

CATHOLIC REVIVAL IN POST-COLONIAL SRI LANKA

A Critique of Ecclesial Contextualization



A.J.V. CHANDRAKANTHAN

To

My dear Vilakan

With affectionate greeting

Yr. Chandrakanth

22-02-95

CATHOLIC REVIVAL IN POST-COLONIAL SRI LANKA

A Critique of Ecclesial Contextualization

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SRI LANKA

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MAPS OF SRI LANKA

ABBREVIATIONS

INTRODUCTION

To
my beloved parents

S. Adaikalamuthu

(Retd. Principal, R. C. T. Boys' Vidyalaya, Ilavalai)

and

Theresa Marceline Adaikalamuthu

(Retd. Senior Asst. Teacher, R. C. T. Vidyalaya, Ilavalai)

and

to my dear sisters

Bhanu, Inthu, Kanthi, Jeya and Rubia

and

to my loving brothers

Sebastian, Vasanthan, Chelian and Arasan

— the domestic church that nurtured my faith

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PREFACE

Theological mutations that are discernible in the post-modern era are partly necessitated by the direct and dynamic dialogue that is taking place between science and religion, theology and society and between religions among themselves. Inter-religious theology, Social theology, Political theology, theological Anthropology and allied fields are becoming commonplace in contemporary religious and theological discourse. The communications and information revolution, improved air-travel and the increased use of powerful satellites have accelerated an ever-widening process of globalisation. These remarkable macro-changes not only affect global politics, trade and tariff, but they also influence the religious creeds and convictions of individuals and communities.

Though crushed under the weight of an alarming debt crisis, many nations of the Third World are slowly awakening to a new experience of freedom, in what could be termed as a post-colonial era where decolonization is leading to other forms of recolonization.

In many of these countries, particularly in the Asian and African continents such micro-national realities as ethnicity, language and culture show vital forms of resurgence and articulate an assertive kind of consciousness, that seemingly go counter to the globalising trends. But the reality is that religion as a powerful and integral social force cannot afford to ignore these trends and processes.

Seen from the perspective of its global presence, the Church is one of the trans-national bodies that wields a strong and powerful influence on social and political issues of many nations and peoples. Like any other trans-national actor, the Church too is hierarchically organized, centrally directed with a net-work of persons performing various specialized

functions across international borders. This trans-national character besides vesting the Church with importance at global level, requires the Church to be ever conscious of its universality.

Herein lies the dilemma of the local or particular churches, especially those that are surrounded by an overwhelming non-Christian population. In those nations that were under Western colonial powers, the non-Christians perceive in the Church the vestiges of colonialism, particularly in such areas as art, architecture, sculpture, music, dress, community-worship, faith-formulae etc. The universality or the catholicity of Christianity is often invoked by the ecclesiastical authorities to justify the western cultural identity of the Church. Such a justification paid scant attention to the concrete locus of the Church's existence and growth.

In recent times, two major factors contributed to the Church's contextual self-discovery and consequently to the re-establishment of its own socio-cultural identity. One being the audacious openness to change manifested at global level by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the other is the post-colonial spirit of socio-cultural and ethno-religious resurgence that surfaced in many nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is within this dense backdrop of ecclesiological and sociological permutations that I would like to situate the need for revival and reform spelt out by the Catholic leadership of Sri Lanka in the past three decades. With the departure of the last colonial power, viz. the British, the Christian minority in Sri Lanka had to face a very complex national situation.

This study seeks to identify this complex national situation and the manner in which the Catholic leadership responded to some of the major national issues and problems encountered by them. An attempt is made here to interpret these responses within a dynamic frame-work of contextualization, because the national issues, problems and concerns do have an evangelical and Christian essence.

The struggle of a community to live, proclaim and celebrate its faith, the existential trials of Christian leadership in an emergent State, the yearning to be at the service of the Kingdom of God through the practice of justice and the restoration of peace, the enthusiasm to live in solidarity with the poor and to grow together in a spirit of dialogue and fellowship with the followers of other religions, - these are a few among the many basic aspirations of the Church of Sri Lanka.

In this book I have made an effort to analyse and interpret the contextual trends that are implicit in the writings of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka in the past three decades. In order to strengthen my arguments, I have also made adequate references to similar trends and movements that are articulated by pastors and theologians from among the Catholic and Christian churches of Asia and Africa.

It may also be stated that in the last few decades, there has been a perceptible reversal in the method and content of theological reflection both among the Catholic and Protestant churches. Theologians today are less inclined to speak of theology as a purely speculative or dogmatic science, unrelated to the life and existence of peoples and communities. Orthodoxy is being consciously and cautiously challenged by ortho-praxis. Instead of deriving theological concepts from above, there is a sincere search today to explicitate a theology from below - from the very context of one's life situation. Theological pluralism has become an accepted fact. It is therefore against this dense background of a theological transition in which the "old is dying and the new is struggling to be born", that I have made an attempt to understand the vision and orientation of the official Catholic leadership of Sri Lanka.

Many persons have helped me and encouraged me in this venture. I am very thankful to Prof. Richard P. Hardy of St. Paul University in Ottawa, for his friendly guidance and wise counsel. His clear perception of the Asian ecclesial and social realities helped me to develop a critical view of

the Sri Lankan ecclesial realities. I have also benefitted from the comments and suggestions made by Prof. Achiel Peelman, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at St. Paul University and Prof. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson of the University of New Brunswick.

A public lecture that I had the honour to deliver at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London in October 1993 on "Religion, Politics and Peace in South Asia", and a research paper on Sri Lanka presented by me in early January 1994 at Somerville College, University of Oxford, helped me to improve certain relevant sections of my book. I therefore wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Andrew Palmer of the University of London and Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond of the University of Oxford for their encouragement and support.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Rt. Revd. Dr. B. Deogupillai, former Bishop of the diocese of Jaffna who gave me the opportunity to pursue my doctoral studies in Canada; and to his successor the Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Savundranayagam who allowed me to have more than a due share of my leave from pastoral ministry to work toward the publication of this book. The friendly hospitality of the Blessed Sacrament Community in Colombo and the fraternal encouragement of Revd. Fr. Oswald Firth, Director of SEDEC, enabled me to complete this work on time. The publication of this book has been made possible by the generosity of the Missiological Institute in Aachen. The energetic directors of that scholarly Institute had also helped me in my earlier efforts to write and to publish. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of them.

A special word of thanks goes to Mr. R. L. de Alwis of Arnold's International Printing House and Mr. Vimalendran of Unie Arts for their affectionate cooperation in steering the printing work to its final form.

When this work was submitted in the form of a doctoral dissertation at St. Paul University in 1987, it received the rare honour of unanimous acceptance by the board of examiners who also recommended strongly its publication. On my return to Sri Lanka, I felt that certain modifications in the form and content of the text is necessary to make it more readable as a book.

The conditions that prevailed in Jaffna and my academic and administrative responsibilities as Head of the Department of Christian and Islamic Civilization since early 1991, took away a fair share of my time. As a result I had almost indefinitely postponed the changes to the text I had envisaged. However, I am glad that a live-in ecclesial experience of the past six years together with my academic involvements at several national and international seminars and conferences, afforded me an opportunity to make substantial and relevant additions to the text. Such an experience enabled me to be more convinced of the fact that a meaningful contextual ecclesiology should grow out of a concerted reflection on ecclesial practices at work within a living community than from investigating theological hypotheses. Finally my hope is that this work will be received as a humble contribution to the on-going theological search within the church of Sri Lanka as well as of the larger Asian region.

A.J.V. Chandrakanthan

28-12-1993

University of Jaffna
Thirunelvely

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A.L.V. Chandrasekaran

28-12-1993

University of Lanka

Thiruvallur

FOREWORD

The need to contextualize the Catholic Church, its theology and missionary enterprises in a new State (Sri Lanka) with its overwhelmingly non-Christian population and their ancient historic traditions, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islam, is the subject of this profoundly thoughtful, erudite and well-researched work. The central problem is, as the author states in the concluding remarks of his last chapter, for the Church "to convincingly express that Christ the Son of God who comes to be with his people in Sri Lanka, comes not from Europe but from the Father..." The Catholic version of Christianity, as brought originally by the Portuguese nearly four hundred and fifty years ago, has had to situate itself in the context of other religions that had acquired an indigenous ethno-cultural identity of more than two thousand years duration. The author has endeavoured to explain this dilemma and the confrontations encountered. The continuing theme in this scholarly study is an investigation of how the Catholic hierarchy coped and the way in which it spelled out solutions to resolve the many crises in post-independent Sri Lanka during the dangerous decades, 1960-1990.

The great value of the contents of this book are not that they are solely theological. In placing the Church in its context and in its efforts towards contextualization, rich sources in the socio-history and politics of Sri Lanka have been investigated, analysed and interpreted so as to integrate these relevant components to the core of the text. As such, this book is indispensable not only to the world of religions; it is useful to political sociologists, and to students of socio-political affairs as well as to those involved in the study of South Asian religio-political trends. The author brings in fresh insights by looking at the island prism from an angle different from that of social scientists.

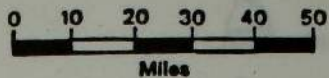
It must be emphasized that the moral that the Catholic church learned in Sri Lanka during the critical years will make this text standard required reading for all interested in contemporary socio-political theology in Third World countries. There is meticulous scholarship in this undertaking and much mathematical precision. The author has integrated social scientific concepts with contemporary theological discourse. Dr. Chandrakathan deserves the commendation of scholars who are specialists in Third World theology and political sociology for this has been a pioneering effort.

