birth out of a history of conflict involving "Bloody Mary", the beheading of a king, and civil war, etc.

Then there are some texts that must be considered:

"When a man hits you on the cheek, offer him the other cheek too".
(Lk. 6.29).

"Put up your sword. All who take the sword die by the sword. Do you suppose that I cannot appeal to my Father, who would at once send to my aid more than twelve legions of angels?"
(Mt. 26. 52-53).

Such texts must be considered in their context. They cannot be applied indiscriminately to all situations of conflict. The first text obviously cannot be taken to mean, for instance, that when a child is struck by a bully he should turn the other cheek or that others near by should do nothing about it. The principle of turning the other cheek points the need for the true spirit of love and humility and the readiness for sacrifice.

The second text is from St. Matthew's account of the arrest of Christ. If the accounts of the arrest in the four gospels are compared, it is obvious that the first verse of this particular text is a later interpolation. It is most likely to have been addressed to an oppressor rather than to the oppressed. As for the second verse, which implies that Christ could easily have successfully resisted arrest but chose not to do so from a superior motive of love, this is based on an idea of Christ as some sort of inexplicable wonder-worker which we cannot accept today. Christ's analysis of the situation, taking all four accounts as a whole, seems to show that resistance was not a practicable option. He had to accept what was happening in the faith that right will ultimately prevail. This was something that had to be gone through in the spirit of his predecessors in the faith, Moses and Elijah, with whom he had communed on the Mount of the Transfiguration, and had further reflected on in his agony in the garden:

"This has all happened to fulfil what the prophets wrote"
(Mt. 26.56). "Let the scriptures be fulfilled" (Mt. 14.50).

"This is the cup the Father has given me; shall I not drink it?"
(Jn. 18.11).

Finally, it must be noted that Christ's little band of disciples were, most probably, armed. Peter had to be restrained from using a sword because he had one. But, no doubt, it was not the kind of mass armed might that was capable of resisting imperial Rome. History had not matured to that point at that time! It is also worth mentioning that there is another passage in the gospels where Christ actually seems to recommend the sword!:

"It is different now ... if he has no sword, let him sell his cloak to buy one. For Scripture says "And he was counted among the outlaws", and these words, I tell you, must find fulfilment in me; indeed all that is written of me is being fulfilled!. 'Look, Lord', they said, 'we have two swords here'. 'Enough, enough!' he replied". (Lk. 22, 36-38).

This shows that interpretation in this whole matter is not easy and straight-forward, but difficult and complex.

Revolution

It is necessary to distinguish between revolutionary movements and various other forms of group uprising - insurrection, terrorism, putsch, etc. These other forms of uprising have arisen at various periods in history throughout the centuries, in protest at corrupt and oppressive regimes in power. Where they arise, as is often the case, prematurely, without sufficient development or ripening of historical circumstances, without a firm basis in sound principles and mass participation and without proper organization and discipline, they cannot be justified and will fail. Further, progress of the true revolutionary movement may thereby be impeded. But, all the same, they are not to be condemned indiscriminately

and intemperately, as is so often done in so-called respectable circles. It must be remembered that such insurrectionary or terrorist activity is almost always a reaction to injustice and oppression of the authorities and structures (of both church and State) in society, and it is resorted to in desperation because no other form of redress is available. It may even in some ways prepare the way for more solid revolutionary action later. So, it must first of all be understood. Then, while it may be necessary to adopt certain measures to control or suppress it, the utmost care must be taken not to suppress legitimate forms of organization and protest of the people. Further, it is much more important to take concrete steps to remove the causes of injustice and oppression. This, of course, will almost certainly entail drastic changes in the order of society.

Revolutionary mass upheaval based on the disciplined organization of a party, working according to scientific principles of socio-political analysis, is a very different thing. It can certainly be justified by the people and the imperatives of history. Here it must be remembered that a revolutionary movement, which aims at a socialist reconstruction of society, cannot restrict itself to constitutional or parliamentary methods alone. This is because the resistance of vested interests to legitimate social change usually assumes a violent form which may have to be met by mass revolutionary action as the only effective means of enforcing the will of the majority.

Decisions in these matters are not, of course, to be taken by theoreticians consulting text-books. They will be taken by the people as historical circumstances mature and the situation demands appropriate action.

Love

However, the utmost attempt should always be made to avoid unnecessary conflict and violence, wherever possible. It must be remembered that untold cruelties have been

committed in the name of righteousness, and just causes have been perverted by ambitious and unprincipled individuals and groups. So, always, even in the midst of violence, the deepest underlying motive of life must be the spirit of love and sacrifice. The words of Che Guevara may be recalled:

"The true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love".

One must struggle for justice because one loves. Also, through the historical changes that take place, people must evolve structures of society that enable rigorous self-criticism and mutual criticism, whereby the actions of those in authority should continually be subject to evaluation, in open dialogue with the people. So one may close with the words of Mao Tse-Tung:

"Our point of departure is to serve the people wholeheartedly, and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses. Our duty is to hold ourselves responsible to the people. Every word, every act and every policy must conform to the people's interests, and if mistakes occur, they must be corrected".

"What is the key to the correct understanding of the Word of God for our time and in our situation today?

Liberation Theology would say: Only a true commitment to a liberating praxis on behalf of our oppressed and exploited brothers and sisters will enable us to see and to experience who the God of Jesus Christ really is. The word of God is disclosed only from such a commitment. Therefore, theology, talk about God, can only start and be carried out from such a presupposition if it wants to be authentic."

John Fuellenbach, SVD

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THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES OF THE PLANTATION WORKERS

Jeffrey Abeysekera

(Christian Workers Fellowship)

Context:

The situation of the plantation workers of recent Indian origin has deteriorated since the racial violence of July 1983. In the face of fear and insecurity arising from these traumatic events, many have left as refugees either to India (especially Indian Passport holders) or to the North and the East of the Island. However with the escalation of the conflict between militants demanding Tamil Eelam and the security forces these refugees as well as earlier settlers from the hill country since 1977 have got caught in the crossfire and have innocently suffered at the hands of the security forces. Those plantation workers who live and work in the hill country are relatively safer but suffer indignities and injustices from time to time, for example when coming into the estate towns to buy provisions. The only protection they have depends on their membership in Trade Unions and the direct action and intervention of the Unions in defence of their rights as workers and as human beings. About 400,000 plantation workers continue to be "stateless" and although the All Party Conference unanimously decided to grant

citizenship to 93,000 "stateless" people, this has not yet been implemented upto date. Citizenship rights are crucially important to this badly discriminated minority group but certain Sinhalese people in the upcountry have fears that so many people will obtain the franchise. Many people among this community do not yet possess Identity Cards and at present those not in possession of Identity Cards are often harassed while travelling.

The major Trade Unions are the Ceylon Workers Congress and the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union, linked to the C.W.C. Political Wing and the United National Party (the ruling party in power). It is primarily through these political instruments that any significant changes in the life of the plantation workers is effected. The C.W.C. Political Wing lends its support to the Government although maintaining its own identity. Its President, Mr.S.Thondaman is the Minister of Rural Industrial Development and is the only member of Parliament representing the people of recent Indian origin (as the 3rd Member of Parliament for the Nuwara-Eliya, Maskeliya electorate). In order to obtain concessions the plantation workers have generally aligned themselves with Trade Unions backed by the political party in power. However of late there is a growing consciousness of how they have been deceived and deprived of their legitimate demands due to their divisions according to political and Trade Union affiliations. The highwater mark of this consciousness is seen in the General Strike of Plantation Workers held in April 1984. About 600,000 plantation workers belonging to all plantation trade unions (including significant numbers of the pro-Government Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union) defied the pressures of the Government and its anti strike propaganda and struck work for ten days. One of the demands won was equal pay for equal work for women: women's wages were put on a par with those of men. While an interim wage increase of Rs.21/= per day was obtained

for men, a realistic wage increase has yet to be decided upon by a Presidential Commission on wages which has deliberated for 14 months so far!

Theology in the Struggle for Justice

In a basically Hindu context the plantation workers obviously sense the presence of God everywhere. The influence of modern Hindu thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi is considerable among the more educated sections of this community. The pressures arising from exploitation and injustice have driven workers to make a critique of religious festivals both Hindu and Christian which stress cultic action and use meaningless symbols. In fact the religious festivals, while having some value in promoting fellowship and bringing people together, are often misused and commercialised. The marriage between religion and politics in the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi provides great inspiration to the oppressed plantation workers and his doctrine of non-violence linked to mass struggles has both a religious and cultural appeal. In fact the present campaign of Prayer Meetings for peace until a solution to the National Question is found organised by the Ceylon Workers Congress in many parts of the country has Gandhian overtones and generates the enthusiasm and participation of those of all faiths who long for an end to violence and for a lasting peace based on a just political solution. The fear and insecurity of the plantation workers is banished in the security and strength of peoples power ("Jana Sakthi").

Through its programme of workers education among plantation workers, the Christian Workers fellowship, draws on this awakened consciousness and helps forward the process of Hindu-Christian theological reflection. There is a great openness to the teachings of Jesus Christ among Hindus, especially the Gospel for the poor. In fact

there is a strong attraction to the figure of Jesus as a self-sacrificing Satyagraha - this is reflected also in Gandhi's own response to the Gospel. However the "Church" which lives and preaches this Gospel has of necessity to be a new open community which has the life style of a servant community. The alternative to the dominant community in today's Sri Lankan society must necessarily be the servant community with a new understanding of authority and the growth of collective leadership based on real solidarity, mutual love and service (Mk. 10:42-45).

Genuine service is not neutral but is inevitably bound up with the suffering inherent in conflictive situations arising from oppressive social relationships. The experience of dying and rising in the inescapable conflict with dominating power is the essence of a prophetic spirituality. It is only the powerless in society - outcasts like the plantation workers - who can articulate with their groans and tears this alternative consciousness, this prophetic -suffering spirituality. They cannot accept the present model of development in which they are victims. They would rather die to this illusion and rise to the vision of a new humanity in which Christ is all in all, uniting in Himself Greek and Jew, freeman and slave, man and woman, breaking down all walls of partition. (Galatians 3 28).

Christian Worship - Foretaste of a New Humanity

With the celebration of the Workers Mass on the 4th of May 1985 at "Tholilalar Polil" in Hatton, the May Day Workers Mass for the Plantation Areas will be 11 years old. The first such Mass was held at Labookelli Estate soon after the 1st of May in 1975, mainly in the Sinhala language and very much after the pattern of the May Day Workers Mass annually held in Colombo by the Christian Workers Fellowship on the 30th of April. In 1976 with the commencement of C.W.F. groups on certain estates in

the Hatton and Nuwara Eliya areas, the first May Day Workers Mass in the Plantation Areas in the Tamil language and using Tamil cultural forms was held on Tillyrie Estate, Dickoya. The Mass was preceded by a procession consisting of Plantation Workers from Tillyrie and other estates, a few C.W.F. members from Colombo, clergy from different churches and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Badulla, the Rt. Revd. Leo Nanayakkara. The Mass was held in the open air adjoining the Roman Catholic Church on the Estate. The event was attended by about four hundred people from Tillyrie estate and some nearby estates and generated much interest and participation. It was at this Mass that the late Bishop Leo Nanayakkara upon seeing some fathers sharing the consecrated "roti" with their infant children remarked "These people are teaching us our theology!" Thereafter similar May Day Workers Masses were held in 1977 at Westward-Ho Estate, Nuwara-Eliya, in 1978 at Castlereagh Estate Dickoya and in 1979 at Labookellie Estate near Nuwara Eliya with the strong support of the C.W.F. groups on those estates. From 1977 onwards cultural programmes began to be held after the Mass ended generating further interest and participation from the Plantation Workers. In 1980 and 1981 the May Day Workers Mass in the Plantation Areas was held at "Tholilalar Polil", the C.W.F.'s Centre in Hatton in order to make the work of the C.W.F. known to the residents of Hatton. In 1982 the Workers Mass was once more held on an estate - Small Drayton Estate Kotagala and in 1983 and 1984 the Mass was held at Bowhill Estate, Kotmale and at Tillyrie Estate, Dickoya respectively. 8th May 1982 proved to be a historic day, in that for the first and last time Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe (who first came for a Mass in the Plantations in 1977) and Bishop Leo Nanayakkara participated together in celebrating the Workers Mass at Small Drayton Estate (an event which could never happen in the normal life of the institutional Church!). While Bishop Leo left for Badulla soon after lunch, Bishop Lakshman stayed on till

6.30 p.m. to enjoy the cultural programme - dances, dramas and songs from many estates as well as from Gami Seva Sevena, Galaha. At the end of this long and eventual day Bishop Lakshman spoke to the large crowd and exhorted them to struggle to protect their human rights, relating to them the famous story of the Church Servant Juan Appu (first related by him at the September 1980 Workers Mass for Justice to the strikers held at Ratmalana).

Despite a largely Hindu context this Christian act of Worship has made an impact on the Plantation Workers due to its relevance to their aspirations and hopes and its inter-religious, open and non-sectarian character. In place of the usual sermon, dialogue sermons, "Villu Paartus" and short dramas have been held and have proved to be very popular. In one instance a "Villu Paartu" described ever so interestingly the history and origins of May Day. A feature of this Workers Mass has been a natural use of Tea with a trace of wine as one of the major elements along with the "rotiya" (The staple diet of the Plantation Workers). Tamil customs and dances like the "Kummi" and "Kavadi" have been integrated into this act of worship to make it meaningful to these people of recent Indian origin, the main social group involved in this act of worship. Besides this, the Mass and cultural programme have attracted industrial Workers, peasants, students and youth from other parts of Sri Lanka as well as trade unionists from the area to demonstrate a solidarity beyond the usual May Day slogans.