Prof. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, PhD, DSc (Lond.)

*Professor of Political Science
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton. CANADA.*

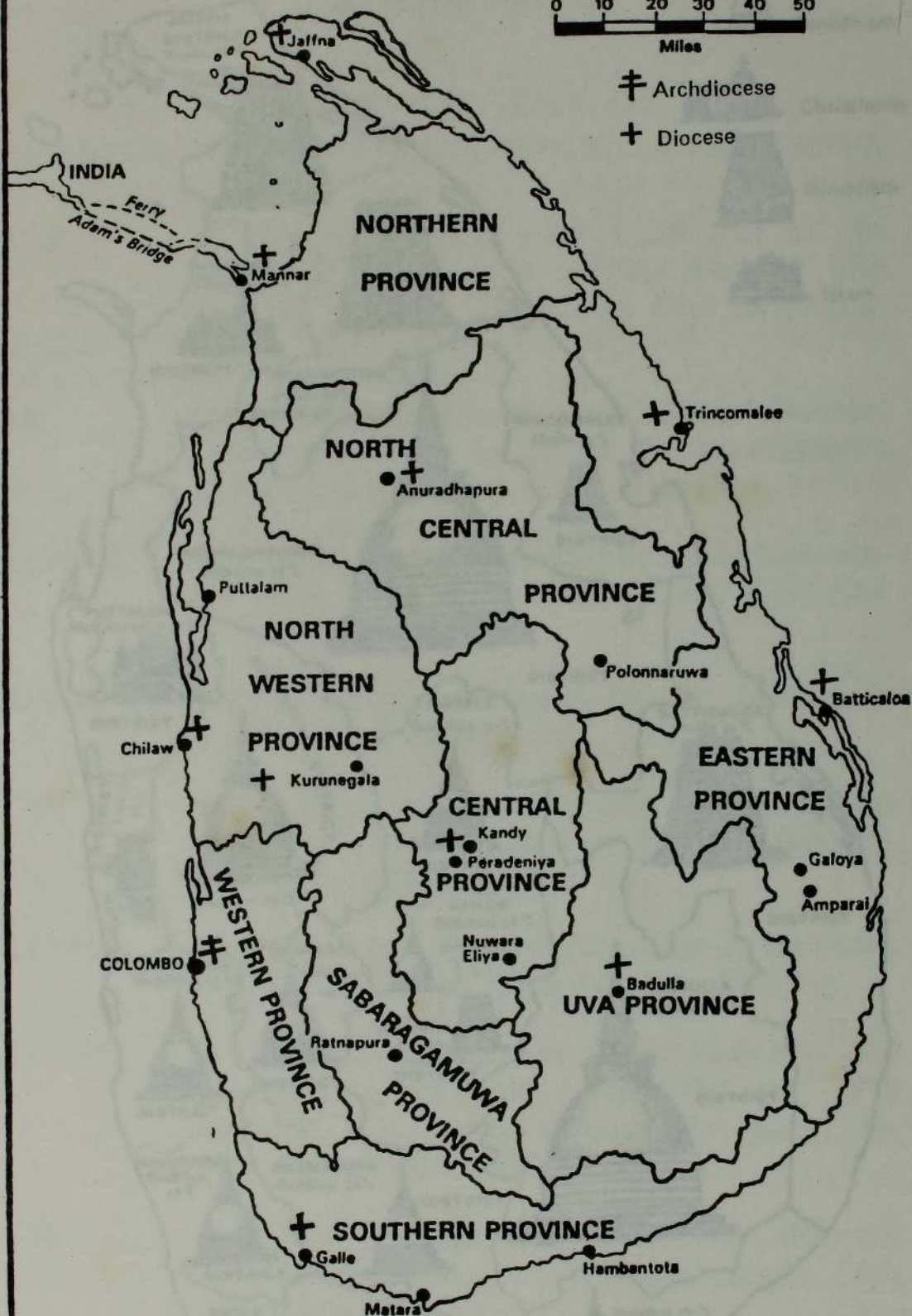
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SRI LANKA: NAMES OF THE 10 CATHOLIC DIOCESES



✚ Archdiocese

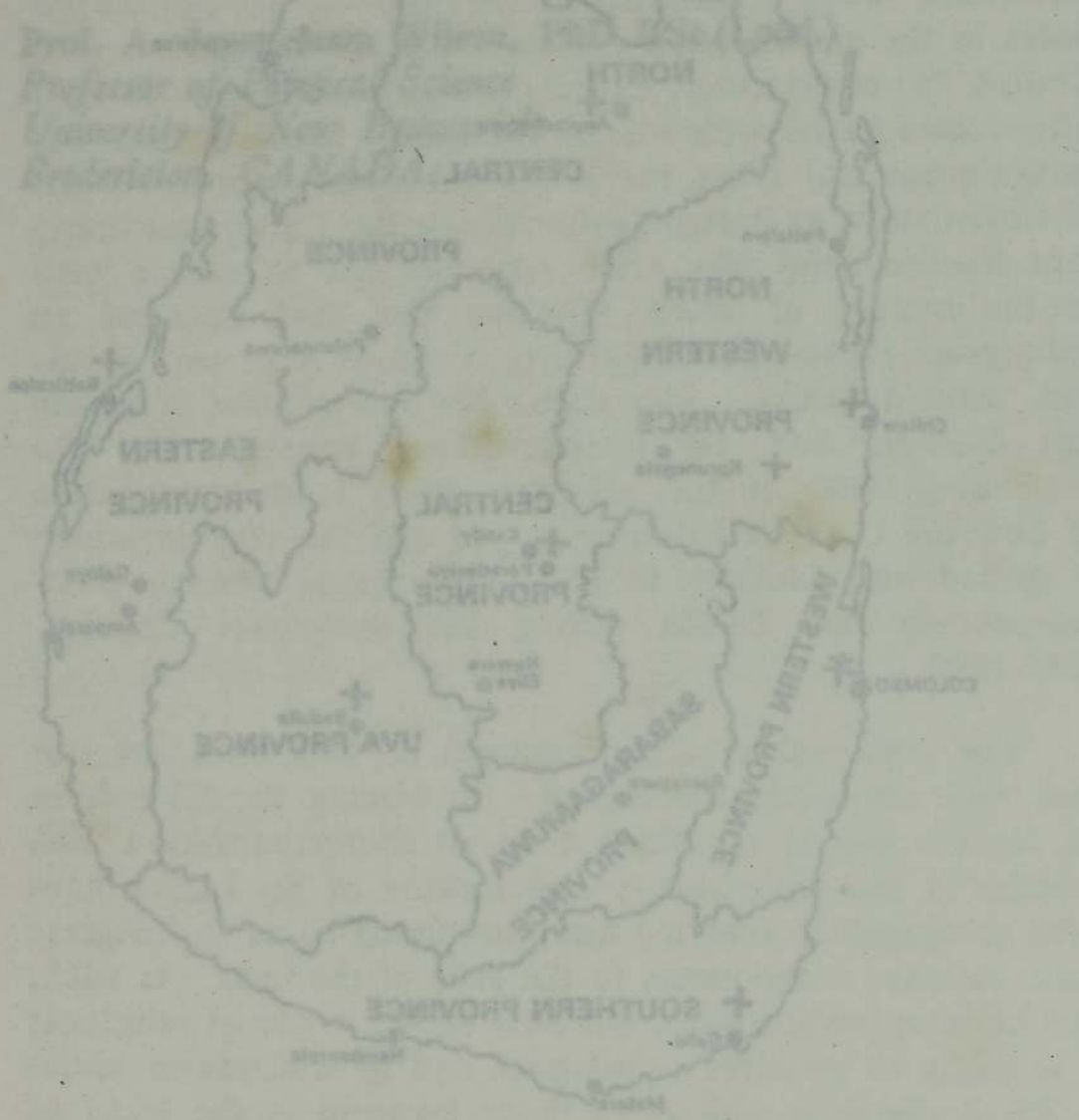
✚ Diocese



MODERN SRI LANKA
Provincial Divisions and Principal Towns

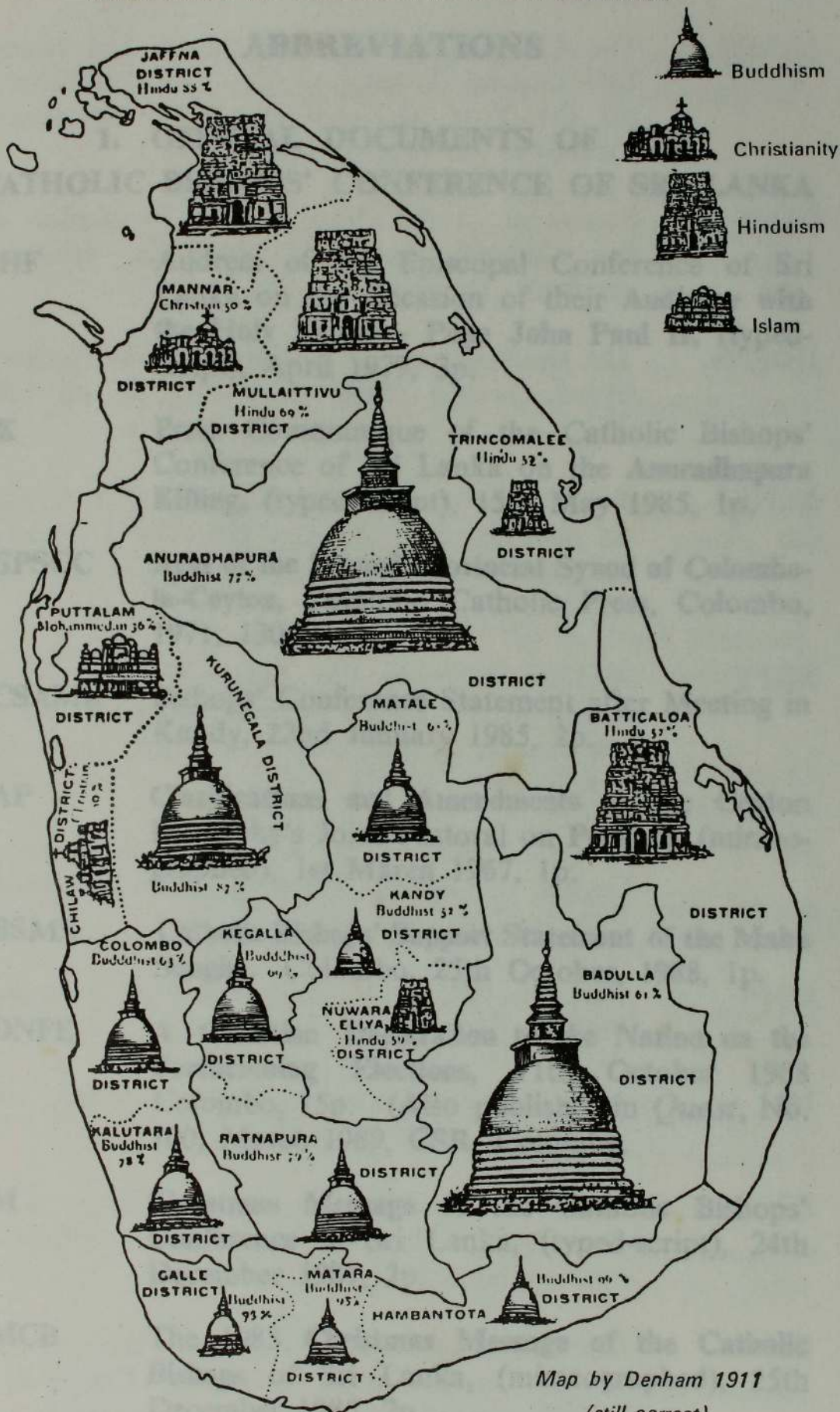
SRI LANKA: NAMES OF THE 10 CATHOLIC DIOCESES

It may be surprising to many that the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka has only ten dioceses. This is due to the fact that the island was divided into three parts by the British in 1815. The three parts were the Northern, Central, and Southern Provinces. Each province was then divided into districts. The districts were then grouped into three dioceses: the Northern, Central, and Southern Dioceses. The Northern Diocese covers the Northern Province and the districts of Jaffna, Trincomalee, and Battaramulla. The Central Diocese covers the Central Province and the districts of Colombo, Kandy, and Nuwara-Eliya. The Southern Diocese covers the Southern Province and the districts of Galle, Matara, and Hambantota. The Western Province is not covered by any diocese. The Eastern Province is covered by the Northern Diocese. The North Western Province is covered by the Central Diocese. The Sabaragamuwa Province is covered by the Southern Diocese. The Uva Province is covered by the Southern Diocese. The Southern Province is covered by the Southern Diocese. The Western Province is not covered by any diocese. The Eastern Province is covered by the Northern Diocese. The North Western Province is covered by the Central Diocese. The Sabaragamuwa Province is covered by the Southern Diocese. The Uva Province is covered by the Southern Diocese. The Southern Province is covered by the Southern Diocese.



Map of Sri Lanka showing the 10 Catholic dioceses.

RELIGIONS IN SRI LANKA PREDOMINANT RELIGION IN EACH DISTRICT



Map by Denham 1911
(still correct)

ABBREVIATIONS

1. OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SRI LANKA

- AHF** Address of the Episcopal Conference of Sri Lanka on the Occasion of their **Audience with the Holy Father - Pope John Paul II**, (typed-script), April 1979, 3p.
- AK** Press Communique of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka on the **Anuradhapura Killing**, (typed script), 15th May 1985, 1p.
- ASPSCC** **Acts of the Second Provincial Synod of Colombo-in-Ceylon**, Colombo Catholic Press, Colombo, 1971, 130p.
- BCSAMK** Bishops' Conference Statement after Meeting in Kandy, 22nd January 1985, 2p.
- CAP** **Clarifications and Amendments** to the Ceylon Hierarchy's Joint Pastoral on **Penance**, (mimeographed), 1st March 1967, 1p.
- CBSMS** **Catholic Bishops' Support Statement of the Maha Sangha**, Colombo, 25th October, 1988, 1p.
- CDNFE** **A Christian Declaration to the Nation on the Forthcoming Elections**, 11th October 1988 Colombo, 15p. (Also published in *Quest*, No. 100, March 1989, CSR, Colombo.
- CM** **Christmas Message** of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka, (typed-script), 24th December 1981, 2p.
- CMCB** **The 1985 Christmas Message of the Catholic Bishops** of Sri Lanka, (mimeographed), 25th December 1985, 2p.

- CVMFL** **The Christian Vision of Marriage and family Life**, Special Pastoral of the Catholic Bishops for the Year of the Family, *The Messenger* Colombo, 3rd August 1980, pp. 2-3.
- DCSF** Statement to the Press on the **Dissolution of the Catholic Students' Federation**, (mimeographed), 1st July 1973, 2p.
- DDPNS** **The Draft Documents Prepared for the National Synod**, *Quest* 3 (1968), Nos. 25 & 26, pp. 138-250.
- ECNE** Report of the Episcopal Conference in Ceylon on the Necessity for an **Effective Catechesis and New Evangelization**, (mimeographed), 14th April 1971, 8p.
- FGPP** A Declaration to the Entire Church in Sri Lanka in the **Face of the Growing Poverty of our People**, *Quest*, No. 100, CSR, Colombo, March 1989, pp. 28 - 33.
- FP** Pastoral Letter of the Bishops' Conference of Ceylon on **Family Planning**, (mimeographed), 13th January 1972, 5p.
- GLM** Pastoral Letter on **Guide-lines on Liturgical Matters**, 30th May 1974; 3p.
- HV** Joint Pastoral Letter on **Humane Vitae**, 10th August 1968, 3p.
- HY** **Holy Year** Joint Circular of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Colombo-in-Ceylon, (mimeographed), 10th October 1973, 2p.
- IECN** Circular Letter of the Bishops on the Occasion of the **International Eucharistic Congress at Nairobi**, (mimeographed), (no date), 1984.

- IYY** Message of the Ceylon Bishops' Conference for the **International Year of Youth**, (mimeographed), (no date), 1985, 3p.
- LA** Statement on **Legalized Abortion** issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka on the Proposed Legislation Regarding Abortion, (type-script), 12th July 1979, 2p.
- LHF** A **Letter to the Holy Father** on the Close of the Centenary of St. Peter, (mimeographed), 25th July 1968, 2p.
- MM** Circular Letter on **Mixed Marriages**, by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ceylon, 4th September 1970, 7p.
- NS** Press Communiqué on the **National Seminary**, From the Ceylon Bishops' Conference, 3rd September 1971, 1p.
- PD** Joint Pastoral of the Hierarchy of Ceylon on **Penitential Discipline**, (mimeographed), 29th October 1966, 4p.
- PGHD** Statement on **Population Growth and Human Development**, (mimeographed), January 1974, 5p.
- PMAS** Joint Pastoral on the **Pontifical Mission-Aid Societies**, (mimeographed), August 1966, 3p.
- PS** Joint Pastoral of the Hierarchy of Ceylon on the **Proposed Synod**, (mimeographed), (no date), 5p.
- PSM** The Joint Pastoral Letter on the **Proposed Synod with Modifications**, *Quest*, 3 (1968), No. 23, pp. 76-81.
- RV** Press Communiqué on the **Rejection of Violence**, (typed-script), 24th September 1984, 1p.

- SBMS** **Statement of the Bishops and Major Superiors,** at the Close of the Seminar on Mission Conscientization, Tewatte, Feb. 1979, in *Omnis Terra*, 13-14 (1978-80), pp. 284-286.
- SFJC** **Report of the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka on the Sinhala Film on Jesus Christ,** 14th April 1983, 2p.
- TNC** **Pastoral Letter of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, The Nation in Crisis,** April 3, 1988, 12p.
- TRSLN** **Toward the Rebuilding of the Sri Lankan Nation,** Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka, SIOLL School of Technology Press, Battaramulla, 10th June 1984, 39p.
- WOC** **We and Our Children,** Message of the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka for the International Year of the Child, (mimeographed), 1979, 8p.