JESUS OF NAZARETH AND HUMAN LIBERATION

Paul Caspersz, S.J.

(Satyodaya - Kandy)

The incident never fails to inspire. It was probably, though not certainly, Jesus' first visit to Nazareth after he had begun his out-of-home life. Though the Jewish synagogue met three times a week, Nazareth was a small town of artisan, farmer and daily paid labouring families and so could afford only the Saturday and feast day meetings. So it was on a Saturday that Jesus entered the synagogue, the centre of the community life of the people of Nazareth.

If it was his first visit to his hometown since he had stepped out into life and won a name throughout Palestine, Jesus would have expected the invitation to speak. On previous occasions, as a boy and as a young carpenter, he had sat with the audience, listening and learning. This time his place was on the stage, fronting the audience.

The synagogue was controlled by a board of elders and locally managed by an attendant called the "hazzan" who was also porter, warden and school-teacher. There were four main parts in the synagogue service:

the profession of faith and a prayer; Bible readings, one prescribed and the other free; a commentary or a sermon; the final blessing.

When the time came for the free reading, the hazzan handed Jesus, may be at Jesus' request, the scroll of Isaias. Jesus knew his texts well, read fluently (this is, however, the only evidence we have in the Gospels that Jesus knew to read), dropped a line from Isaias 61 and inserted another from Isaias 58. What was important to him was not to interpret Isaias but to change the history of his people.

'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me;
 he has sent me to announce good news to the poor,
 to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight
 for the blind;
 to let the broken victims go free,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down to speak.

What Jesus said we do not know. Luke merely makes a summary conclusion. 'Today, in your very hearing, this text has come true'. But from the reaction of the audience and the reaction of those to whom the immediate audience related it, Jesus' exposition must have had terrific impact. The reaction ranged from great enthusiasm, pride in the power of their village boy, hero worship to doubt, hostility, attack, homicidal rage. If we know the background, we shall understand both Jesus' choice of the text and the reactions of those who heard him.

What was the background?

In the life and teaching of great human leaders and liberators like Gotama, Jesus, Francis of Assisi, Marx, Mao, there is an important and indispensable element of universalism over time and over space. But this universalism does not prescind from, and is in fact based on, the limited historical time and the definite socio-cultural context in which such persons lived and taught. Marx and Mao achieved this universalism not only by extra-ordinary sensitivity to, but also by deliberate analysis of, the human condition of men and women in their time. Gotama, Jesus and Francis achieved it by acutely sensitive perception of their social milieu: the tools of methodical social analysis of society were, however, not available to them as they were to the leaders of a later day.

The background was the hardship and suffering of the common people, heightened by the humiliating domination of their land by successive groups of exacting foreign rulers. With the economic exploitativeness of the Jewish social system and the political subjugation to the Romans the Jewish religious leaders, certainly those at the top of the hierarchy, were too intricately involved to be able to open up a path of liberation to the masses.

In the present stage of our knowledge of Jewish history, it is difficult to determine precisely the dates and the duration of the successive waves of foreign rulers on native Jewish soil. If it is difficult for us today, the determination of dates was impossible to Jews like Jesus in Jesus' time. To them it was also much less important than the preservation of memories. Transmitted orally by parents to their children and their children's children in a time during which human memory was much more retentive than it is today, these memories stored up the history and the myths of the people, gave them an identity and a culture.

These memories of Jesus certainly went back to the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids who successively and with only short periods of intervening precarious independence conquered and ruled his people. The slavery in Egypt probably began after the Hyksos rule in Egypt was overthrown by native Egyptians in the 16th century and the Seleucid domination was finally ended by the Hasidim and Hasmonean rulers in the 2nd century. Hellenic influence continued in the Hasmonean court, Numerous intrigues in the palace made the government very insecure. Finally in 63 B.C. began the era of Roman domination.

At the birth of Jesus Herod I the Great, an ally of the Romans, reigned in Palestine. He had ten wives, five of whom were important. He was a self-conceited, proud and scornful monarch, who made many exactions from his people. At his death in 4 B.C., his three sons shared his kingdom: Judea in the south went to Archelaus, Galilee in the north and Transjordan to the east went to Herod Antipas while east of the Jordan and north from the Lake of Galilee went to Philip.

Soon after Herod I's death there were frequent liberation uprisings of the people and of all these during the impressionable years of his boyhood and youth Jesus would doubtless have heard. In Jerusalem itself these uprisings were put down with great cruelty by the Roman governor of Syria, Quintilius Varus. In the Jordan valley the rebels rallied round a slave of Herod called Simon; in Judea around a former shepherd Athronges and his four brothers; in Jesus' own district of Galilee, Judas who probably later founded the Zealot movement plundered the arsenal of Herod at Sepphoris, only three miles from Nazareth, where Jesus lived. From Nazareth Jesus could see Sepphoris. Since he was neither deaf, nor blind, nor dumb, Jesus would have heard, seen and spoken about three

things. From what the Gospels tell us about his later life, it would have been impossible for Jesus not to react sensitively to so much human and national tragedy.

The foreign rulers from the time of the pre-Exodic Egyptians humiliated the upper and middle class Jews and economically exploited everyone under their domination. The burdens of slavery, taxes and forced levies fell most severely of all upon the common people.

But the common Jewish people were crushed also by their own ruling classes. These classes united in the Great Council or the Sanhedrin (Hebraized form of the Greek synedrion, "sitting together") which was the body of seventy-one persons - chief priests, elders and scribes - who met under the ruling high priest to decide religious, legal and internal Jewish civic matters that did not pertain to the Roman governor. It is important to examine the composition of the Sanhedrin.

It was made up of three aristocracies.

The first of these was the sacerdotal aristocracy. Scattered all over the country were the priests of the lower ranks, many of them Pharisees and true friends of the common people. In the Sanhedrin, however, were the priestly aristocrats who were centred in Jerusalem and were drawn mainly from four families, out of which the Roman procurator chose the high priest. They imposed several taxes on the people; the annual temple tax of two days' work, a tenth of every harvest, gifts of various kinds and on various occasions, alms, the best part of the livestock used for the temple sacrifices. They made the temple a great commercial racket.

The second was the landowning aristocracy. This was dominated by some two hundred Sadducee families, linked by marriage with the priestly aristocracy. They were

curry-favourers with the Romans just as their ancestors had been with the Greeks. They were perhaps what we today would call the comprador bourgeoisie. In religious matters they were sceptics, in civil and political life they were defenders of the status quo with which they had vested interests.

Finally in the Sanhedrin came the academic aristocracy. These were the scribes, the lawyers and the experts in the written and the oral Torah, mostly of the Pharisaic party. They were the separate ones: they looked down upon the common people. "This rabble knows nothing about the Law - they are doomed" (John 7,47). The radical group among them were the Essenes.

To summarize, the Sanhedrin or Great Council of the Jews stood for power: political, religious, economic, ideological. In the hearts of the seventy-two there was hatred and contempt for the Roman rulers but, in practice, for the sake of the selfish interests of their class, they connived with the Romans to keep the common people at bay.

That the three evangelists make it quite clear that Jesus was first condemned by the Sanhedrin (though it is Hyam Maccoby's view that it was not by the Sanhedrin at all but by the Chief Priest's Court) before, for various reasons, they took him to the Roman Court must be always recalled with shame and fear by priests and religious who belong to the class from which the Sanhedrin drew its membership. Shame, because the veils they draw before their eyes prevent them so often from giving true judgements about events and people. Fear, lest again in the name of a rule they condemn themselves to inaction or they condemn a person who outside the rule brings deliverance to a people.

In the Jerome Biblical Commentary, the writers of the chapter on the History of Israel, describing Jewish movements in Palestine during the New Testament period, content themselves with an analysis of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. This is typical of the elitist writing of history and is, incidentally, something we must avoid if we are ever to have an Asian approach to the study of Jesus. In reality, much more numerous than the three aristocracies we have considered were the common people of the land. It was with these people that Jesus lived most of his life, private or public. The upper classes, in so far as they were upper classes, Jesus did not exclude but had not much time for. To him Herod was only a little puppy dog with a loud bark. When emissaries came to him from the upper classes seeking his credentials, he advised that they ask their masters to come and see for themselves his life with the common people. At his final trial he scorned the idea that the powerful ones could have decided his fate. The rich who made their offerings in the Temple with great display he took no care to notice: he saw only the widow throwing in her little coin.

Drawing their support from the people and their leadership probably from the urban and rural petite bourgeoisie were the violent nationalists. They were fiercely divided among themselves to an extent that caused the final ruination of the Jewish state hardly more than a generation after the death of Jesus. Some of them belonged to the Zealot party. If the apostle Judas drew his surname from another group called the sicarii or the dagger-drawers, then it is very significant that Jesus chose at least two of these fire-spouting revolutionaries - Judas and Simon - for his inner core group of only twelve. It has also been held possible that Peter, James and John may also have been attached to the violent nationalist movements. At least, the last two brothers seem to have done well enough with their fish to have,

if they wished, provided their party comrades with sorely needed funds.

At the bottom of the social ladder, with no room even on the lowest rungs, were the common people, the am-haares, the people of the land. They lived both in rural and in urban areas. In the former, some owned small parcels of land, but others were the exploited tenants of the rich absentee owners or were so landless and so bereft of economic power in the feudal society of their time that today they would be called the rural proletariat. In the latter there were the artisans, small-scale producers of food, textiles, perfumes and jewellery, those who worked in the building industry (the Temple was rebuilding between 20 B.C. and 62 while Roman overlords and native aristocrats built grand mansions for themselves). Many of this class of wage workers in the towns would today be called the urban proletariat. Finally, both in the towns and in the villages of Jesus' Palestine, there were the slaves.

If a too facile and simplistic two-class analysis of society, such as is so often made by superficial Marxists, does not do justice to the complex social reality of modern societies, still less is it adequate to understand the society of Jesus' Palestine, about which our information is in any case so remote and so scanty. However, there can be no doubt that Jesus faced in his country a social situation where the great majority of people was common and poor and felt oppressed or at least deprived in a land which they held to be sacredly their own. They were, as we have seen, oppressed and deprived not only by the hated Roman conquerors but by the social system which was managed for the benefit of the wealthy and the powerful sections of their own people.

In this social situation the young and enthusiastic Jesus had to make his fundamental guiding option. It would

have been preposterous for him to have sought a place in the Sanhedrin class. But might he not have looked for a reformist role within it or at least on its fringes, keeping the system going but smoothing its roughest edges, as the Pharisees, Nicodemus and Gamaliel, sought to do? Jesus, however, was not to be content with reformism. He was a revolutionary leader of his people. He opted to be squarely with the poor, the lowly, the outcasts of the people. What he did in the Nazareth synagogue was to make his option public.

The incident in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4) and many other sayings and actions of Jesus recorded in the four Gospel accounts make it impossible for anyone to doubt the presence, and even the centrality, of a fundamental option to be squarely with the dispossessed in Jesus' life. That Scripture scholars may question the authenticity or the validity of the evangelist's own interpretative rendering of one or the other action or saying is both possible and legitimate. But our argument does not proceed from this or that text. It is built on the evidence of the accumulation of such recordings and this evidence then becomes unbreakable.

What is important is to see in the fundamental option taken by Jesus his clear awareness and his deliberate exclusion of the opposite. Jesus' decision, to take an unequivocal stand with the poor and the outcasts of society was made in a climate of conflict with those who did not grant that the practice of true religion consisted in working for the liberation of one's fellows from the structures of injustice and oppression.

The existence of the opposite, the acceptance of conflict, the assumption of the role almost of an agent provocateur is evident in the Beatitudes with its series of powerful subversive paradoxes. It is evident again in the portrayal of the Final Judgement of humanity

in Mt. 25. Jesus has come to serve, not to be served. The rich think that they do not need service, they can command it. He has come not for the just, but for sinners. Not the proud self-righteous religious leader but the lowly publican makes the sincerest prayer. Not the ostentatiously rich donor but the poor widow makes the richest offering. Mary's Magnificat is the community song of the liberated poor.

It is evident also in many of the parables which traditional spirituality and traditional novitiate and seminary training have used for other purposes such as the invitation to repentance and penance. The Father accepts and re-invests the outcast son while he seeks to make the self-centred elder brother see the inapplicability of accepted social norms of behaviour in a situation where openness to the dispossessed should be paramount. The parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep must likewise be re-evaluated in the light of Jesus' fundamental option.

That Jesus took his fundamental option with full knowledge of its consequences is proved by the daring things that Jesus did. Among them are the occasions of table-fellowship with the hated, feared and despised tax-collectors, with prostitute women (was the box of alabaster ointment a gift from her employer the previous night?) and with sinners of all kinds. By these actions Jesus knew that he was acting in defiance of the culture and the customs of respectable Jewish people. By their means he forced people to take sides between the old society with its social taboos and the new where the only law would be love. Incidentally the prayer, Give us today the bread we need, was probably taught by Jesus with undertones that this bread should be eaten in the company of the wretched of the earth.

Whether the followers of Jesus in history and in our own time have taken the position Jesus took

is a question that has to be asked and answered. More than by anyone else is this a question that has to be answered by the leaders of the Jesus community - the Bishops of Rome and Canterbury, by the other bishops, by priests, religious and lay leaders.

Jesus' fundamental option was not just a theoretical one. He had to translate it into a programme of action precisely in the areas of the oppression and exploitation most acutely felt by his people. These areas, as we have seen, were national subjugation by the Romans and economic exploitation by the prevalent Jewish social system and, embedded in the latter and legitimizing it, the falsification of religion by its official exponents.

Martin Hengel has well summarized the three options available to Jesus in face of the humiliation of subservience to Roman imperialism: armed resistance in the manner of the extreme nationalists, connivance in the manner of the priestly Sadducee aristocracy, passive endurance in the manner of the am-haares. In face of the evils of the national social system itself, the options available to Jesus were not different from those available to us in our situation in our own country today: revolutionary retaliatory violence, connivance with the oppressing forces and not bothering at all about the evils of society because religion is held to be about something else.

The greatness of Jesus is not that he excluded connivance, escapist submission or mere indifference - many other leaders in Jesus' time and ours do this - but that he transcended the way of liberation by violent resistance. He did not reject violence, he went beyond it. By precept and by action he showed that there is a more revolutionary way than violence to establish the society of love and sharing of the goods of the earth, where each would give according to one's ability and receive according to one's needs.

This was not a pacifist way. Jesus accepted the role of conflict, he even provoked it, as his famous Sabbath cures show. The conflict was between his ardent passion for interhuman justice and the vested interests of his foes in maintaining the status quo. He tore off the mask of piety from religious practices that worked against interhuman justice and kindness or which were just neutral in a situation of injustice. He called Herod a fox and knew that what he said would be taken back to Herod. He seems to have made a joke of paying taxes and probably even encouraged non-payment of taxes to the Romans.

But Jesus was not facile in dividing society into two classes: the poor who are always blameless and the rich who are always wicked. In the parable of the workers given work at different times of the working day, yet paid the same wage, Jesus seems to have been well aware that there often surfaces an upsetting and unexpected lack of solidarity among the poor: so today we have the phenomenon of workers in Germany and Britain being more intolerant of immigrant coloured class-brothers than the middle classes of their countries and international solidarity of the working class is perhaps today more distant than when Marx dreamed about it.

Jesus' dealings with the tax-collectors are particularly illuminating in this regard. They were held to be despicable and heartless traitors and quislings and exploiters of their own people. Yet Jesus had table-fellowship with the tax-collector, Matthew, and Matthew's other publican friends. What is more, he offered Matthew a place in his core group. He showed unexpected cordiality to another rich tax-collector, Zaccheus. He even asked Zaccheus for hospitality in his home. Above all, in his inner core of twelve followers, he brought Matthew the tax-collector and Simon the Zealot together. One would like to think that Jesus asked Matthew to give up his job but allowed Simon to retain membership in his party! If Jesus

welcomed the Zealots because of their just indignation at the indignities heaped upon their people by the foreign masters, he entertained publicans into his company because they were oppressed by the system which used them as oppressors.

What was the difference between Jesus and the Zealots? Basically, the Zealots, like the great Jewish prophets of old, were not revolutionaries, but reformists, in that they had confidence in the Jewish social system centred ideologically around the Law and practically around the Temple. As against the Law, Jesus propounded the freedom of the children of God. As against the Temple, Jesus worked for the worship of God in spirit and in truth and, practically, in effective love of humanity.

Like Marx, Jesus is sure that man can achieve a society free from alienation. Jesus, however, thinks far more positively than Marx about society as it should be. While Marx thinks that the way ahead to the new society lies in the use of the very tactics of the oppressor to ensure his down-fall, Jesus envisages not merely a revolutionary goal for society, but a revolutionary strategy for the attainment of the goal.

In the programmatic manifesto he issued at Nazareth, it is significant that, according to some good manuscripts, Jesus omits the last line of the Trito-Isaian text: to proclaim "a day of vengeance for our God" (Is. 61,2). Jesus was indeed capable of sarcasm, anger, rough language against the unjust, but he probably preferred to leave these passions out of his official proclamation at Nazareth. Jesus has the fullest confidence that the day of full justice will come. In fact, in some of his actions and sayings, Jesus seems to want his followers to know that with him this day of deliverance has already come. Elsewhere there is evident in the Gospels a tension between the not-yet and the already. In the period of

tension, just as at the end, there should be no room for vengeance. The followers of Jesus have therefore the assurance that though the goal cannot be reached without revolutionary fervour, revolution does not necessarily include lies, vengeance, tortures for dissidents, exile, murder and character assassinations.

No wonder the crisis deepened for Jesus more than it did for Marx. It held Jesus finally to the shameful death by crucifixion. Jesus did not die a natural death. He was killed for his views and for his revolutionary claims. Throughout his short public life he had maintained a critical stance towards society: towards the Roman rulers, towards the Council of the Jews, towards the people whom he never romanticized. His criticism shook society to its foundations. In a final desperate bid against the revolution, all classes combined against Jesus and killed him.

They hoped everything would be over and that society could continue its blunderings again. But Jesus lived on.

Soon after his death, however, two powerful tendencies arose ever since have endangered his essential message of human liberation. One was the institutionalization of his prophetic movement in a hierarchical Church. The other was the deification of his person to the detriment of his message. The two tendencies coalesced when the Church began to claim power and privilege in the name of the power and the privilege of its founder who once was Jesus of Nazareth but who is now God.

The task of Jesus' followers today is not to live in society according to a belief that Jesus of Nazareth is God. It is rather to live in society according to a faith that God is Jesus of Nazareth. They do not know God other than in Jesus of Nazareth. Then the liberation message becomes irresistible and invincible because it is the message, the central message, perhaps the only message, of Yahweh, God of Justice.

LIBERATION : PRAXIS

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"When old words die out on the tongue,
 new melodies break forth from the heart;
 and where the old tracks are lost,
 new country is revealed with its wonders."

*Rabindranath Tagore, in Gitanjali, p.37*SECTION I"THE HOPE OF LIBERATION LESSENS
 MAN'S INHUMANITY..."

(A contribution to Dialogue at Village Level)

To the Buddhist peasant of Uva-Wellassa in Sri Lanka, who for over a century bore the brunt of British colonialism from which he has never fully recovered nor ever will; to the Catholic seminary professor who after twenty years of Christian theology, ways of worship and philosophy, and who suddenly went over to a contextual seminary programme under a dynamic bishop; to two Salvatorian religious sisters who, trained in Rome, branched out, one to village health, the other into teaching theology and surveying village reality, the inner Call, heard differently but firmly, must have

been the same. The three Christians will say in faith, that it is the imperious yet reassuring call of the Risen Christ hidden among the people, especially in the countryside ("I'll go before you into Galilee"). The peasant has already said with his life that he and his embula-carrying wife felt an urge to better 'the situation of all his people, and so, felt they had to be with those 'who came to be with them' (1).

PART ONE

Remote Origins of Our Dialogue

On Mission Sunday, October 1964, during Vatican Council II, a questionnaire went round to the priests of Sri Lanka to find out 'the opportuneness of dialogue with the Buddhists (2). Questions ranged from the feasibility of a priests' seminar, to attitudes of people to dialogue. The dialogue debate, then on in the Council, was explored. There were replies extolling the relevance of dialogue. "It is not too late", or "Tomorrow may be too late", or again "No time is in-opportune", or "Not only could something be done just now, but should be done, in the spirit of Ecclesiam Suam" -- and such answers indicated its relevance.

Going beyond, the priests spoke of 'Co-existence with our non-Christian brethren', and the Report itself, out after the Bombay Eucharistic Congress (December 1964) made explicit reference to Hans Kung's statement: "Pro-existence rather than mere Co-existence", in which he suggested that religions indicate to one another the good found in the other, not merely in one's own, religion.

Further, there was the Enquiry Centre idea born of evangelism. Some even thought that 'a few more Centres would do the trick'. High praise for common study and for ecumenical efforts at beaming the message from a common platform were ideas in dialogue in those days (3). A page of encomiums came for the Dialogue centre started by the late Dr. Lynn de Silva. Thus, the Report yielded trends in dialogue, evangelism, evangelization as mere preaching, but a deeper, more global approach to dialogue was still to come.

Proximate Origins of Our Dialogue

In 1967, Pope Paul VI issued what was less-correctly termed "Development of Peoples", for it should have been called "Progress of Peoples" as its original title suggests: "Progressio Populorum". We say "less-correctly" because the 'seventies and 'eighties saw 'Development' taken as development of a few pockets, of a few nations, rather than the progress of all by the resources of all, which in fact is the transformation of society into a new society and a new humanity where exploiter and oppressor will cease to be. Progress of peoples came to an effective ending with an appeal to: "all men and women of good will" (DP,83). It was an obvious challenge that cut across barriers of christianity, ideologies, religions and cultures. It was — in an encyclical of total humanity -- an appeal to all.

Then, regional episcopal conferences were coming up, encouraged by official Rome, but frowned upon by lesser officials who saw a danger in Asia, Latin America and Africa coming into their own by virtue of the conclusions of Vatican II teaching on the Local Churches. That teaching presented Jesus to the world of today, each in its own area, an idea that had been in vogue since 1971 from the Papal Letter to Cardinal Roy on Justice (1971), Octogesima Adveniens.

The FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) made gallant efforts to discuss and plan on Dialogue, and the process is still on. There have been meetings in Taipeh (1974), Baguio (1978), Calcutta (1978), Tokyo (1979), Bangkok (1980) and Kuala Lumpur in the same year.

Yet, for our purpose, namely to show the proximate origins of our own village efforts at dialogue, we single out two of these documents. First is the Taipeh general thrust combining Dialogue with Justice:

"A local church in dialogue with its people, in so many countries in Asia means dialogue with the poor. For most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor - poor, not in human values, qualities nor in human potential, but poor in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need, to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, i.e. under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them" (Taipeh, Taiwan, FABC, Evangelism. in Modern Day Asia, n.19).

..."indigenization renders the Church truly present within the life & cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed into the Body of Christ...Asian religions are brought into living dialogue with the Gospel so that the seeds of the Word in them, may come to full flower and fruitfulness within the life of our peoples" (4).

A second document comes from the Tokyo FABC Conference indicating three Ways of Dialogue. It was not possible to join the Buddhists in prayer and Religious experience, for obvious religious and historical reasons; it was not of priority importance to start with Dialogue of

Understanding, namely to "speak clearly to one another about our beliefs and ideas, to make grow a real acceptance of each other in mutual love". Our ancestors in the Faith, especially the last-named colonizers - the British - had left the agricultural economy in Ceylon a shambles in Uva - Wellassa after the legitimate Uva rebellion of 1818 when grain was plundered, houses destroyed, areas laid waste and all men above 18 killed under governor Brownrigg's orders (5). The 'collective unconscious' memory still stores it up willy-nilly (6). And it is the Dialogue of Life that intrigued us and led us to this area of Uva, i.e. Buttala: "to join together in promoting whatever leads to unity, love and justice; whatever promotes human values, such as the strengthening of family life, and whatever relieves the afflictions of our times such as famine and hunger, natural disasters, inferior education, inadequate housing and unequal distribution of wealth. In turn, this will include organized action and reflection in faith" (Tokyo Conference, FABC, 1979).

The Presence with the People

Accordingly, we - a Buddhist young man of thirty called Somadasa and I - came to an illuk-infested (*imperata cylindrica*), two-acre block, 140 miles east of Sri Lanka's capital city of Colombo, to an area in which puranagam (traditional villages) eked out an existence side by side with new colonizations by natural groups, mostly of Sinhala Buddhist peasants who formed over 95% of the people of the area. It was on July 11th 1980, feast of St. Benedict. The two Salvatorian sisters came on the 13th of June, feast of St. Antony 1981. Within a fortnight, a Buddhist monk asked us when "we would be leaving the place, for he thought for sure that we would be soon baptizing the people". A small time business-man who detested us when we picked a few unlettered boys to teach them their own language, Sinhala,

abused us in public, saying: "Why mix up religions? You see to your own religion; we'll see to ours". In 1982, after a particularly trying drought in this Dry Zone area of Sri Lanka, when we had listed 89 farmers for drought relief in a twenty-page report on how they incurred the losses and to what extent, the monks joined us and went for redress to the state officials. A puny official - the only one available at the time - refused to pay any drought relief. The peasant farmers, the monks and the two sisters and priest turned back but by evening, the local Member of Parliament had been informed that "two religious groups had got together for redress for the farmer", and on the morrow, the Buddhist monk of Alutwela visited us and said: "We must continue to work together for the rights of man. For whom did the Buddha work? For man. What did your founder, Christ do? He lived and died for man. I was challenged yesterday by a state official because I went with you and the two Sisters for drought relief" (7). We felt "together" in our distress.

We hold, therefore that there are no two histories but only one history of man's distress and of his salvation-liberation. Christians, within the Judeo - Christian tradition believe that God, El Shaddai, the Transcendent became El Imanu (Emmanuel), the God who is With us. His power passed into people and the people became sovereign. Biblical covenantal language ever signifies: 'I am in you and you are in Me', for God says through patriarch and prophet: "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Exodus 19; Jeremiah 31:31).