2. JOURNALS AND PERIODICALS

- AAS** **Acta Apostolicae Sedis**
- AFER** **African Ecclesiastical Review**
- CS** **Cistercian Studies**
- EAPR** **East Asian Pastoral Review**
- EMQ** **Evangelical Missions Quarterly**
- FEER** **Far Eastern Economic Review**
- IMR** **Indian Missiological Review**
- IRM** **International Review of Mission**

ITS	Indian Theological Studies
JD	Journal of Dharma
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
MS	Mission Studies (IAMS - Publication)
NB	New Blackfriars
NRT	Nouvelle Revue Theologique
NZM	Neue Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft
SC	Social Compass
TAN	Teaching All Nations
TE	Theological Education
TS	Theological Studies
TJT	Toronto Journal of Theology
TVT	Tijdschrift voor Theologie
TVT	Tijdschrift voor Liturgie
ZMR	Zetschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft

3. ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

(Political, Religious and Other)

ACBC	All Ceylon Buddhist Congress
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa
ATC	Asian Theological Conference (1979)

CBCSL	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia (Singapore)
CISRS	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, (Bangalore)
CLS	Christian Literature Society, (Madras)
CRSR	Centre de Recherches Socio-Religieuses, Louvain
CSI	Church of South India
CSR	Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
FABC	Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference
IAMS	International Association of Mission Studies
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colomb
IMC	International Congress on Mission, (1979)
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Ceylon Equal Society Party)
NBCLC	National Biblical, Catevhetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore, India
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
TEF	Theological Education Fund of the WCC
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP	United National Party
WCC	World Council of Churches

INTRODUCTION

Brought and nurtured under the protection of the Portuguese, persecuted and purified under the Dutch conquerors, tolerated and later supported by the British, Christianity as a faith and a religion has grown and spread in Sri Lanka with a foreign character and an alien image. Today, almost after 450 years of its "implantation" in Sri Lanka, the Catholic church is the most numerous Christian denomination with a membership of a little over a million, spread out across the entire island. The Catholic church has truly grown in size and stature as well as in pastoral intensity and missionary fervour.

With the departure of the last colonial power from Sri Lanka the hostility of a vast number of Buddhists and Hindus was directed against the Catholic church. In the church's well-established institutions, in its socio-political influence and the western religio-cultural identity, the followers of other religions perceived a continuation of the colonial legacy. This enmity reached its climax in 1960-61 when a pro-Buddhist government decided to nationalize the Catholic school net work, then the largest in the nation.¹ Since then the church has been compelled to re-fashion its identity and to re-think its missionary and pastoral pursuits, goals and visions.

For over a quarter century immediately following the second Vatican Council (1965-1990) the Catholic leadership in Sri Lanka has consciously embarked upon a serious task of "re-discovering the true image" of the church *vis-a-vis* the national context. Two major forces one from within and the other from without the church have considerably accelerated this new quest of the church. From within the church was the ecclesial renewal initiated by the second Vatican Council which provided a powerful catalyst for reform and renewal. From without was the post-independence trends of ethno-religious nationalisms that asserted themselves by stirring up a socio-religious and an ethno-cultural renaissance. This

spirit of change that surfaced at this period, brought about a change of attitude in intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial relationships.

The vision of reform introduced by the Council in the fields of liturgy, missionary activity, ecumenism and inter-religious unity with other faiths, provided an atmosphere that was conducive for productive revival and renewal in the life and ministry of the church. This new vision ushered in a new approach to theology and pastoral life. For the many Christian communities scattered across the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America this spirit of renewal opened up new avenues for responsible and relevant forms of theologizing and pastoral practice. It opened up new and varied dimensions of the church's life and mission in the different nations and cultures. In those nations where the church perceived its missionary presence as a minority group with a foreign identity, a decisive effort was made to seek a meaningful form of national integration and contextual incorporation. It paved the way for a new form of self-understanding of the church. The church that considered itself a finished product now began to realize the need for growth and progress.

In keeping with the Council's proposal this process of change was referred to as "adaptation". But soon the churches felt the need to broaden the boundaries of the notion of adaptation. Hence indigenization, inculturation, localization, contemporization and contextualization were proposed as more dynamic substitutes.² The role and function of the laity received a new and dynamic definition while the ecclesiological emphasis shifted from a hierarchical church to a servant church, with a strong sense of communitarian service.

In the 1970s Walbert Buhlmann characterized this new trend as "the Coming of the Third Church"³ and in the late 1970s Karl Rahner pointed to a new historical epoch commencing the birth and growth of a "world church".⁴ From the Asian perspective some theologians viewed this as the

emergence of a theology with a contextual content and character.⁵ Assessing these theological trends Robert Schreiter recently measured this move as a “new shift in perspective”.⁶ Examining similar theological movements that were strongly articulated in the Latin American nations Roger Haight saw and “An Alternative Vision”.⁷

In their very essence these trends pointed to an essential function of theology and proved right the observation that “a theology which does not draw upon the legacy of the people to whom it speaks usually exhibits little creativity and development, it quickly loses relevancy, and gradually alienates the believer from the social and cultural context in which he lives.”⁸ These words echo in a different tone the description of theology provided by the theologians who gathered in Belgium at a World Congress of Theology. They said that “theology is a reflection of Christians upon their faith and their Christian experience in a particular time and culture. Hence only Christian communities, involved in the life of the contemporary world, and taking active responsibility within their society can fashion the theology of the future.”⁹

Our study and analysis is therefore done with the conviction that a relevant theology arises out of a meeting and merging of two realities, namely a community of faith and the given context in which this community endeavours to live, proclaim and celebrate its faith. In this respect it should be granted that the church in Sri Lanka is institutional and hierarchical. The ecclesial experience and contextual integration of the Sri Lankan Catholics is largely determined by the hierarchy. In ecclesial matters they wield a strong influence and are listened to by a vast majority of the laity. The traditional sense of religiosity and respect for religious authorities facilitate further the position of the bishops.

Inspired by the Council and instigated by the growing sense of alienation felt within the church, the bishops of Sri Lanka initiated a process of reform in the post-conciliar period beginning from 1962. They preferred to name this process as “adaptation”. They sought to make the life and

mission of the church relevant and meaningful to the concrete Sri Lankan context. In their joint pastoral letters, messages, declarations they outlined the method and mode of reform envisaged by them. We have made an effort to study and analyse critically the methods and approaches as expressed by the bishops in their various documents.

Our study follows four steps. In the first chapter we examine the origin and meaning of contextualization by situating this concept within the general missio-theological trends and pastoral programs enunciated by Catholic and Protestant theologians in the past thirty years. We have also made adequate references to instances of the past where traces of such trends are discernible. Our major focus in the first chapter is to clarify the theological basis of the concept and process of contextualization. We did this in order to establish a parameter that can be used to evaluate and to present a dispassionate critique of the method and approaches adopted by the bishops of Sri Lanka, who also made explicit efforts to respond to the ecclesial and socio-political context of Sri Lanka.

The positive and negative aspects of the attempts made by the bishops to contextualize the church in Sri Lanka should be evaluated against the situation that obtains in Sri Lanka. It is necessary therefore to analyse the Sri Lankan context as an integral part of our study. This is done in the second chapter. We have presented there the Sri Lankan context in its manifold socio-historical and religio-cultural aspects. While focussing on the thirty year period covered by us in this study we have also made an effort to invoke the relevant historical and other factors that have shaped and moulded the nation to its present form.

The third and fourth chapters seek to shed light on the methods and approaches, areas and models of contextualization enunciated by the bishops. In order to sharpen our focus on the diverse elements that constitute this period and to discern critically the approaches enunciated by the bishops we have divided the thirty year period into two phases based

on the socio-cultural and ecclesial developments that characterize these phases.

In the fifth chapter we have given a theological critique of the bishops' approaches to contextualization and suggested different ways of overcoming some of the deficiencies in their method of approach.

It is also proper that we state the reasons for choosing the period beginning from 1960 for our study and critique. For the universal Church as well as for the local church of Sri Lanka, the period beginning from 1960 has important ecclesiological significance. It was from the year 1960 that the formal preparations for the epoch-making Second Vatican Council began. A new spirit of ecumenical cordiality began to make visible signs of intra-ecclesial union from that period accompanied by many charismatic and humanitarian gestures of the Great Pope of this century, John XXIII.

For the Sri Lankan nation and especially for the Catholic Church of Sri Lanka, the year 1960 portended catastrophic changes in its relationship to the state as well as in its ministerial and missionary functions. The bill that was passed in parliament (1960-61) concerning the nationalization of denominational schools was the greatest blow suffered by the church. The influence wielded by the church in the colonial period and in the early phase of the post-colonial era began to wane away while the hostility directed against the church from many quarters began to gather momentum. The expulsion of foreign missionaries from the island and the alleged implication of the church in the *coup d'état* of 1962 further compounded matters. This beleaguered situation called for a serious self-directed critical analysis of the church and this was undoubtedly facilitated by the openness and a new vision for change and renewal expounded by Vatican II.

The Council's dutiful "return to the sources" re-discovered the centre and summit of Christian faith, ministry, liturgy and mission. Proclaiming the WORD of God by word and action was given priority, and as a result, the hermeneutical

task of interpreting the WORD demanded not a mere archaeological knowledge of the Biblical **sitz im leben**, but it confronted the pastors and preachers to re-discover their own **sitz im leben** with all that it implies and with all that it demands. Thus contextual involvement became an inescapable necessity of renewal or revival. It wrought in a new way of being and understanding the church itself.

For, the Church whether it is local or universal is not a mere institution that is established to transmit theological knowledge and salvific information about God and His Kingdom (or reign) or Jesus Christ and the Paschal Mystery. Rather it is commissioned by its Lord and Master for an action-oriented continuation. Involvement and participation with actual human persons and other socio-historical realities become an unavoidable part of Christian communities as living and growing organisms.

Theological explicitation of the faith of such a community that is truly and fully rooted in its historical context cannot be reduced to an academic exercise of interpreting sources and deposits of revelation. It calls for a meaningful articulation of the praxis of faith in word and deed in such manner, that it becomes relevant and perceptible to the changing mechanisms of every historical context. The following pages illustrate as to how the Catholic church of Sri Lanka, officially represented by its pastors and leaders, with their frailties and strengths responded to the needs and exigencies of the Sri Lankan historical context in the post-colonial era.

NOTES

1. See Tissa Balasuriya, "The Ceylonese Experience" in *Jeevadhara*, 3 (1973), No. 13, pp. 82-95.
2. These terms and their theological significance are analysed in the first chapter of this study.
3. See W. Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1978, 407p.