Then also the ring composition of the Gospel according to Matthew, practically begins and ends with: the word 'with', "They found the child with Mary his mother" (Mt.1:23) and again: "Behold I am with you all days..." (Matt.28:19). But in the story of the anointing of Jesus' feet, the same word is used for the poor: "The

poor you will always have with you". Some people brandish this text and flee responsibility for the poor by merely repeating these lines: "Christ said they will always be with us". But the story is quite other: Judas who held the purse strings did not care for the poor. Christ the poor Man, defended Mary's action by quoting a text from the Book of Deuteronomy (15:11) which says: "The needy will never be lacking in the land. This is why I command you to open your hand to your brother, to him who is humiliated and poor in your land". The very text some take as argument against the poor is really an indictment of their reluctance to discover, and come to the aid of, the poor. It is our contention that our being present to the poor peasant here, is also our being present to the Christ who identifies himself in some secret way with the poor, as we shall see later in our paper.

We began this paper with the Lord's call, and hence we feel it opportune to say that there is a subtle temptation to pride if we feel we are the only group 'making the grade' and discerning Christ in the poor. It is easy to try to live like the poor and wag a finger at everyone else as the low grovelling lot but that would be sinful, non-liberative and so unlike the real poor. It is he who calls. His is a humble, healing presence and his call is to be admired and his will adored. He chooses whomsoever he wants to discover his varied presence: he is present in the assembly at the holy Eucharist; present in the minister, in the word proclaimed, present in the Sacrament reserved. The Priestly Formation decree, n.8 suggests that "the young cleric be taught to look for Christ in meditation, in the Eucharistic celebration, in the bishop who sends him, in his people, and in the unbeliever". If all our life is an attempt to find His traces, His presence, in faith, then it is a humble task, not one that should fill us with pride.

Our desire is, however, to be more intensely branches in the Vine, so that our presence will show forth the Jesus praxis, our spirituality will be a following of Jesus who did not baptize but was baptized in his culture and proclaimed his suffering and death as the baptism of his preference: "I have a baptism which I must still receive and how great is my distress till it is over" (Lk.12:49-50). He said so to induce us all to a baptism, an illumination or enlightenment (what the Greeks call a photismos). Is it not into such a baptism that the suffering masses of rural Asia and the city-state broken-downs have been plunged? Does not this kind of baptism bring forth a peaceful, patient, long-suffering people whose life is often short-lived by the violent banding together of financially high, powerful leaders of elitist groups, and yet whose life is lived in newness and constant hope of betterment collective and personal, arisen in their hearts.

The mystical union signified by the Vine and branches image is not laid aside when we say that Jesus is Word of God as doing-word, the Verb of God (dabar in aramaic). It is source of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, of christian saying and doing, of promise and fulfilment. Our presence must speak to all, as an eloquent presence, to point to the eternal Word, just as the presence, word and activity of the Buddhist must deepen our belief and theirs in the sanātana dhamma, the eternal dhamma word, the firm word (dharma=firmus=firm) of stability. Both groups wanting the fulfilment of an undying or a beyond-death truth (satya) is our exchange, our dialogy more than our theology (8).

Dialogical Theology or Dialogy : a Fifth View

Out of the turbulence of the mid-sixties, dialogue came forth. Much under the influence of Bonhoeffer's theology, and worried about what the expected decline

of traditional religion might do to the relevance of Christianity, Harvey Cox wrote Secular City, underlining the tirades of the prophets against mere cult, and Jesus' opposition to the priestly establishment of his own time.

Twenty years later, in 1984, the same author writes Religion in the Secular City, underscoring irrepressible religion as irrepressible. In no way rendering obsolete the earlier work, it furthers biblical faith as critical of all human religiousness. Jesus was a subverter of evil. He was and is seen as a dangerous threat to the bogus pseudo-peace, disorder and injustice that often pass for law and order, peace and national security.

The author introduces a study made by Carl Raschke (1982) (9), which outlines four ways in which students approach the truth question in religion. We need to outline the four ways here to see how Cox's own way may indicate future trends and even confirm our own:-

1. A judgment-less approach about the validity of their truth: a sympathetic study of various expressions of faith : a watching without evaluating. But Cox suggests that the question, 'is it true?' always arises as a matter of life and death.
2. Study the faith in human. It is not a question of comparing systems in dialogue, but of human beings within these systems. Here too, the question of truth is not answered, for one must ask: 'what faith will guide my choice?' if the truth-question is personally posited after the description of the religions.
3. A single tradition lies behind various expressions of faith. All religions are variants of a larger whole : a unity-behind-diversity approach. Raschke calls it the Hindu solution. Cox suggests that while it can be true, it is not demonstrably true.

4. Panikker's approach : one neither hides the differences nor trumpets the similarities but one has awe and ecstasy - a waiting and listening : a non-aggressive approach like Gandhi's ahimsa.

But perhaps it is in Raschke's suggestion and Cox's confirmation of a fifth way that truth-indicators may be found. Raschke wishes to go "beyond theology" calling it "dialogy". Cox rightly refuses mere terms and asks: "By dialogy, does he mean something close to what I am calling 'post-modern' theology?" (10).

Religion is perhaps the only institution that has an inbuilt critique of itself and of society, but history has always shown that it has notoriously lent itself almost always to a defence of the status quo, thus blunting the liberative edge it has. It is very likely that Raschke castigates as theology what he thinks to be a monolith, but if theology is theologizing or 'doing theology', and not the graven-in-stone image he seems to have, then it can also mean dialogy.

Cox repeats what we feel today to be the basic locus theologicus, namely, the Poor on the march to freedom from all evil. In a first instance, the author says: "Christians should meet their fellow human beings of the other great religious traditions, not in a detached or aggressive manner, but with a willingness to listen together to what the ancient runes say. It is important that this mutual listening take place not in some demarcated religious sphere but in the day-to-day combat and compromise of real life. The inner logic of the strictly academic approach to religious pluralism is leading it out of the academy and into the grimy world in which both fundamentalism and liberation theology are also trying to cope with the same cacophony" (11).

And soon, Cox repeats with emphasis, concluding his twentieth chapter: "the favoured format of inter-religious dialogue today is one in which the poor are systematically excluded... one in which representatives of the various religions of the world - usually scholars or ecclesiastical leaders whose positions make them more attuned to confessional rather than class differences - meet and converse about what unites or separates them. But it is the hard reality of social conflict, not the exchange of ideas that creates unity or foments division. Christians who have participated with Hindus and humanists and others in actual conflict against the powers that be do theology in a different way. They do it as part of an emerging world-wide community made up of the despised and rejected of the modern world and their allies. In this new community, as in those tiny first-century congregations of ex-slaves and day-workers in Colossae and Ephesus, where they had also begun to hear the same good news, the most intransigent of religious, traditional and cultural barriers no longer have the power to divide" (12).

Thus, if dialogue can gently and determinedly, induce both parties, both religious groups, (and in multi-religious dialogue areas) or all groups, to be prophetic at the service of the poor of God, by socio-political cooperation, then religion and dialogues would have done their obvious duty. Otherwise dialogue will become only a frustrating task of aimlessly looking at each other and not transforming the world by the richness of a transforming presence.

PART TWOGiving Witness to the Liberative Word

The Asian situation demands a clear-cut vision of a just society and of a new humanity which it purports to achieve. If development is truly de-enveloement, the removing of the envelope of bonds, then true development and liberation coincide in the release of the broken, and in transformation, not in mere reform of the oppressive and exploitative economic, social, political, cultural structures into a new society.

Then respect for human dignity becomes the creating of a society based on people's needs. If we are committed to them, involved with them and among them rather than working for them, the very process of decision-making with them will become a transforming presence. We - the Jesus community - will not be mere catalysts, for in the process of a mutual presence, the people and we will be 'doing the truth in love', and that transforms us both, when people become the architects of their own destiny.

The transforming presence of the Word in the world is the basis of our transforming presence among the people. The latter presence demands witness or confessing to its truth, To confess is to give witness to, to profess, to proclaim by life-witness; "Fiteor", or "fateor", "prophetare", being allied words. It also signifies today, prophesying, correcting, rectifying, conscientizing, denouncing of evil and announcing of good.

The 'logos' or word inherent in dialogy, is accepted by us Christians as Jesus. In our process of dialogue, we hold this principle: the more Christians present in a Buddhist milieu, learn of the Buddha praxis and of the depth-values of Buddhism's holiness (called sāra

dharma) operative among the Buddhists, the more will they come to a better understanding of their own faith in God, in Jesus, in the Jesus praxis, faith in men and women who reveal in their own way one single aim for all humanity, and that is total release from every type of bondage unto freedom.

Three Moments of Confessing

We therefore present three moments or aspects, rather than phases in our witness to the total Christ:

- i. Confessing Jesus in a Christian context
- ii. Confessing the Buddha - Dhamma in a Buddhist context
- iii. Confessing Jesus in a Buddhist context

i. Confessing Jesus in a Christian Context

We cannot proclaim Jesus today in the same old way. We must find new ways of living Him out in our life. And that will be a proclamation. The Christian context is accepted as the God-milieu, i.e. Jesus is Word of the Father, Son of the Father who opted for humankind, especially for the poor. Jesus never worked for himself but for the ongoing reign of God, the Kingdom. "The Bible and especially the New Testament presents Christ's work as one of liberation. God himself in the fulness of time sent his Incarnate Son into the world to free men from every form of slavery to which they were subject by reason of sin and of human egoism, from ignorance, destitution, hunger, oppression, hatred, injustice (Gal.4:4-5). Jesus' first preaching was to proclaim the liberation of the oppressed. Sin, the root of all injustice and oppression is in fact an egoistic turning back upon ourselves, a refusal to love others and therefore to love God himself. In continuing the prophetic mission of her founder, the Church must more forcefully preach and realize more effectively

this liberation of the poor, the outcast, worker working with others, building with others a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not enough control" (13).

Jesus made a preferential option for the poor. Crowds (the ochlos) followed him for they felt they were sheep without a shepherd. He loved them with compassion welling from his heart. The Greek verb splagchnizomai is from the noun splachnon which means intestines, bowels, entrails or heart, those inward parts from which strong emotions arise, a 'gut reaction', when Jesus was moved to pity. Those who follow Jesus must be like him, be on the side of the poor, with them, in all the circumstances of their life. This leads us to a spirit of detachment, release from the bonds of goods and consumerism; will induce groups to live as did the first Jesus community, the original church of those called by him to go and sell what they had, give to the poor and then follow him.

This One who opted for the poor to liberate them, loved them so much that he emptied himself to become this form of Eucharist, wherein he presents his body to us as sign and token of the kind of unity he wants all men to have eventually, starting from the now of life. The teaching of Jon Sobrino is relevant here for he shows that Jesus' action and preaching and prophetic option indicated a radical rupture with the synagogal type of religion. Jesus' prophetic option led to his death. So, we should take within the scope of the Eucharist, not only the how of his life and death but also the why of it. Into this why comes his comparatively early death because he stood for the human, fought for the poor. The following of Jesus (cf. Segundo Galilea) demands that we also defend what he defended, loving

and preferring what he loved and preferred. In this we risk death ourselves (14).

It is this Jesus who asked that we preach to all nations - and nations are structures of society that today spew broken-down persons, oppressed, alienated caricatures of what the Father meant his children to be, and this, especially in the Third World.

If in TW countries and elsewhere, the Synod of Justice (1971) is used for catechesis, instruction, education, prayer and reflection-action, we would have avoided the senseless controversy on Liberation theology, its allied tergiversations in high places. Why fear universal teaching:

The good news of Jesus is first of all, himself and his life as being the basis of all endeavour for the follower: "If you wish to be my disciple, you must deny yourself...if you wish to follow me, sell what you have and give the poor...he who loves his life will lose it and he who despises his life in this world will keep it unto life everlasting...go and do likewise...love one another as I have loved you...take up your cross and follow me..." - these are imperious demands and yet coming from one who is very human and very understanding of our broken selves, one who would not quench the smoking flax nor crush the bruised reed. These demands have Jesus' example or self-emptying (kenosis in Philippians 2) as their basis. And yet, herein lies the challenge: It has been done, it can be done. No one who ever faced these challenges ever found himself discouraged. Jesus lived them out first in his life, showing himself free and forgetful of Self.

In the small Groups of Christians and religious who come here, we have much sharing of this message of Jesus Poor. We take it as a part of Education for justice

in the spirit of the Synod of Justice mentioned earlier (15).

The Church's presentation of this liberating Jesus - and his Name is translatable in any language as Saviour-Redeemer-Liberator - must continue in education: "education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its social and individual manifestations. Education will also include and inculcate a truly and entirely human way of life in justice, love simplicity. Education will awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and on its values...In the developing countries, the principal aim of education is for justice, and it consists in an attempt to awaken consciences to a knowledge of the concrete situation and in a call to secure a total improvement; by these means the transformation of the world has already begun" (16).

The open-hearted Jesus-community Christian after the Council (Vat, II), will see in Jesus the narrow way, which is indeed the broad way of love for all. He will see in the Buddha the basis of the Buddhist's constant assertion: "siyalu sattvayo nidukvethva" (may all beings be happy). In it he would see a constant appeal for self-forgetfulness (anattā) in the life of the Buddha. Born of a princely, landowning family, he followed that inner urge of the higher self ('attā hi attāno nātho', self is the lord of self) to leave all things and go search for the truth; he never gave up the search, whether with his mentors Alara the Kalama or Udekka Ramaputta, or with himself, but looked to beyond. He used the Dhamma word and changed the hearts of many a hearer, helped make the bad good and the good better by his example of selflessness. The four sublime states or brahmavihāras, mettā, karunā, muditā, upekkhā are operative in Buddhism: they are loving-kindness, compassion, gladness at another's well-being, and

equanimity. Mettā or maitri is from mejjati, melting, a word so closely knit with the 'bowels of compassion', in meaning. In these as in everyone of the pansil (five precepts) and the dasapāramitā (ten perfections), there is a radical-turning away from self to the other. When Bhikkhu Kassapa of Ampitiya took a copy of the New Testament to his Buddhist dhamma class on Sunday afternoons, he did so with red-ink markings on every sentence he found helpful to understand selflessness in the christian way. When the Ven. Alutgama Dhammananda, in 1965, at the Malwatta vihara, Kandy, wanted a catholic priest to speak on: "Self-denial in the life of Christ and self-denial in the Dhammapada (of the Buddhist canon)", he too was looking for the common ground of a common urge to deny self so that others might grow.

Now, the Christian says that, to believe in Jesus is to believe that he is divine. Some have money, ambition, power, profits, prestige, self and so forth as gods, as source of meaning and strength and drive. To believe that Jesus is divine is to choose him, to make a deliberate choice of him and what he stands for as our God. By his praxis, Jesus changed the content of the word 'God'. If Jesus is our Lord and God, we must allow Him to change our image of the unimaginable, transcendent God. Jesus is the Word of God, because He reveals God to us. God does not reveal Jesus to us. God is not the word of Jesus, i.e., our ideas about God cannot cast light on the life of Jesus.

God is the acme, the supreme source of selflessness, says the Christian. In Jesus we begin to see God's plan in its most human and incarnate expression as it reveals God's criteria: his mercy, his justice, his search for the lost sheep, his deep love for the little ones, the little flock, his demands, his love.-- a "contemplative Christology" as Segundo Galilea terms it (17).

Albert Nolan, in Jesus Before Christianity holds that "Our God does not want to be served but to serve; does not want to be given the highest possible rank in society, but wants the lowest place and be without any rank and status; he wants to be recognized in the sufferings of the poor and the weak; he is not detached or indifferent but committed to the liberation of all mankind, his beloved children. If this is a true picture of God, then Jesus is divine. Then God is more truly human, more thoroughly humane than any other human being. He is what Schillebeeckx has called a Deus humanissimus" (18).

For the man of faith, therefore, who begins reading the signs of the times as Jesus read them and answered with his life and death, the terminology of static natures or metaphysical realities may seem necessary, but may take second place and who can blame him, for christianity is not meant to be a following of Jesus only by academe. It is a real-life matter. Such a man of God, given faith, will say that Jesus' divinity is not an addition to his humanity. In Jesus, the human and the divine have been so united, that Jesus' divinity is the transcendent depths of his humanity. Jesus was immeasurably more human than other men and that is what we value when we say he is divine, when he is acknowledged as our Lord and God (19).

He claimed to be the truth. In him the truth became flesh. He felt to be a being at complete harmony with God. Feeling and thinking with the mind and heart of God, he had no need to rely on any authority outside his own rich experience. He showed this all the way, with his life, compassion, Passion-death-Resurrection.

ii. Confessing the Buddha - Dhamma in a Buddhist Context

If we confess to a Total Christ, open on the reality of today's world through the Jesus community which he formed, then the very following of Jesus becomes a Jesus praxis.

It would inevitably lead us to "give honour to whom it is due", and to understand that renown, honour and peace come to all who do good" (Rom.2:10). We could then proclaim to the world that Muhammad, the Buddha, do not belong exclusively to those denominations or ways of life, but to the whole world and to all of mankind.

We in our village felt we had to give witness to the selflessness of the Buddha, his renunciation, his praxis of detachment, his rejection of lobha, dosa, moha, the triple concupiscence, his samānatma tā (sense of equality and justice).

The Buddha had followers from every walk of life, for they all liked the sense of brotherhood and equality. It is still the story of those who, due to Dr. Ambedkar, have taken to the equalizing doctrines of the Buddha, from among the harijans ("those born of God") who long for brotherhood among men.

Without over attempting to replace what or whom he "denied", if he did, the Buddha did not refer any glory to himself in his person, but only to the moment of the Enlightenment or its excellence. The manifest intent was: better to be enlightened than not to be, or in later language, it is better to be a bodhisattva (one who gives one's life for others) than not to be. There were and have been other Buddhas for other ages, but this Buddha is for this age. This is why the Enlightened One or the self-realized One is regarded as a refuge (a sarana). Even if mother or father were to

disregard anyone, the Buddhu-amme (Buddha as mother) or the Buddhu-piye (Buddha as father) will be near him or her -- is an oft-heard remark in the village.

Involving the people in decision-making, a week after arrival here, we invited the people to see if it were opportune to start a clinic day every month. A lengthy discussion on the feasibility and mode of it, as a monthly exercise, preceded and decision followed: "plan it as you like; we will provide two nurses to be trained. You consulted us for permission. Go ahead also with our blessing." On the third monthly Clinic day, October '80, D. Karunapala, a youth leader uttered these words at a pililandara (causerie): "You always induce us to go to bana preaching in the temple. The monk's preaching of the dhamma-word should form our life. You always say: "vairayen, vairaya no sansindeth" (Hatred is never appeased by hatred but by love alone: Dhammapada), but, tell me what is the real meaning of 'Buddhuvanava' (becoming a Buddha). I think it is to do what you are doing here: to see to the sick and distressed. Even the sick man is a Buddha if he leads you to live the Dhamma. If you help him to be cured, you too can become a Buddha. Why should I go to the temple and listen to bana. Religion cannot be relegated to the temple, nor life to ritual". A useful, healthy discussion ensued. Hence, our making available some religious space for getting to know the Buddha and Buddha praxis more deeply, made the Dhamma more firm (dharma) in the hearts of people.

Confessing the Buddha in a Buddhist context may also mean confessing to the truth of righteousness by living the dhamma: "He who sees dhamma sees me", said the Buddha. The monks often repeat when they hear anyone using a Buddhist text to induce someone to lead a good life: "bana danna ekkena ta vandinna ona" (one must venerate anyone who knows to preach the dhamma), and

that is because dhamma is a saving word: etena saccena suvatthi hotu, as terminate some gāthās (verses) of suttas (sermons): "by this truth may there be salvation".

Vesak festivals: there is a triple festival of the Buddha celebrated on the full moon day of Vesak (May), viz., the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment, and Passing-Away (Mahaparinibbāna). Following the bak mahe [bhagyavantha masa or the happy month (April)], which is the month of the paddy harvest, comes the month dedicated to pious actions and devotions towards the Buddha. It is the month which comes after the April renewal of the New Year, accompanied by reflection and serene joy.

Having had the Sevaka Sevana Ministries' school experience of Bandarawela in the hill country, with its annual Vesak festival celebrated in the Town Hall, we started in the village here a Vesak festival in 1981, attended by the chief monk and over five-hundred villagers. There were dances in honour of the Buddha, there were speeches in what is called a pratipatti pūja (offering and sharing of principles), a talk was given on "Today's preaching for Today", which outlined the five Buddhist precepts: to refrain from killing; from taking what is not given; from unlawful sex relationships; from lying; from taking intoxicating drinks. The monk, Ven. Kotaneluwe Upatissa of Happoruwa looked at the christian speaker who asked that a wider scope be given to the five precepts.

"If some nations kill what they call the lower strata of society; if we violate human rights for food, clothing, shelter, justice, then we violate the first precept."

"If we keep up GNP at the expense of other countries; if we pay poor prices for raw materials and pay

low wages, very low wages in Third World countries and thus rob workers of their means of sustenance, it is colossal robbery. It is against the second precept. Then we extol things, objects with tanhā (avarice) and reject persons and relationships (metta), and that is not righteous."

"If kāma is taken as an exclusive, erotic love isolated from integral love, sex promiscuity will make us treat persons as objects and not as subjects. The country which started the Siyam-nikaya in Sri Lanka, now has 3 lakhs of prostitutes."

"One nation, the USA, with 6% of the world's population uses up over 40% of the world's wealth, wastes is the right word. More than a robbery, it is a lie, the doing of falsehood in hatred. It is the living out of a lie."

"The fifth precept is meant to prevent the weakening of the will and of responsibility. It came up hundred years after the Nibbana of the Buddha, and must take within its scope today, the weakening of will through drugs and drink" (20).

When the speaker had finished, the monk replied: "Let me say that this catholic priest expounded the dhamma well, but one thing is wanting I must say, and that is that he should have been a Buddhist. I also exhort you to update Buddhist doctrine, to reflect on it and live it today in its widest scope..."

For Vesak 1982, a troupe of Buddhist dancing girls danced, trained by a Buddhist dancer and the Buddhist choir we formed sang carols re-written with Buddhist help on the sāra dharma which could be compared with the Kingdom values, as we have said before. Justice, sharing, brotherhood, kindness, the four brahmavihāras

were all put into song(21) and it delighted the people of this 3rd century BC town of Buttala (Guttahalaka). One carol particularly, asked the Buddha to come down and see how his doctrine had been turned upside down by some faithful turned faithless but that really they and we would like to see it turned downside up (22). The Waguruwela temple chief, Ven. Alutwela Sumanasiri practically wrested the microphone from the hand of the catholic priest and announced a rare word:

"I normally do not leave the temple open after 7.00 p.m. It is now 11.00 p.m. and I keep up here with my people to greet this combined christian-buddhist group of our village Buddhist girls and a priest and two sisters who are in a way, Buddhist-Christians, Buddhist by their culture and truly Christian by belief and conduct. They have a large heart to be able to honour the Buddha as a great Asian teacher. I now regret having harassed him at the start saying that he had come to baptize. Now I know that is not his idea. You must venerate one who knows bana, the dhamma. So, now I tell you, be free to come here or to go there to learn the dhamma. It is the same. He too can guide you."

We helped him to plan and distribute infant-food to his temple-area because of alleged malpractices in official distribution. We then collaborated with him, and still do, on many counts. He had come full circle from suspicion to sympathy and understood our transforming presence.

On Vesak day, 1983, the song-dance troupe was given greater welcome. The people had come to know us more deeply. Muttu Banda (A.M. Muttubanda) one of the best farmers of the area came quietly on the morrow and said: "I reflected on every word they sang; followed every gesture. I live humbly, with trouble to no one. Once

in a way, unthinkingly I say some harsh word, but I'm sorry. If I die now I will get nibbana. I examined my life in relation to the message of those songs. I am happy". A week later, Madduma Banda, the man with the slight hunch, said: "Please do not leave us. Remain here. You will never realise how much the people feel uplifted and glad that you like them and their faith. The morals of our group of people have been deepened by the presence of your group. People are the better for it, and I must tell you that."

It was easy then, in the Vesak of 1984, to have an exhibition of posters on the Buddha's life and renunciation, and on the Dhammapada, organized by us and worked out by the village children.

Unthinking British administrators once tried to kill the spirit of Buddhism. Perhaps the 'collective unconscious' had regarded this as being a "powdering of the very image of the Buddha" reducing it to nought. A month after our arrival, a small boy it appears, had told two farmers of a further village that we powdered an image and put it under the rug to get people to walk over it. Which was entirely untrue. Imagine the surprise of the people of Garandibakina, Happoruwa, Waguruwela and Alutwela when four beautiful images of the Buddha were donated by us to the temples, and their dāyaka sābhas (councils), images brought from the place of the Buddha's first sermon in Varanasi, the Chaukandi stupa commemorating it. The monks and the people felt happy.

Such dialogue is not a question of vogue, fashionableness or expediency. It is born of eminent need and human brotherhood: to assert that religion is better than irreligion and that humanity's widest scope must take in the cultural and religious no less than the social and political into account in the integral life of man, of men and women, now.

iii. Confessing Jesus in a Buddhist Context

We saw how the contemporary Jesus must be shown forth by today's Jesus community as witness to Jesus. We saw how good it is to give witness to the Truth in a Buddhist context, drawing principles and lines of action from Buddhism. There seems really no need for a third, because embryonically the open-Jesus message and universal appeal is manifest in the first and second moments already. In other words, if we share our faith in the contemporary Jesus, with all Christians, we will surely acknowledge the Buddha's role in liberation. And doing both these we will manifest the true Jesus to the world.

Montcheuil is supposed to have said that: "no one is a proper missionary who having gone to a people, does not see that the Jesus spirit, the saving spirit of love has been there at work already before him". That is the spirit of openness and kindness, and self-sacrifice best understood by the faithful Christian as much as by the faithful Buddhist.

"I was hungry and you gave me to eat", said Jesus. "I was thirsty and you gave me to drink", or again: "I was a stranger and you took me in". So says Christian spirituality drawing its lines from the Gospel according to Matthew. Going into the village of Illuklanda off Monaragala in 1976 for a survey, we saw a poor man who built a makeshift house and at the end of the day, made a shelf of simple planks, placing thereon, a pot of water (waterpot for merit: or pin thaliya) so that the "poor traveller might slake his thirst". We imitated him here in our hut too, since our first day in this place. Then again, the daily dāna (midday offering of a meal as alms) and the annual dansela (food-gift meal hall for Vesak) are signs of giving the other to eat and thus satisfying hunger, much as the pindapātha -

the monk's begging bowl - could be sign of a farming people's prosperity or penury, according as the food is higher or lower than the 'equator' of the bowl. Then too, the ambalama, the wayfarers' inn) was the Buddhist way of saying that he took in the traveller and the stranger. Names like Ambalantota, Ambalama, Ambalangoda in Sri Lanka are quite self-explanatory as wayside inns to welcome the stranger of yore.