4. See Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II", in *AHER*, 23 (1980), p. 324ff.
5. See John C. England, "Contextual Theology in Asian Countries: A selected and Annotated Bibliography", in *Ching Feng: Quarterly Notes on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture*, 27 (1984), p. 217-232.
6. R. J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1985, p. 2ff.
7. Roger D. Haight, *An Alternate Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology*, Paulist Press, New York, 1985, 340p.
8. W. Cenker, "The Emergence of an Indian Christian Theology", in *ZMR*, 57 (1973), p. 81.
9. As quoted by D. S. Amalorpavadass, "Theology of Evangelization in the Indian Context", in *Service and Salvation: Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization*, J. Pathrapankal, (ed.), TPI, Bangalore, p. 32.

Chapter 1

THE ORIGIN, MEANING AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE PROCESS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

A. A PARADIGM SHIFT IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The dawn of the new ecumenical era that ushered in with the birth of the World Council of Churches in 1948, and the daring declarations of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council that came to a solemn close in 1965, have in the past few decades brought about a remarkable revolution in the method and content of contemporary Catholic theology. In addition to this, the philosophical currents of personalism and humanism further accelerated by a neo-existentialist thrust have contributed toward a relevant and context-centred reformation and re-formulation of theological sciences. A new quest for a meaningful inter-locking between, ortho-doxy and ortho-praxis that characterize the spirit of post-modern religious revivalism have led both Catholic and Protestant theologians to a re-scrutiny of the contemporary historical context as a valid **locus** of the praxis of faith.¹

Such terms as “adaptation,” “indigenization,” “inculturation,” “liberation,” “contemporization” and “contextualization” that are frequently invoked in contemporary theology are more indicative of a dynamic search for the **locus** of theology than a mere quest for a new method of theologising. When compared to the theological trends that were prevalent in the beginning of this century, the depth of meaning shrouded in these terms quite deliberately point toward a “paradigm shift” in both the method and content of Christian theology, as the global ecclesial situation is gearing itself to enter the threshold of the third millenium of the Christian era.

The whole trajectory of ecclesiastical planning, pastoral programmes and ministerial structures, envisioned or en-

compassed by the process of contextualization has in recent years been the subject of lively discussions in theological circles, especially of the African and Asian continents.²

In fact contemporary trends in Catholic theology attest, as we shall indicate later, that contextualization as a concept, vision and process is indicative of the socio-theological evolution and pastoral maturation of what was initiated nearly three decades ago simply as "adaptation," by the Second Vatican Council.³

This study is geared toward an analysis of the contextual historico-phenomenological reality of the Catholic church in Sri Lanka, and its evangelizational and pastoral priorities, as envisaged collectively by the Catholic Bishops' in the post Vatican II period. Hence it is appropriate to delineate here the central concern of this study and its specific relation to the subject matter that is being examined in this chapter.

1. OUR MAIN CONCERN

As suggested by the title an effort has been made in this chapter to identify and understand the conceptual origin and meaning, and to discern the ecclesiological horizon, theological basis and missiological implications of the process of contextualization. Such a task is undertaken here as an initial effort to determine those factors that go to constitute the rudimentary frame-work for an effective and authentic contextualization of the church in a particular socio-political and religio-cultural milieu.

It is our hope that such an examination would help us to deduce a theoretical frame of reference, which can be utilized as a parameter, to make a dispassionate critique and an objective assessment, of the vision and method of contextualization as perceived, proposed and planned by the Sri Lankan Catholic hierarchy since the close of Vatican II. As a matter of fact, even as early as 1960, the Catholic Bishops' of Sri Lanka, as a collective body had addressed themselves to numerous missio-pastoral issues with a sharp contextual focus. The bishops deemed certain national issues as vitally important for intensifying an effective Christian presence and wit-

nessing in this nation which has an overwhelming non-Christian population. Particularly, the declarations made by the bishops at the pre-election period, i.e. 1959-1960 and other statements issued before and during the nationalization of Catholic schools, deserve a special mention.⁴

The long and comprehensive statements made at the close of the National Synod,⁵ together with the joint pastoral letters and other public statements released by the Sri Lankan bishops, seem to unfold progressively their conscious and concerted pastoral vision to contextualize the church in Sri Lanka.⁶ These public documents therefore contain the programmes visualized, the methods adopted, efforts made and approaches embarked upon by them towards realizing this goal. Although the term contextualization is not explicitly used in any of these documents, its sense and meaning permeate almost all their major statements and declarations⁷ as an inescapable historical exigency.

2. A WIDER BACKGROUND

Viewing this from a wider ecclesial perspective, we find that the Sri Lankan bishops are not alone in this arduous enterprise. A similar missio-pastoral **motif** and thrust are clearly discernible in the churches of many countries of Asia.⁸ In fact, the origin and spread of Christianity in the Asian continent and the current problems of survival and continuity, coupled with a search for indigenous identity are among the common traits that the Sri Lankan Catholic communities share with several other local churches of Asia.

As a vital ecclesiological task, contextualization gained rapid acceleration in the contemporary Asian missionary context due to the currents of religiously motivated nationalisms⁹ prevailing there almost at the same time as post-conciliar renewal began to exude into the ecclesial terrain. Thus, the socio-political climes warmed up by the indigenous religio-cultural resurgence provided a salubrious climate for a very productive ecclesial renewal. Whether the pastors, theologians and missionaries utilized this potential with a right form of discernment and judgement remains an issue of critical study and examination.

Furthermore, certain recent trends in missionary approaches confirm that contextualization as envisaged today is pastoral in inception, socio-cultural in motivation and ecclesiological in practical application. Perhaps for the same reasons, contextualization and its popular Catholic counterpart "inculturation"¹⁰ have elicited creative responses not only from the Asian churches but also from those of Africa and Europe.¹¹

B. CONTEXTUALIZATION: THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

Within the past two decades the concepts of "adaptation," "accommodation," "localization," "indigenization," and "inculturation"¹² have wielded considerable influence in Roman Catholic theology. There is also a gradual refinement and evolution as to the pattern of transformation they demand or signify. As observed by Robert Schreiter, a leading North American Catholic exponent of contextual theology, these terms and their contents express a "new shift in perspective"¹³ that is said to be clearly discernible in contemporary theology.

According to him, this "shift in perspective" has been prompted by several factors, not least among them being, the growing popularity of the Latin American "theology of liberation," the inadequacies of Western or North American theologies to respond to the multi-cultural and multi-religious circumstances of the non-Christian East and the new questions and concerns vigorously unfolding in the churches of the Southern hemisphere concerning their cultural, ecclesial and missionary identity.¹⁴

Terms like adaptation, indigenisation and inculturation, which preceded the advent of contextualization also confirm, that the theological process these terms strove to signify are far more dynamic and complex, than what these terms sought to contain individually or collectively. This can be further ascertained from the manifold definitions and descriptions

attributed to these terms.¹⁵ But what we can infer from this is that the frequent use of these terms, helped to make explicit a search and a struggle that was implicit within the young churches of the mission lands. These churches strove to re-discover their socio-cultural identity and sought to give a theological legitimation to their quest for authenticity and originality. To elucidate our contention we shall briefly examine here, some of these terms that have become prominent in recent missio-theological writings. After tracing and establishing the inseparable link between these notions and the process of "contextualization," we shall explain our reasons for retaining the concept of "contextualization."

1. ADAPTATION

"Adaptation" was the foremost pastoral and missionary programme that dominated the decade immediately following the council.¹⁶ All the changes and reforms introduced into the liturgical, magisterial, ministerial and missionary life of the Church during this phase were subsumed under the notion of "adaptation." The theological principle of adaptation is said to lie within the mystery of the incarnation.¹⁷ Those who promoted or advocated adaptation in the early 1960s argued that "adaptation," as a theological model for missio-pastoral renewal, has a solid foundation in both ecclesiology and Christology.¹⁸ Both in theory and practice adaptation pointed to the efforts made by the different local churches to replace their alien characteristic traits with elements borrowed from the local cultures. It began with the translation of the catechetical and liturgical texts into the vernacular languages. In actual pastoral practice "adaptation" gave the impression of making some temporary adjustments or modifications, in certain aspects of liturgical worship. Despite the dynamism attributed to this process it did not aim at making any substantial changes in the pattern of ecclesial life. In the course of time the notion of adaptation received a wider significance, in that it paved the way for a more creative mode of ecclesial presence and missionary activity by awakening in the local churches a new sense of social solidarity and cultural identity.

2. INDIGENIZATION

With the dawn of the 1970s the word adaptation gradually shrunk into oblivion in the Catholic theological and missiological circles of Asia and Africa and was quickly replaced by a more "land-oriented" notion of "indigenization."

"Indigenous, indigeneity and indigenization; are derived from a nature metaphor, that is, of the soil, or taking root in the soil."¹⁹ Hence, this term pointed to something "growing out of the natural environment," "native as opposed to foreign or exotic."²⁰ The process expressed by this term placed profound emphasis on the critical and respectful recognition, assimilation and internalization by the local churches of the social and religio-cultural components of a specific **locus**, region or nation, in order that these churches grounded on the mystery of incarnation may become truly and fully native—in their life, mission, forms of worship, expression of faith, theological formulation and other pastoral enterprises. The political independence attained by several nations of the third world, from various European colonial powers added a new impetus to this process of transformation.