Word hidden in the world, Jesus speaks in different ways and presences. But, the earliest "presence" of Christ, through a baptized group of British invaders was harmful; the fear remains even if wounds are healed. We will have to let it be proven that ours is not a harmful presence but a presence for the good of the people.

Furthermore, Jesus did not invent the cross. One day, I had forgotten to wear my cross-badge and Ran Banda, a small lad said he would run into the house and get it before I started on my journey. To which the son of a mason replied: "There is really no need to rush to get that cross, because the cross is a sign of sorrow. We know it already. It is a 'haras kepima', an opposition to my will. I wish to do something and I'm called to do something else. See, every door has a lintel and two doorposts. Yesterday my father bought a wire mesh, and it has hundreds of crosses. That is why Jesus took a cross as a sign of his life". This incident took place in September 1980, when our hut was still a building. The cross was a sign of contradiction, of juncture, of opposites, as universal as ever. Jesus accepted it as a political instrument of torture under the imperialist government of Rome. The Cross has never been the same again for a Christian, whether he hangs it round his neck or is stretched on it as on rack of torture both for himself and his fellow-countrymen. St. Paul can still go on saying: "I preach Christ and Christ crucified", and we feel he would be happy to see the cross emerging

from the so-called uninitiated so far away from the Greek wisdom that failed to grasp the folly of the Cross.

In March '81, a sāṅghikadāna (almsgiving to the Sangha or monkhood) was given to six monks of the area. It had not occurred to us that this might have been the first time. At the bana-preaching following the meal, the chief monk announced: "This could well be the first time that a dana has been given to Buddhist monks in a Christian place. It is historic action. I ask Father to come to the temple hall and teach Christianity to our teachers and relate it to other religions." A letter corroborated the invitation the next day.

Or take the Buddhist pilgrimage organised together with the farmers at their request in March 1982, to the ruined cities, to Anuradhapura and its eight holy places. The 48, farmers and their wives and children had visited the famed Polonnaruva Gal Vihara - which had fascinated the Trappist Thomas Merton - and seen the Standing, Seated and Recumbent Buddha. What was their surprise on quietly entering a room to see an enormous, agonizing Christ. In the semi-darkness of the chapel - for it was the community chapel they had entered - the following dialogue took place:

Woman one: ...and who is this? I feel sorry for him.
(Ane mata dukkhai)

Woman two: "You see, this is their Christ, their God".
(Devio)

Woman three: "Yes he also gave his life for others."

One: "Yes, it's just like the Buddha. He also cut himself in pieces as the Jataka story says."

Woman two: "Yes, but that's only a story. It didn't happen".

Woman one: "That may be, but I'm very sorry about this man, Christ. Why did he die such a violent death?"

The priest who overheard it was about to leave the chapel, when they asked him: "Now tell us the whole story of his death". And they, who were looking for real freedom, listened, knowing full well that speaker and listeners had to be converted to the Truth of selflessness and sharing, justice and peace.

What Do They Think About All This : Is Jesus Shown Forth Here?

Wherever we are, we are the Jesus community and must act and express ourselves the way Jesus wants to do, for Jesus and the Jesus community have to be one, in all that is not sin. If then, the Jesus community has the mind of Christ and acts like Him and in Him, then those who see the Jesus Community will somehow discover the Jesus praxis and be drawn to the living of Truth in mettā, or a doing of the truth in love.

On August 25th '84, Piyatilleke, a young peasant boy said in conversation: "some say that Muslims by religious rule, help only Muslims, but here, I see that your rules allow help to be given to Buddhists. As Christians, you do not pretend riches but live poorly and you live united with us. You also educate our Buddhist children and drop-outs, without asking anything in return. That is "loku pinak" (a meritorious act)". His companion Ratnayake added: "You live like us and close to us without exploiting us ("sura kemen thorava"). You are friendly and want our true good ("sebe yahapatha"). You are religious ("pevidi") and observe it with kindness, prayer, ritual. Then also you honour the Buddha whom we venerate as our teacher and master." To which Gunapala added: "Whatever you do, you do well and fully. You do good. In that way, you help the country. Yours is a good life without trouble to anyone. Some are good to their own people; you are good to all. I like that, and that is why I come here."

A youth leader said he likes to write down in his own tongue what "a lot he learnt from us". We place it here, in toto:

"I will accept Jesus as founder of a noble religion, one who showed a sincere love and affection for people ('janathava'). He had no 'high' and 'low' but loved all as equals, and equally lovable. His life shows this admirably. Owing to this I cannot empty him out of my mind. As for other religious leaders and founders, I revere them."

"Because the Church truly lays claim to much wealth and property, she cannot change the existing unjust system. It is difficult to think she will. Even though some, or even many, within its ranks are doing something for the true progress of human society, yet because the decision of many more is victorious, truth is sent underground and untruth seems to advance. But it is very clear that the Suba Seth Gedara group (your house and team) is untiring in its efforts to see that truth will win and that people will surely better themselves."

"Perhaps more than 99% Buddhists are found in this area, and for about five years, this little Church-group has honoured our traditional and time-honoured customs and culture, and large numbers in this village area have already accepted the quiet effective good done by this group. We also like the friendly openness with which you work with our people."

"At the start, a few young people were watching you carefully: "how will you act towards us? 'Did you come to turn us to your ways somehow?' or 'were you an international spy group or spy ring to eventually sell out our village?' - were

questions which harassed us young people. But we went beyond mere observing and worked with you in your humble efforts as you worked with our people. There we discovered the true face of what you call 'sabhava', the Church."

"I now see after all these years and for the last year especially, that this little christian group - all of you - have understood our sorrow, our plight ('dukvedanā') and are really very loving and compassionate towards our people, especially the poor. Despite objections of a few who dislike the poor, the work of the three of you has gone on. It is a valuable service: to rescue and teach the drop-outs, to supply for what is wanting in the school schemata as regards certain subjects, to help adults in non-formal education, in short, to give us a hand: by assuring continuity of a reasonable distribution of infant food (triposha) from the government, by helping in a clinic day programme, seeing to Primary Health care with a team of barefoot nurses drawn from our own village, and now working with a wider field of 14 villages or so, of this area; by helping self-sufficiency in agricultural inputs by training ten farmers to do research and have technical advice on local fertilizer (bio-fertilizer) according to traditional methods; thus showing you want our culture to advance, and so you honour our happy past. We also have had, due to you, training in cultural and dance items for the less - skilled but eager, and we have had slide-shows which really have helped us live. You helped us with a library of 400 books and now, a 2000 coconut seedling scheme. It is for the poor. All this proves the true meaning of Suba Seth Gedara, the name of your house "Good wishes' house". You wish us well and want our true good. There is a new awakening among us, a renewal."

"Were anyone to ask me, I could say: 'we know them as Christians, as a Christian group by the name of Jesus they possess and profess. But they have not tried to foist their religion or religious beliefs on us'. Of course, to a Buddhist Community, this presence of yours is a threat, a menace -- some people may imagine. They are few who think so. Why do they think so and why are they disturbed?' Although this small Christian group does not parade its beliefs or have public cult, yet there is a very large crowd of people who like them and who realize the value of their service'... I can say this to those who ask me. So, if anyone tries it, let them know that the villagers cannot be torn apart from this group. A very large number of young people, boys and girls and little children, honour and revere the Suba Seth Gedara and Susith Bavana group and accept them."

"In former times, the Christian religion was preached and proclaimed with guns and bayonets; many subtle methods were used, but this small Christian group, by helping the people in a real spirit of service has sunk deep into the hearts of the people. Their presence has been accepted as upbuilding. It is a peaceful living together and is a great support for peace and reconciliation."

"The example of this Christian group will never be forgotten by the growing ones of the village. To the Christian churches at large and to other religions, this is an immense example and a challenge. If, in this way, and with this background, every village could have such a course of action, a new light will dawn. Of this I am certain. Only then, will village peace spread throughout the land. Then an intelligent, wise and exemplary people will

arise in our country. The people will have a consoling, happy life."

"In the process of changing structures, this kind of activity might be termed 'reformist' by some, and yet what do we do with the sick, those who are bedridden, the destitute and illiterate and the weak? How shall we take them along with us in the onward march of the country? How can they go if they are not helped?"

"This small Christian group works in such a situation, when other religious groups may be collecting money ("mudal garagenima":literally, 'raking in the shekels' :Ed.), when some are locked in a competitive cut-throat struggle. What the masses choose and the people opt for, is right. That is the people's choice. This group is their choice. Let those who will, decry the choice or hurl insults. Truth will prevail. If their decisions are right, people will stand by this group. Their example will be the people's mainstay. It will be impossible to separate the people from such a group. Those who have a real love and show forth real love for the people, will never, ever leave the people."

"I say this to the group: "Be with us and act with us in the future too. May you show the way. We wish you courage, strength and determination" (23).

A young peasant farmer, by thus wishing courage to a group to go ahead in collaboration, is honouring the dignity of men and women. A deep chord may have been struck in relationships that spell holiness, in a spirituality that would take in the economic, social, political, cultural, and religious aspects of the human. Do not the Christian humanism and the Buddhist humanism point towards the total salvation or liberation of man from sin and all evil?

PART THREELIBERATION OF THE HUMAN FROM KLESAS (STAIN)All Reality : Cosmos and Man, World and Nature are Summed Up in the Word

Some time in 1965, Horst Symanowski, a social worker of Berlin, said: "Today's question is 'How can I find a gracious neighbour. We no longer ask the question: 'How can I find a gracious God', or we label it antiquated. A different question haunts us today: How can I find a gracious neighbour? How can we still live at peace with one another'" (24).

God is not the first known. This is part of the depth humility, the magnanimity of God. Even in His Word made flesh, or enfleshed (as Rahner would say), the Godhead is hidden. God sent his Word into the world which he loved so much as to bring it into existence in Verbo, in the Word, with Word as model and exemplar. Protology then, is based on the word; so is eschatology, the last reality, for Consummation will also be in the Word. In between, the ongoing process of the Kingdom or reign of God is also under the guidance of the Word Incarnate. It comforts the Christian in his faith to realize that all religious aspirations and all history of past and present, and prognostique for the future is a d eroulement of the Word and that all of reality is contained in the Word (25).

This Word is also word of protest: pro-testis (witness on behalf of...) and of prophetism (to speak on behalf of the Truth) correcting deviations, judging malpractices. Judaism was a protest religion against the evil of oppression in rich "Egypt". Mahavihara, founder of Jainism and the Buddha, founder of Buddhism

both protested against (it was a protest for) wrong attitudes, of selfishness in the Hinduism of their day. Islam became a prophetic religion outside Israel defending the Word of God (Kalima) as also defending the orphan and the widow, for human reality is born of Allah's word: "Be and it is" (kunfa yakunu). Today too, Islam stands at the gate of the Third World in vehement protest against evil (26).

What we see and know on the world level today and especially on an Asian level (not to say Third World level) is the human being's inhumanity to his fellow humans. In such a situation the Word in the world must be a corrective, reconciling, uniting word of truth which liberates. Why should the Church or the local Jesus community come and introduce the self-emptying Christ as if he were self-aggrandising, accumulating, spreading the leaven all over the dough and making the food salty rather than salted? Why make the incognito Christ cognito as the Son of God, parading Him as Son of God rather than Son of Man before they tested him as a man among men?

It must however be said that Buddhism is a soteriology, for it has a thrust of moksha, vimukti (from ming-muncati) which means liberation or release. Aloysius Pieris asserts that "Soteriology is the foundation of theology" and that "the universally valid starting point or basic of inter-religious collaboration is Liberation rather than God" (27).

Nor should anyone write off Buddhism arrogantly by saying that it is atheistic. Let's hear their case. There is a Transcendent impersonal Absolute in Buddhism, termed Nibbana. But just as it is distasteful for the Muslim to hear that God is 'Father', and that, due to legitimate historical reasons of his own, so too it is unpleasant for the Buddhist to hear that the Transcendent

impersonal Absolute is "three persons" - because 'person' for him is a highly corruptible, disintegrating thing as 'puggala', individual. He hardly links up 'person' with the akālika buddhi (timeless intelligence) or the 'amatā sacca' (truth that is beyond death). He feels that we say that the Transcendent is a threefold corruptible and terminable. Besides, the English and Anglosaxon "Gott" or "God", although translated in the Sinhala liturgy as Devātīdēva (Deum de Deo, God of God), comes up against the same title given to the Buddha as devātīdevā, the one who has purified himself by his light (deva or div, or dev) carrying it to perfection, for he took eighteen thousand eons to purify himself or enlighten himself and thus went beyond all devas (gods) who can fall back from goodness and purity.

Dr. Gunapala Dharmasiri, speaking on the goal of morality, once said:

"as forms of ethical cultures, Buddhism agrees with Christianity. As God is all good, it is necessary to perfect oneself morally in order to reach union with him. The Christian who thus becomes perfect morally, invariably attains Nibbana. Similarly, the Buddhist who attains moral perfection, attains union with God"(28). Likewise, at a seminar held at Pilimatalawa, Kandy in 1977, Dr. Lily de Silva ended with: "Now I know. It is not conversion, not converting me or my fellow Buddhists that you are seeking. It is in seeing and appreciating my values, our Buddhist values, our spirituality, our efforts at peace, sharing, justice, what you call Kingdom values. If you get the Kingdom and I am allowed to set my goal as the final peace of Nibbana, then you are not despairing about my future. Then I am glad. We can live together, we can get to know and have metta for each other (29).