Indigenization was systematically initiated by certain protestant theologians in the early part of the nineteenth century,²¹ to ensure the efficiency of their ministry of evangelization and to emphasize the need for cultivating a healthy interaction, between the evangelizing churches and their host cultures. Hence Christian worship, celebration of the sacraments, proclamation of the word, catechetical instructions, ecclesial ministry and spirituality were pointed out as areas that require a creative cultural integration. In keeping with the spirit of the times, efforts were also undertaken to promote indigenous forms of Christian music, literature, art, decoration and architecture.

In order to strengthen this process, the "three self" formula²² was proposed as an indispensable evangelizational prelude. This "three-self" formula, i.e., "self-support," "self-government," and self-propagation" sums up the motives

and goals of indigenization and it continues to give elan and inspiration to those who sincerely seek to promote an indigenized church.²³

A similar movement towards indigenization was attempted within the Catholic Church in some parts of Asia around the early part of the 17th century. This movement, has left indelible imprints in the ecclesiastical history of this region. For example the missionary efforts and enterprises of Matteo Ricci (1552 - 1610) in China, of Roberto de Nobili (1557 - 1656) and Giuseppe Beschi (1680 - 1746) or **Veeramamunivar**²⁴ in South India are viewed and interpreted today as heroic attempts at indigenization.²⁵ These missionaries in spite of their western cultural identity, showed a profound respect for the native religio-cultural ethos in contrast to the negative judgements of the institutional church. They manifested a remarkable openness toward the religious beliefs, rituals and doctrines and the complex philosophical systems that characterized those religions. Even the audacious missionary methods employed by the oratorian priests, Joseph Vaz²⁶ (1651 - 1711) and Jacome Gonsalves²⁷ (1627 - 1742) in many parts of Sri Lanka during their missionary endeavours in the mid-seventeenth century are interpreted today as pioneering efforts toward the process of indigenisation.²⁸

In recent years, within the Catholic Church, at an official hierarchical level, the pastoral concern for indigenization became a subject of serious theological reflection and a vital missionary pursuit, especially after the Synod on "Evangelization in the Modern World" held in Rome in 1974.²⁹ At this Synod, the bishops of the Afro-Asian continents strongly underlined the missio-passtoral importance of the process of indigenization. This has been largely due to the fact that prior to the synod, this subject was seriously studied and reflected upon in the continental assemblies such as FABC and AMECEA.³⁰ Among those factors that enhanced the quest for indigenization in the Afro-Asian churches are: the rejuvenation and revitalization of the native and traditional socio-cultural and religious values, the post-colonial aspiration for national identity, the pain of social and cultural alienation

felt by these local churches, the lack of lively dialogue with other religious traditions, and the growing inadequacy of the Western monocultural theological systems to respond to the concrete problems faced by these local churches. All this served as strong incentives for the Afro-Asian bishops to choose the direction of indigenization.

3. INCULTURATION

In recent years "inculturation," has become the viable substitute for "indigenization," even though one finds these two terms being used interchangeably,³¹ in certain missio-theological writings. It is commonly accepted that this term is "Roman Catholic in origin and inspiration."³² Noteworthy is also the fact that in recent years the notion of inculturation has received explicit approbation by the Roman Catholic officialdom.³³ As a matter of fact the ever growing theological and missiological literature on issues pertaining to the different facets of inculturation attests that Catholic theologians and missiologies have been largely responsible for the popularity this term currently enjoys.

Inculturation in its pastoral use and application is closely associated with the different aspects of culture from whence it derives its basic meaning and significance. The explicit efforts made by many theologians in the third world to mediate theological understanding with the help of social and human sciences³⁴ have also strengthened the process of inculturation. As for the western and American theologians,³⁵ inculturation is a lively issue because of their experience of an on-going cultural transformation that characterises their societies and nations.

Culture is the pivotal point of the process of inculturation. Hence one's understanding and perception of culture, determines the direction and focus of inculturation. In social sciences, the concept of culture is given a variety of definitions and descriptions all of which "revolve around the fact that it is the totality of one's way of life in a particular setting."³⁶ Culture, therefore envelopes the whole gamut of realities that circumscribe a particular human and social context or

situation. The notion of culture as employed in the Asian languages embraces also art, architecture, sculpture, music, language and literature, as well as the socio-economic and political structures that go to make a particular social ensemble. Today, the boundaries of culture(s) are further expanded by several factors, some of them being, mass-media, transport, tourism and international trade and commerce.

This dynamic and wholistic view of culture has also helped to widen the horizon of inculturation and its socio-religious boundaries so as to embrace and encompass ecclesial life in all its vicissitudes. Taking all this into consideration, we could describe inculturation as that process of mutual interaction by which the liberative message of the Good News of Jesus Christ enters and perfects the totality of a culture of a given social or national group, while allowing the constituent elements of that culture to give a visible form and enfleshed expression to the Gospel message. The mystery of the incarnation is often invoked as the Christological foundation for inculturation, while the Paschal mystery with its underlying dynamism is seen as the motivating force giving elan and urgency to the process of inculturation.³⁷

In the Asian nations because of the close affinity that interlocks religion with a society-based culture, the process of inculturation has opened new vistas towards inter-religious fellowship. For the present, it is sufficient to say that the cultural renaissance sprouting forth in Asia, during the post-colonial years did serve to buttress the practicable aspects of inculturation initiated by the Asian churches.

4. CONTEXTUALIZATION

(a) CAUSES AND SOURCES OF ITS ORIGIN

Having made a missio-theological investigation of adaptation, indigenization and inculturation it is appropriate at this juncture to enumerate the specific contribution made by these terms in forging and fermenting the meaning and content of contextualization. As observed by us already, at

least in the Roman Catholic Church, the process of "adaptation" is the primary and the original spark that ignited the flame of ecclesial renewal that is being nurtured today through the process of contextualization or inculturation.

The actual implementation of the process of adaptation in the post-conciliar era, unravelled a host of realities in the young churches of Asia. Though indispensable to the mission of the church, these realities, received little or no attention from the church hierarchy in the past, until the torch of adaptation was flashed on them. Native theologians became increasingly conscious that their creativity has been stifled by an uncritical conformism to western theology. Certain disaffection was expressed towards the blind imitation of the West by the young churches in matters of liturgy, ministry and church organization. Besides these, the literal translation and verbatim repetition of the catechetical and other religious instructions in its western linguistic categories and thought patterns, the unquestionable assent to a western monocultural theological system as universally and everlastingly valid, and the widening rupture from native socio-cultural milieu are some of the other poignant findings unearthed as the process of adaptation penetrated into the life and mission of the young churches. In Sri Lanka, these deficiencies were often pointed out by persons from within and without the Sri Lankan church.³⁸

Furthermore, this dynamic transformation experienced by the young churches disclosed that the conceptual connotation of adaptation is blatantly inadequate to cover the entirety of areas that demanded change and modification. The process of adaptation was not strong enough to penetrate the depths of the socio-cultural layers. Then came indigenization with a limited degree of socio-political connotations to fill this conceptual vacuum. But that too had to be given up soon because of its political overtones. Herein lie the practical importance of both contextualization and inculturation.

(b) DEVELOPMENT IN MEANING

As a theological and missiological concept, contextualization was first introduced by Shoki Coe, who headed the team that was entrusted with the Third Mandate programme of the Theological Education Fund (TEF).³⁹ Contextualization as a theological notion came to widespread use following this team's publication of two booklets entitled **Ministry in Context** (1972) and **Learning in Context** (1973). Those who originated this term conceded that it was the conceptual limitations of the existing terms such as indigeneity, indigenous or indigenization that led them to opt for this comprehensive term contextualization. Coe remarked that indigenization was often used in the sense of "responding to the Gospel in terms of a traditional culture."⁴⁰ But contextualization as described by TEF, "takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of the nations in the Third World."⁴¹

In the recent past, contextualization has helped to stir up very creative theological reflection and missiological discussions. Theologians from among the Catholic and several Protestant denominations have addressed themselves to the different challenges and problems related to the process of contextualization.

After having surveyed much literature on the subject, Krikor Halebian culled out the following as problems and concerns most often recurring: (1) the definition of contextualization; (2) its difference from indigenization; (3) the legitimate agents for contextualization; (4) syncretism; (5) the limits of contextualization; (6) the gospel core; (7) hermeneutics.⁴²

His survey discloses two important truths, namely a major portion of the discussions on contextualization has deplorably remained theoretical in context, even though the term came into focus due to pastoral or practical exigencies. Secondly, very little if any attention is paid to the ecclesio-

logical dimension of contextualization or the "contextualization of the church." Rather a considerable section of the debate has centred around forging and evolving a "contextual theology," little realizing that theology in order to be relevant and meaningful to a particular context must grow and mature out of the faith experience of a Christian community living in that context.

The tendency as displayed in many current discussions seems to assume that "contextual" theology can be pre-fabricated in theological laboratories and then be transplanted into different contexts. But we wish to stress the fact that it is the "contextualization of the church" that should realistically and chronologically precede the creation of any "contextual theology." In other words, it is the reality of the local church with its communitarian faith-experience, missionary concerns and pastoral pursuits that should become the matrix of any theology that claims to be truly contextual.

(c) CONTEXT

Before we present a description of what we understand by the terms "contextualization of the church," a brief examination of the words such as context and contextuality which are intrinsically related to contextualization is in order. Etymologically the word context is derived from its Latin kins **contexere** and **contextus**. The former has several meanings such as to join, to hold or to weave together, while the latter which is in the noun form refers to "what is woven together, what is held together as a connected whole."⁴³ Based on this etymological sense the word derives a wider significance at the level of its common use. In relation to a "text," context is seen as "the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning."⁴⁴ Context also stands for "the inter-related conditions in which something exists or occurs."⁴⁵ This could be more concretely spelt out as "one's socio-cultural, religious, political and economic environment."⁴⁶ Hence one finds the use of such terms as "situation," "setting," "milieu" etc. in contemporary theological literature as part of the attempts made to approxi-

mate the elements and dynamism signified by this "all-embracing" concept.

A concrete example can be advanced here to illustrate our point. The ardent concern of liberation theologians, specially in South America, to understand the religious and theological implications of the socio-political and economic functions in their societies is undoubtedly prompted by a context-centred Christian quest. Hence the assertion that "at the heart of the theology of liberation is the affirmation of the 'contextual nature of theology'"⁴⁷ is both valid and well-founded. Because one's realistic rootedness within the context is manifested by the fact that the proper content of theological reflection is culled from the concrete life situation. It cannot be an arbitrary choice of theologians. Rather it is thrust on them by that very same reality within which they seek to articulate meaningfully the core and content of their Christian faith-experience.⁴⁸

(d) CONTEXTUALITY

When the word contextualization was introduced by the Theological Education Fund, a distinction was drawn between "contextuality" and "contextualization," noting that "authentic contextuality leads to contextualization."⁴⁹

Contextuality is explained as:

that critical assessment of what makes the context really significant in the light of **Missio Dei**. It is the missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it. It is the conscientization of the contexts in the particular historic moment, assessing the peculiarity of the context in the light of the mission of the church as it is called to participate in **Missio Dei**.⁵⁰

Three vital issues to be delineated here are, namely "**critical assessment**," "**missiological discernment**" and "**conscientization of the contexts**." In his analysis of his definition R. D. Tano rightly points out that in the actual practical

approach, these three levels begin with conscientization.⁵¹ This term with a resonance of liberation theology indicates a community-centred aspiration for transformation based on actual involvement and participation in a given social context.

In order to effect a relevant transformation it is necessary to determine those elements that need to be changed. Hence, there arises a necessity to critically assess and examine the mode and method of changes to be effected. In this sense "contextuality" becomes a guiding force, a regulating principle and a norm of action leading towards authentic contextualization.

Hence as a working definition we understand contextuality as that critical principle which is employed to assess a particular context in order to determine a suitable and a relevant missiological and ecclesiological orientation to that context, which would eventually lead toward the full and actual realization of the process of contextualization.

5. CONTEXTUALIZATION:

REASONS FOR OUR CHOICE

Our choice of contextualization over other terms used in contemporary missio-theological writings needs to be clarified here. We abandon the term adaptation because it gives the impression of an adjustment that is external or peripheral without penetrating into the very essence of the reality that is being modified or changed. It also points to the nature of change as an external accommodation, rather than a substantial transformation from within. In this way it gives a only pretence of change.

We do not wish to employ the concept of indigenization because it is strongly coloured with elements that seek to lead the mode of change along nationalistic and provincialistic lines. When fostered without proper control it may lead even to narrow-minded parochialism or sectarianism, thus jeopardizing the universal aspect of the local churches. We shall demonstrate this with concrete examples when we present

a critique of the path of transformation opted for by the Sri Lankan bishops. For the present it is sufficient to note that indigenization under the guise of promoting the "native elements" can easily become an obstacle to **progress** if it is allowed unabatedly to resuscitate archaic indigenous elements.

Despite its overwhelming influence on Catholic theology we also hesitate to use the term inculturation. As a missionary principle and methodology it has been a popular slogan in the Asian churches for more than a decade. Our hesitancy to use this term springs from two factors. The first one is the complex reality of culture in which inculturation is grounded, secondly because of the inseparable union that exists between religion and culture in the Asian countries, the process of inculturation has been very often counter productive in the consequences it sought to bring into being. The basic reason for this failure lies in the disregard shown to the non-Christian religious symbolism by ardent inculturationists, who wished only to pluck the cultural meaning from these symbols without paying any attention to the religious sense entwined in them.⁵²

This deficiency of inculturation has been virulently pointed out as a "theological vandalism."⁵³ As observed by Aloysius Pieris, "inculturation of this type smacks of an irreverent disregard for the soteriological matrix of the non-Christian's religious symbolism and it easily lends itself to be interpreted as a disguised form of imperialism."⁵⁴ Hence the suggestion that inculturation be complemented by **enreligionisation**.⁵⁵

Aloysius Pieris also brings out a major theological deficiency entrenched in this form of inculturation by showing that current approaches to inculturation are only a modified or modernized version of the "instrumental theory"⁵⁶, which he says is often taken for granted in western theology, and has been uncritically absorbed in Asia.

Another major weakness that can be attributed to the process of inculturation as it is currently practised, is rooted in its exclusively cult-centred approach. To a large extent

inculturation in theory and practice remained a liturgical or worship-centred phenomenon. Pastors and missionaries made very little efforts to channel this dynamic flow beyond the boundaries of liturgy. Instead of serving as a motivating force of socio-cultural integration of the pastorate of the church, – in many non-Christian lands, inculturation, in theory and practice was invoked only to justify the introduction of a few elements from the non-Christian religious rituals and cultural practises into Christian worship. Due to this narrow, cult-centred approach, the powerful socio-cultural potential of inculturation remained untapped and unexploited. The ecclesiological dimensions of inculturation were overshadowed or subsumed under these cultic overtones.

As a dynamic process of socio-cultural transformation, it had very little or no impact on the social and historical situations of the people. Thus it appeared to be a lop-sided missionary pursuit. Within the Roman Catholic Church, for all practical purposes it only adorned a Latino-Roman liturgical garb with a few indigenous cultural embellishments.

In sum, adaptation, indigenisation and inculturation, in one way or another, failed to enter into a living and transforming relationship with all the elements that constitute a “context” and therefore elicited negative reactions, suspicions and doubts from the non-Christian groups. For instance the remarks of G. Vitanage, a Sri Lankan Buddhist, are representative of the fears entertained by his coreligionists. He states,

The so called indigenization... appears to be a matter of tactics rather than one of appreciation and admiration of things indigenous. In other words it appears to be a camouflage resorted to with a view to breaking down the aperceptive mass of Buddhists and to proselytising them by using the vast financial resources of the Church. It can be likened to the tactics of a chameleon which takes on the colour of the environment in order to deceive its prey.⁵⁷

6. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

The conceptual limitations, pastoral deficiencies and missionary inadequacies of the notions preceding contextualization press for a more comprehensive and an all-inclusive missio-theological approach. Therefore, as a working description, we understand "contextualization of the church," as that process of creative ecclesial presence in which a local church or churches as a community of believers with special emphasis upon the biblical testimony and its subsequent tradition, express, live, proclaim and celebrate their specific Christian faith – experience with an authentic rootedness in the socio-political and religio-cultural milieu of that particular historical moment in which that Christian community finds itself.

The diverse elements implied in this description shall be explained in the course of our development of the theological basis and historical exigencies of the process of contextualization.

C. CONTEXTUALIZATION: HISTORICAL CATALYSTS AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Certain dominant historical forces to which we have made partial allusions in the previous section, are undoubtedly responsible for facilitating the ferment of contextualization as an indispensable missio-pastoral process in contemporary ecclesial life, particularly in the Asian continent. It is essential to demonstrate here, the dynamic role played by these forces in shaping the form, moulding the meaning, and in conditioning the content of the process of contextualization.

For the sake of clarity we shall view the contribution made by these forces from three inter-related aspects, which in our opinion have a particular relevance to our study of the Sri Lankan situation. Our presentation is based on the descending order of their specific impact on contemporary ecclesial life within Asia in general and Sri Lanka in particular.

1. ECCLESIOLOGICAL INCENTIVES

(a) REVIVAL AND RENEWAL AFTER VATICAN II

The ecclesiological revolution characteristic of modern times derives its energy and inspiration from the Second Vatican council. It is imperative therefore that the concept and content of contextualization be viewed, interpreted and understood against the dense background of the tides of renewal generated by the Council and the subsequent Synods of Bishops held in Rome.

The program of **aggiornamento** inaugurated and initiated by the Council has been the power-source of renewal for the Catholic Church in the last two decades. Consequently the years immediately following the Council have been for the churches at various levels, namely, local, diocesan, regional, national and international, years of profound change, reflection and reform. In its true sense of "up-dating" this program of **aggiornamento** has been an effective and an influential catalyst for creative change and transformation in many areas of ecclesial life, mission and ministry.

Especially in those nations where Christians constitute the minority, this process of revival, originating from the Council has not only opened avenues, for new forms of ecclesial presence and mission but has also given birth to new challenges and concerns, which were previously left unnoticed.⁵⁸ From an ecclesiological point of view, this state of affairs, neatly confirms the council's penetrative perception of the Church as a **mystery** that unfolds itself in various dynamic models and imageries.⁵⁹ As a reality that exists in history, the Church is inescapably affected by the ebb and flow of history. As a result, "the self-understanding of the Church has varied considerably along its journey through different epochs and cultures."⁶⁰ This evolution in self-understanding while giving a new elan and urgency to its missionary presence, inevitably affects the Church's specific conception of the way of realizing this same presence, according to the needs and requirements of the different times and places.

(b) THE CHURCH: A SIGN AND SACRAMENT

The profound realization that it is not the Church but the person of Christ who is the centre and pivotal point of the mission and activity of the Church in the world is yet another "self-discovery" of the Church, traceable to the Council.