Buddhism thus focuses attention on man. Makhali Gosala had held that samsāra suddhi (salvation through gamanena or wayfaring through rebirths) would suffice for man's salvation-liberation. The Buddha likened him to a fisherman casting his net at the mouth of a river for the destruction of many fish" (An.1.33) (30). Rejecting him, the Buddha held attakāro (free will) rather than akiriyavāda which is more akin to the popular use of karma as fate or non-use of will. Human initiative, enterprise, endeavour, courage, perseverance, human instrumentality were thus upheld by the Buddha. Buddhism thus extols man's humanness and greatness of free will, a point which amazed Vladimir Soloviev "that in a doctrine of no-self, so much stress is paid to the human" (31).

If the Buddhists are in touch with the Jesus community and if by his favour, the community presents the Human face of Jesus, then by its mediation the Buddhists are in touch with Jesus. They will follow Jesus 'from afar' doing what he wants and what he did. They will be followers of Jesus and the Jesus praxis without even knowing it (32). Vesak light or the Light of Asia, of Sir Edwin Arnold's poem of that name, on the Buddha can never be against Christmas or Easter light. They will be touched by the Buddha, their immediate teacher, whose aryastangika magga they follow - the eightfold path. It is a human way and a righteous way, for 'Man is the way for the Church' said Pope John Paul II in his first encyclical on the Redeemer of Man. No one who knows both the righteous eightfold Path and the New Testament can fail to echo the words of John: "He who does right is righteous as he is righteous" (1 Jn.3:7)... "everyone who does right is born of him" (1 Jn.2:29). The words used are dikaiosune, dikaïos, justice, quite redolent of the sammā (right) in the eightfold Path: right speech, right action, right (sila); right effort, right mindfulness, right concen-

tration (samadhi); and right understanding, right thought (prajna). This is the only way to remove suffering, says the Buddha, for it is a path of righteousness.

The Word in the world expresses itself as bana, the corrective word of morality which when lived to the full is capable of bringing men and women to the haven of peace through righteousness which is identical with the biblical Peace through justice, so relevant even today. In Jesus, the Word of God showed us not only of communication between God and men-women, but also as the logos or the mind of God. We know God's will and mind by looking at the work of Jesus of Nazareth: he who fed the hungry, healed the sick, comforted the sad and lonely, preached the truth, who was a friend of outcasts and sinners, and who 'stuck out his neck' for mankind, and man's rights.

Inhumanness in Asia

The Churches' credibility is at stake in Asia today. How long will Asia be made to say that it likes Jesus but would withdraw from Christianity? We know what could well come from within man: goodness, kindness, sympathy, compassion the saradharma, but what we see is quite other.

The Word is in the world. So is Asia. And has the word nothing to say to an Asia that is slowly being crucified on the rack of pain? This nailing and crucifixion are carried out right into the villages of rural Asia - pagans (from pagus, village) and paysans (French for peasant) being gaily mixed in favour of the semanticists and anthropologists, and the shopping-complex, supermarket, agribusiness cartel, law of the sea are all turned against the poor.

How can quiet, peaceful Asia, cradle of many religions of the world live peacefully when she is told:

"Let Asians fight Asians"(33), and when her people are decimated by indiscriminate family planning, where the quantity of the poor in the world is reduced so that the standard of life of the white western world may be raised - a terrible indictment on Christianity which should have shown the Jesus praxis of opting for life and having it more abundantly. More than that while larger nations are banding together as USA or EEC, at the other end of scale we see small countries cut up in a more vicious neo-colonialism of the principle of 'divide and rule' : once Vietnam was cut up into north and south, Korea still divided into north and south, majestic India now cut up into Pakistan and Bangladesh and foreign backers, for their own ends adoring the plan of a 'Khalistan' and 'Tamilnadu', while Peace prizes reach some, others get only the bullet, depending on whether remote causes of exploitation and oppression are left aside or raked up.

Then again, while most colonizers condescended to grant flag-independence and pull away but apparently, some returned in a more voracious yet subtle manner to deplete villages through the transnational corporations, to commandeer large tracts of land in the name of benign development projects (whose development, really?), with trees of great girth and value - satinwood, teak, ironwood, whole forests of them raped; wantonly felled with razor-edge machines, then heaped up and burnt with the flames of a people's aspirations; with birds' nests, generations of birds lopped off, with beehives and honey - so needed for the poor - wrecked for ever; with deer, sambhur, elephant lunged at and killed, the prime resources of poor countries, the jungle habitats gone for ever in the name of a nebulous development that spells bondage.

And the irony of it is in a possible desertification: the operation of destruction in one area

known to us, has left dry seven once gurgling streams which first drew the MNCs to a particular area. Today the streams are dry because of the clearing. The Buddhist peasants have no Rutilio Grande or Oscar Romero to fight for them but only a few Buddhist monks and some of their own farmers. The whole process brings the institutional religions to disrepute and results in the sullen silencing of the people rendered voiceless because landless but a hidden power, hopeful and renewed all the while, rests with them.

Does the Jesus community in the world show anxiety that the developing countries have fallen into a debt trap engineered by the big blocs of the world? Hasn't the World Bank admitted that it cannot reach the Third World's poorest people?

Pascal's words are still verified: "Jesus is in agony till the end of time. We must not sleep till then". This agony (struggle) well describes the tragedy of rural Asia. Jesus suffers in the suffering poor. Everytime we hear of the failure of an UNCTAD, Jesus suffers in the poor; their hopes raised high and dashed low when proper prices for raw materials are not paid, low salaries given, buffer stocks not raised, when pesticides rejected in other countries are dumped in the poorer and more voiceless ones, when poisonous inputs are so easily available to the illiterate that they die an early death(34). In ruralia Jesus suffers each time the poor man's chena is sold off or grabbed, when the aforementioned multinational companies hold sway; when rain holds off or a flood comes at the wrong time, sometimes with neighbouring seas disturbed with submarine nuclear tests, Jesus suffers in the poor man. After a hard day's work, he sits up all night in the pela (watch-hut made of poles and sticks) listening to marauding wild boar and elephant. Sleepless nights follow as he goes about

wanting to feed his wife and children, till the harvest comes and indebtedness stares him in the face. Strong market forces are pitted against him and his soul is "sorrowful even unto death" (mata marena tharam dukkhai). "All sufferers in history appear as special servants of Jesus, the Suffering Servant". In them, there is a deeper and profound presence of Christ", says Leonardo Boff.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' suffering among the people is the Passion. It needed a courageous man to tell the world by his praxis that "profound religion leads to political commitment and in a country such as ours where injustice reigns, conflict is inevitable. When a dictatorship seriously threatens human rights and the common good of the nation, when they become insupportable and close themselves to all channels of dialogue, understanding and rationality, then the church speaks of the legitimate right to insurrectional violence" - says El Salvador's late Archbishop Romero, who died defending the Word and his peasants against a repressive military regime. It is such religious, faithful forthrightness that is Prophecy.

This is the Jesus who was accused of being a political man, disturbing the false peace of Israel under imperialist Rome, for, one of the charges against him was that he forbade the paying of tribute to Caesar, when the real praise should have been that he upheld the "things that are of God" - namely what all his bystanders must surely have known: 'the land, the resources and the people', Yahweh's own possession which through the Covenant had passed to the people.

We situate our conclusion under six aspects of change:

Biblically: "Dharmayano" or the Dhamma word personified is the new term used in the Sinhala Bible. The dharma, stable norm of all life is the still point in the turning world of samsāra. The dharma is also the norm of relational holiness: "Be holy as I am holy" (Leviticus, ch.17-26). If the Spirit blows where he will, he can inspire truths in other moral codes. If we distinguish static truths (like two and two equals four) and operative truths, those that men and women live by, we can see that the Spirit who can never contradict himself, has been in the scriptures of many a code.

Theologically: To emphasise the need for presenting the deeply human side of Christ in no way means the denial of the sonship of God. One could meet him as the Word of Life, enfleshed as the Word of life in the world of everyday reality, where depth of relationship becomes holiness. The conclusions of Chalcedon or Ephesus are not rejected or abandoned but absorbed into the mainstream of history. Jesus takes us to greater truths as orthopraxis rather than mere orthodoxy.

The Uniqueness of Christ and Christ Crucified: is an appeal of Paul and an inner demand of the Christian faithful according to the Christian scriptures. Christ is being re-crucified today as corporate community, especially among the poor who manifest him. His passover from sin to holiness (Jn.13:1) is seen in the passion and death of the people, and his resurrection is seen everytime they band together in the hope of new life and community building, this last belonging to his kingship. The Word builds community.

Founder (Buddha) - presented the Dhamma,
and that word built the Samgha (sam)

God presented the Word,
the Word built the
Community (com)

The messiah emerges from the Suffering people and identifies with the people. One of the key points of minjung theology is that the Crucifixion of Jesus took place as a historical event in the political arena (35).

In the Missionary Sense: The great Mission mandate: "Go ye and teach all nations...is not primarily a mandate to proselytize and convert the individual and turn him away from his faith in goodness. Biblical conversion has no object. 'Making converts' and 'conversion' make no sense. Conversion is the turning away from oneself to God who is always turned to us. This is the goal of our missionary action. The evangelizer must now get evangelized and turn to the Truth. The mandate is primarily a message to "make disciples of all nations" (structures of society). There is no opposition but continuity between Luke 4:18: "He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor..." and the last message: "Go ye and teach all nations", for they are held together by Mt.25: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat..."; "thirsty and you gave me to drink". This last, might mean today to make political action (to agitate) to set up a waterworks.

The Social and Liberative Aspects: The Buddhist schema allows not only the token of sangha (community) through the Theravada (Sri Lankan basic) Buddhism, but also through the Mahayana Buddhism which induces the salvation of all beings as salvation or liberation for all. Christ is the Healer: I am the Life. So dialogical collaboration takes place in matters of food, health and ill-health as reference to the Deed of Logos, the Word. The Buddha is also known as the Mahaausadha pandita, the great wise healer. Christ is also the Truth: I am the Truth. The Buddha said: Truth is beyond death. Here collaboration should take place in works of education for justice, formal and non-formal ways of education and conscientization.

Eschatologically: The Exodus - Resurrection - Passover paradigm is verified in Buddhism in the Buddha's renunciation (nekkhama, na-iskramya), each time he made a passage from evil to goodness, from selfishness to selflessness - a pattern found in Buddhist morality. The Buddha is also called a "Jina" or Victor over evil, of tanha, lobha, dosa, moha. Theologically too, the messianic expectation of the people is based upon theodicy, the victory or vindication of God's justice over evil in history. The Messiah and the People actualize the justice of God in history. In that sense, true messianism, which coincides with the true role of the Maitreya Buddha or Buddha Amitabha (amitayus, amida) is an eschatological phenomenon closely linked to an apocalyptic understanding of history (36).

The liberation of men and women, rather than a direct search for God will let us all meet in the arena of Asia, even Third World or Sri Lanka today. The Jesus community, born of the Word in the world would like the Buddhist to live the truth in love (metta), inspired by the Buddha teaching. The upholding of human compassion does in no way mean a denial of what Christians term, the Divinity. "Break captive chains... give sight to the blind...Go teach all nations...feed the hungry...take in the stranger..." - are all injunctions born of compassion. Jesus the healer, Jesus the teacher loves the masses - the minjung - now as then, for they "are like sheep without a shepherd, and he takes them as they are, unconditionally. So too, the Buddha praxis reflects compassion for all creatures. From the Buddha's life we can deduce that he would have been serenely joyful to see One such as Jesus, so profoundly human, so intensely divine.

There is no need to ask which is first: human or divine, or is it human and divine or divine and human.

In the tragic vortex of today, there is not even a question of how these two natures co-exist in Christ. While holding on to what it signifies, let us push on to the truth of Christ: actus fidei terminatur non ad enuntiabile sed ad rem: the act of faith is not in the statement, but in the reality of it. The Jesus reality for all ages cannot be domesticated by decree but accepted and formulated however feebly, in faith.

If we but knew with Sobrino, that Jesus is the way to liberation, then he is not an obstacle to anyone on the Way with him, nor is that person a stumbling block when he too is on the Right way.

FOOT-NOTES

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1. The team is made up of an Oblate missionary, Fr.M.Rodrigo, O.M.I., and two Salvatorian missionaries, Sr.Benedict Fernandopulle and Sr.Milburga Fernando.
2. M.Rodrigo, Buddhist -Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka, in Concilium, 116, Seabury Press, 1979, pp.99-106, (p.100).
3. M.Rodrigo, Report on an Approach to non-Christians, January (Duruthu) 1965, mimeographed, unpublished material, 11.pp. Kandy Seminary, Sri Lanka, p.2-3.
4. Evangelization in Modern day Asia: Official statement of the FABC Plenary Taipei, Taiwan. 22-27 April 1974, IMCS,Asia: Document Service, FX, Oct. 1977,
5. Vimalananda Tennekoon, The Great Rebellion of 1818, Gunasena & Co. Colombo, 1970, p.xiii.
6. M.Rodrigo, Life in all its Fulness, theologizing through village dialogue, CCA, Asian Preperatory: Asia Contribution Report,

Singapore; also Asian Theol. Search, series, n.2, p.4, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

7. The date in our house diary is one in March 1982. The monk is Venerable Alutwela Upananda of Alutwela temple. Several other areas received drought relief but this area was ignored.
8. Harvey Cox, Religion in the Secular City : towards a post-modern theology Simon and Schuster, New York, pp.304. We have borrowed the word Dialogy from Cox's quotation of Raschke's paper, p.228: "Dialogue must cease to be a secondary quest or reflection about religion, but must become itself a religious quest. This kind of Dialogy will bring about an "interpretive tension" says Raschke.
9. Carl A. Raschke, "Religious Pluralism and Truth: From Theology to Hermeneutical Dialogy", Journal of the American Academy of Religion (March 1982-83).
10. Cox, op.cit., p.228
11. Cox, op.cit., p.229
12. Cox, op.cit., p.239
13. The Church and Human Rights, Work Paper 1, Pont. Com. Justitia et Pax, Vaticanis, n.56, p.23
14. Jon Sobrino, Cristologia desde America Latina, Mexico, 1976 and La MAISON DIEU: 137 1st trimester 1979, 40 + p.12
15. Synod of Justice, Justice in the World, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis
16. Synod of Justice, Justice in the World, TPV, 1971, p.12-13 (Printed. Caves)
17. Segundo Galilea, Following Jesus, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1981, p.81 to 188

18. Albert Nolan, O.P., Jesus Before Christianity, The Gospel of Liberation, Darton Longman, Todd, 1980, p.138
19. op.cit. Nolan, p.138. In this section we have almost totally relied on the expressions of Nolan for this is the first time, we feel, that such a clear statement has been made by a theologian regarding the divinity of Christ as manifested in the humanity.
20. M. Rodrigo, Pancasila as an Ethic of the Inter-personal, Dialogue, n.s iii. This is a summary of Fr.Rodrigo's speech of that day.
(2;62-67)
21. A sampling of the six songs: "You wished that men's eyes be opened.
You wished that their minds be
enlightened
You wished they'd reach nibbana,
From darkness they'd reach light.
Strength, Justice, Peace,
No other path would there be
O Lord Buddha, today we remember you
Goodness seems to have been abandoned by society
There seems to be no day when justice and righteousness
Are done by men and women.
22. The text also said: "Humanness has fallen low; Money become king
Something 'greater than life' has raised its
ugly head.
O Buddha Gautama, the whole of society is
topsy turvy
Now they struggle for breath.
23. A youth leader called HMJ, a young and knowledgeable farmer gave this in writing in Sinhala.
24. J.A.T.Robinson. The New Reformation?
25. The Spirit of God cannot be imagined. The biblical sign of a dove and of wind are about the only ones usually accepted, of which

one can be imaged and the other, the wind, not easily so. It has the idea of gentleness and power, breeze and storm. The Hindu idea is of the Vayu (wind or breath) as supportive and expressive of the Vacana (word). The Spirit inspires the word and the word forms community.

26. Aloysius Pieris, SJ, The Place of Non-Christian religions and Cultures in the Evolution of a Third-World Theology, CTC Bulletin, CCA, Vol.3, n.2, pp.43-61. see p.57, col.1 The author maintains "Theology as God talk is not necessarily the universally valid starting point or the only basis of an inter-religious collaboration in the third world. Liberation, however, is" (Ibid, p.57, col.1).
27. Aloysius Pieris analyses the Islamic situation at the portals of the TW (Third World): see article cited in n.20 above, pp.53-54. R.C.Zaehner in At Sundry Times, p.216 extols the idea of the Word of God which can accomodate Christianity, Islam and Hinduism: "The Christian interpretation of the eternal Logos has room for the Muslim idea of God's amr, kalima and gawl, and for the Hindu conception of God's eternal generation of the 'seed'".
28. Gunapala Dharmasiri, The Meaning of Religion in Sri Lanka Today, Dialogue, new series, vol.ii, n.1. pp.7-14.
29. Lily de Silva, quoted in Michael Rodrigo, Moral Goodness: Doorway to Final Peace, Sevaka Sevana bulletin, vol.1. n.4, Dec.1978, p.262
30. K.N.Jayatilleke, Some aspects of the Gita and Buddhist Ethics, April-July '55 Reprint. Univ. of Ceylon Review, vol.xiii, nos. 2-3., pp.141-142
31. Henri de Lubac, La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident, Aubier, 1952 Vladimir Soloviev, La justification du bien, Paris, Aubier, p.237
32. Michel Quoist, Christ is Alive! Gill & Macmillan, 1971, p.128 "Man's aspirations are the same throughout the world, although

they are felt, expressed and lived in different ways in every situation. They exist in the heart of every man, regardless of the notion that man has of them, regardless also of race, class, age, philosophy, or religion...To give oneself to one's brothers is always the same as giving oneself to Jesus Christ and in him, to the Father...A Christian should therefore fearlessly join hands with all men of good will who work for the integral and harmonious development of man and the world" (Quoist, p.178)

33. Gowan - Lakey - Moyer - Taylor - Moving towards a New Society, New Society Press, Philadelphia, 1976, attributed to President Johnson, p.135
34. While this paper was being written, the third death by pesticide poisoning took place in our village within the last one year. This time (on 26th November) it was a young girl of 22 who died of Tamarone poisoning, an entirely unnecessary agro-input, and an unnecessary death', "Pesticide deaths - Lanka leads" cried a headline (Sunday Oct. 28th '84, Weekend paper. (1212 dead '83)
35. The hope of liberation worked out through the process of social analysis has great influence on those sharing in the process. It sustains their hope, gives religiousness a new meaning, and makes collaborative effort more secure. Not only does man's inhumanity to man (men and women) truly lessen, man's selfishness is edged out by other-turned-ness. See Minjung Theology, Ed. Kim Yong Bock, p.101
36. Buddha Amida, or Amitayus is the Buddha who will return. Kind sustainer of the Buddhist devotee. See Minjung Theology, p.189. Also; The Tannisho Kenyukai (transl.ny Shinji Takuwa) 1968, Hokuseido press, p.19 ff. Typical Mahayana Buddhism shows the Three Bodies of the Buddha: Nirmanakāya: body submitted to changes; Sambhogakāya, body in which the Buddha enjoys reward of merits. Yves Raguin says "we may compare this body to the glorious body of Christ. It is seen by faith and not by eyes" (Raguin, Sixteen Lessons on Buddhism and Christianity, Taipei, 1975, p.24-25); Dharmakāya is the absolute ground of everything, also called the Buddha nature. The Ultimate Reality is not personal, but is a 'nature'.

SECTION II

LIBERATION : CRISIS?

LIBERATION THEOLOGY AT STAKE

"Libertas" is Latin for liberty or freedom. "Liber" means free. Liberation Theology began as an attempt to deepen the faith of the Latin American peasants who have suffered or are still suffering under the heel of a voicelessness born of landlessness and violation of allied human rights.

Already in 1971, the world Synod of Bishops in Rome announced officially to the world:

"The Church - the People of God - is called by God to be present among all men, preaching the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, joy to the broken-hearted. This Gospel has a power to set men free, not just from sin but from what sin has done to our society."

"In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to me as the one who frees the oppressed, the one who defends the poor...when men fulfil the demands of justice, they learn to recognize just who God is - the One who sets free. When Christ came...He made of his whole life a total gift to liberate mankind. He preached that God is Father of us all...we are set free to give ourselves that others may be free."

That is the Gospel we must preach today. To preach it we must consecrate ourselves to liberating man right here and now" (Synod 1971)

And as if this were not enough, the Vatican Justice and Peace Commission in its Working Paper 1 said rather loudly, outlining the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church: (1975):-

"The Church continues the prophetic mission of Jesus, whose words and actions are for the good of men to save, heal, liberate and assist them all. The Bible, and in particular the New Testament presents Christ's work as one of liberation. God himself in the fulness of time sent His Incarnate Son into the world to free men from every form of slavery to which they were subject by reason of sin and of human egoism, - from ignorance, destitution, hunger, oppression, hatred of injustice (Gal.4:4-5), Jesus' first preaching was to proclaim the liberation of the oppressed. By His death on Calvary, Christ freed us from sin...Sin the root of all injustice and oppression...The fullness of liberation consists in communion with God and with our fellowmen...the Church must forcefully preach and realize more effectively this liberation of the poor, oppressed and the outcast..."

Merely because sinful humans can go back on their word, Jesus can neither deceive nor be deceived and so cannot be guilty of tergiversation. He cannot go back on His word. He is the word.

Today, the debate on Liberation theology - sweet hope for the oppressed and a menace to some rich and powerful. A matter of precision semantics for some, a matter of life and death for others. Local churches not involved in the death-struggle, are congenitally incapa-

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ble of thinking, acting and being poor as Jesus was, and is. It is a debate, not a controversy or a classic religious quarrel. It pertains to the life and death of the majority of people in the world, the so-called, Third World, over 3/4 of mankind. Liberation theology does not exist on its own. It cannot be separated from the people and milieu from and in which it is born, i.e. millions of women and men of the Third World, from the sertao of Brazil, the slums of Sao Paulo or the pavements of Manila or even in the African bush. It is also the life-blood and ardent expression of most ecclesial communities at the base (Basic Christian communities of LA).

God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world but that by Him the world might be saved. There is only one world and we by man's inhumanity to man have cut it up into First, Second and Third Worlds and even up to seven!

Most believers in the relevant countries - it is now granted that the Latin American form of Liberation Theology might not be the ideal form in toto for Asia or Africa - draw from Liberation Theology strength to deepen their faith and hope to refuse fatalism of misery and to commit themselves to the daily hard grind, even the struggle, often murderous, for the transformation of the world. We say 'murderous' because they lose much by stark, unadulterated violence against them.

The public debate has thus come to the market-place in the open air of the poor. In theory and practice, the last judgment has been handed over to the poor. No Cardinal, Bishop, prelate or potentate will get behind that. It is as sure as death. To them and to those groups who pray and work so that the oppressed and the exploited may have a little breathing space...

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Without ignoring the religious dimension and deeper faith dimension of the Theology of Liberation, it must be said that it also has a political dimension. For centuries, in some countries, the Church had been more or less a consenting partner of the powers that were ('the powers that be'). Today, these same powers are against them and on the side of those who contest power in the name of Justice. The frantic terrorizing right wing press of some countries hurls imprecations "against the bishops and red pastors", but Archbishop-emeritus Helder Camara's words still ring true to the gooseflesh people: "Take care, Christians my brothers. Beware of invoking the fear of Communism as an excuse for avoiding a change in the structures which confine millions of the sons of God in a sub-human condition. It is not honest to say that to tamper with the structures is certain to lead to a plunge into Godless communism" (Liverpool, 24th June 1972, p.19: Helder Camara by Neville Cheetham, People with a Purpose, 3).

Is this courageous Church going to go back on its course through fear? Acclaiming Christ as universal King or Community-Builder - Shepherd who replaced the picayune pastors and bunkum leaders roundly condemned in Ezekiel 34 - are we to be fearful of seeing the newly-involved under Him, in the organization of their own lives?

A Chorus of Voices

Gustavo Gutierrez, Peruvian priest, perhaps the founding father of Liberation Theology, made headway since 1971, with his Theology of Liberation, affirming with Chenu the French Dominican that theology is not a science hanging between heaven and earth but it is always a faith reflection on a given social-cultural context in a given political situation and so cannot be blocked by the conditions of life of the Latin American peoples. Pierre Vilain of Croissance des jeunes nations reveals how Karl Rahner once intervened to affirm



"The Theology of Liberation which Gutierrez represents is perfectly orthodox" (Croissance, dossier 266, Nov. 1984, p.21).

The Vatican has given some safeguards in an Instruction signed by Cardinal Ratzinger, for the Doctrine of the Faith Congregation. Although we could give it in point form, we could now give in toto Cardinal Bernadin's Comment:

"These theologies have become especially popular in Third World countries where there is intense poverty and great disparity between rich and poor. The Instruction highlights the biblical foundation for an authentic theology of liberation. It also clearly emphasises the Church's concern for the poor, for social justice, for human dignity and human rights. It cites in a positive way the Medellin conference concept of the Church's making a 'preferential option for the poor', and helpfully points out that Medellin also included a preferential option "for the young". It will be a valuable instrument of catechesis and pastoral action. The Instruction does not contain a denunciation of Liberation theology nor does it single out any particular theologian for specific criticism. It does indicate however, potential difficulties and identifies certain concepts not in accord with catholic teaching. It seeks to provide ecclesial guidance in this complicated, complex and sometimes confusing matter...(there must be a dialogue) to ensure that liberation theology develops within the parameters of our catholic heritage" (Messenger of S. Antony, 12 Dec. 1984, p.10).

THE WORKER'S HYMN

Son of the Father, Jesus, Lord and slave,
born among the cattle in the squalor of a cave,
one with God, you made yourself
one with man, shunning wealth;
Lord, we worship you with hand and mind.

Son of the Father, Jesus, worker's friend,
you whom Joseph taught the skills of working with your hands,
man at home in builder's yard,
one with man, toiling hard;
Lord, we worship you with hand and mind.

Son of the Father, author of our faith,
choosing men to follow you from every walk of life,
who with them, in boats, on shore,
troubles shared, burdens bore;
Lord, we worship you with hand and mind.

Seed of the Father, from life's furrow born,
teaching men in parables from agriculture drawn,
Jesus, lover of the soil
man of earth, son of toil;
Lord, we worship you with hand and mind.

Father and Spirit, Jesus, Lord and man,
bless us in the work you have appointed to be done.
Lift our spirits, guide our wills,
steer our hands, use our skills;
Lord, we worship you with hand and mind.

*From Ceylonese
English: Fred Kaan*

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

SRI LANKAN PERSPECTIVES

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