This discovery led the Church to understand more realistically that her essential mission is to be a visible sign, and an instrument of the grace which unites all people to God and with one another.⁶¹ As a community re-created in Christ, bathed in His Spirit, entrusted with a mission and empowered with His presence, the Church is described by the Council as a sacrament, heralding God's kingdom and summoning all peoples irrespective of the divisions of race and class, colour and creed to share the unity and fellowship affirmed, lived and proclaimed by Christ.

(c) THE LOCAL CHURCH: A VISIBLE SIGN

The understanding of the Church as a visible "sign" and a "sacrament" has far-reaching theological implications and consequences for the evangelizational ministry of the Church especially in reference to the process of contextualization. The Church is said to be a visible and perceptible SIGN. The Universal Church which does not and cannot exist as a visible and perceptible reality in time and space, cannot also be a "visible sign and sacrament of salvation" to the world, but the local churches can and must. And so succinctly stated by Edward Schillebeeckx, "... people belong to the universal church because they belong to a local community."⁶²

Referring to the reality of the Church, the Council affirms in no uncertain terms that "this Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors are themselves called churches in the New Testament."⁶³

Such an assertion further reinforces the concreteness of the Church as manifested and made explicit in and through the numerous local churches. It is not surprising therefore

that contemporary ecclesiology places a strong emphasis on the need to rediscover the role and identity of the Local churches as indispensable to an effective missionary activity.

The "SIGN" aspect of the local churches unveil an important dimension of Christian life. A sign is something that points to a reality other than itself and outside of itself. Spelt out more concretely, a sign becomes functional and relevant by not being self-oriented or self-centred. By definition a sign is directed and oriented toward another. Hence the sign aspect of the Church places the local churches in a precarious position. It constantly invites the church for a **kenotic** or emptying experience and calls for an undoing of all forms of self-centred or self-seeking evangelism.

On the other hand, on a more positive note, a sign has an instructional, directive and orientational function. In order to perform these functions fruitfully, the Church must ceaselessly seek to be a genuine representative of humanity in all its religio-cultural pluriformities and ethno-social diversities. Being a sign demands of the Church that it should not confine itself to a single culture, nation or people as it will mar and mutilate its nature as a "universal sacrament of salvation."⁶⁴

This attitude should summon all local churches to become a real event, by truly incarnating itself in the soil and by entering into the mainstream of social life and expressing its faith and worship from elements drawn from its religio-cultural heritage. In this way each local church should be willing to offer a genuine and self-effacing service in full solidarity, through genuine involvement and participation, in the concrete context.⁶⁵

2. MISSIOLOGICAL EXIGENCIES

(a) CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE WORLD CHURCH

The ecclesiological revolution taking shape in the modern world, particularly in the non-Christian world, has been gauged from a dense missiological perspective by Karl Rahner.

For him, the post-Vatican II Church, in terms of its global presence and mission has inaugurated a new "epoch" in the history of theology.⁶⁶ In his assessment this contemporary missionary presence of the Church, almost in all corners of the world is indicative of an emerging consciousness of the Church as "world-Church."⁶⁷ By world-church Rahner points to an aspect of the Church that is more than a mere geographical presence of the church in all parts of the world. In fact he contends that the Church must be **inculturated** throughout the world if it is to become fully a world Church.⁶⁸

In other words, Rahner emphasizes the fundamental importance of the local churches and the necessity incumbent upon the local churches to be genuinely incarnated in the socio-cultural milieu; so that these local churches would be able re-discover and maintain their specific identity and mission, and would be able to make an unique contribution towards an authentic catholicity by realizing what may be termed as "semiological catholicity" i.e. universality in its function as "SIGN."⁶⁹

The Church becomes universal not only when the Gospel is preached to all people and everywhere, but when the spread of the Gospel permeates, 'purifies and perfects all the realities of the temporal order,⁷⁰ so that with a strong and solid foundation in the mystery of the incarnation, the young churches, may absorb unto themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which are created, purified and saved in the Person of Christ.⁷¹

(b) SITUATIONAL RESPONSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCHES

Many countries of Asia were victims of colonial domination and control since the early part of the sixteenth century. It was during this period that Christianity was brought in as a "potted plant" from Europe and implanted in the Asian socio-cultural soil with hardly any organic interaction with the Asian religio-cultural matrix. Thus following the withdrawal of the colonial powers, i.e. in the post World War II

period, many Christian communities particularly in the African and Asian continents became painfully aware of the glaring social rupture, the cultural alienation and the drifting away from the stream of national life imposed upon them as a result of their membership in the Christian community. These churches felt the urgent need to remedy this situation. This awareness also induced a fresh thinking about the church's missionary presence and activities and demanded innovative patterns of nativisation that would ensure the survival and continuity of Christianity among the teeming millions of non-Christians. Such a process of creative and contextual innovation is bound to change the self-understanding of the Church as well as its traditional image.

The impetus provided by Vatican II which encouraged liturgical celebrations and other community worship in the local idiom and languages and the dwindling numbers of foreign missionaries further eroded the western image of the church in Sri Lanka. This opened up new avenues for more indigenous forms of ecclesial expression.

The leadership exercised by the native bishops and the growing numbers of native priests and religious also facilitated and hastened this process. Within the Catholic church of Sri Lanka, it has been confirmed even by sociological analysis that the abovementioned factors did serve as strong catalysts to the local church in mobilising her to become "progressively indigenized at all levels."⁷² From a theological point of view such a process may even be construed as the inescapable consequence of the historical consciousness manifested within the Church in the post-colonial era.

(c) SOME MISSIONARY AND HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

For the many local churches in the non-Christian lands, this period of renewal witnessed also an active return to the past to seek historical justification for promoting the process of indigenisation.⁷³ Sri Lanka being the test case of our study we could cite here a valid example to prove our point. With the advent of the Dutch (1656 A.D.), and their sub-

sequent conquest of the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka from the control of the Portuguese, the indigenous Catholic communities and their foreign pastors were exposed to a situation fraught with a double-edged hostility.

Namely, on the one hand these Christians had to face the antagonism of their cultural kith and kin, and on the other, the anti-Catholic, Dutch conquerors who brought along with them the tragic features of their politico-religious rivalries with the Portuguese.

It was during this period that the courageous Oratorian missionary, Fr. Joseph Vaz,⁷⁴ from India – himself an Indian Brahmin convert to Catholicism, opted for a radical missionary method that is said to resemble closely the contemporary notion of contextualization or inculturation.⁷⁵ Joseph Vaz was not preaching or theorising on inculturation. He just responded to the needs and exigencies of his times. Assessing properly the double-edged hostility of his troubled times, Fr. Vaz resorted to a pastoral method that enabled the Christian faith to seep deep into the life of the people. Through his originality in the creative use of the vernacular languages and the local religio-cultural expressions, Fr. Vaz pioneered an excellent form of contextualization of Catholicism in Sri Lanka. Impressed by the exceptional fruits produced by this method, his able successor Fr. Jacome Gonsalves continued his missionary endeavours along the steps of his eminent predecessor. It is now claimed that except for these two audacious missionaries Christianity would have quickly faded into oblivion in Sri Lanka.⁷⁶

But at least in the South Asian region, Joseph Vaz was not the sole originator of this missionary venture. The way was already paved by such perceptive pioneers as Matteo Ricci (1552-1610 A.D.) in China, Robert de Nobili (1557-1656 A.D.) and Giuseppe Beschi or **Veeramamunivar** (1680-1747 A.D.) in Southern India.⁷⁷ It is commonplace in contemporary missiology to consider their missionary efforts as audacious attempts at nativisation of the church.

Moreover, the farsighted instructions given to the first two candidates for the episcopate in Indo-china by the then

established "Congregation de Propaganda fide" contains very commendable descriptions of what is referred to today as indigenization or contextualization. It reads in part:

Do not in anyway attempt, and do not on any pretext persuade these people to change their rites, habits and customs, unless they are openly opposed to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country over to China? It is not your country but the faith you must bring, that faith which does not reject or belittle the rites or customs of any nation as long as these rites are not evil, but rather desires that they be preserved in their integrity and fostered. It is, as it were, written in the nature of all men that the customs of their country and especially their country itself should be esteemed, loved and respected above anything else in the world. There is no greater cause of alienation and hatred than to change the customs of a nation, especially when they go back as far as the memory of ancestors can reach . . .⁷⁸

3. SOCIO-POLITICAL AND RELIGIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

(a) POST INDEPENDENCE NATIONALISM

After a long spell of colonial domination and subjugation many nations of the Asian continent emerged to a new life of political and cultural freedom, in the post-World War II period. The new sense of nationalism that sustained their quest for freedom, found diverse forms of articulation following the attainment of political independence. In many countries of Asia, the native Christians as a religious group did not agitate or join in the struggles for political independence. On the contrary their religious affiliations induced them to co-operate with the colonial powers, in what was judged by non-Christians as anti-national activities. It cannot be denied also that under colonial rule, Christians as a religious group were able to enjoy a certain amount of state patronage, privi-

lege and protection – a fact that was acknowledged by the Sri Lankan bishops nearly two decades after political independence.⁷⁹ But in the social realm this alliance widened the gulf between the native Christians and the followers of other religions. The leadership realized the need to consciously dissociate itself from this colonial legacy. Today, in order to compensate for this “unpatriotic past” of pre-independent times, Christian leaders and authorities display a sympathetic attitude toward these nationalistic movements. Christians have avowed to uphold the national image by opting to immerse themselves into the national stream with all its socio-cultural currents of resurgence. This nationalistic enthusiasm reveals that the church of Sri Lanka sees its foreign character as something to be shed away in order to put on a new image and identity.

(b) CULTURAL RESURGENCE

Political independence from colonial rule served as a strong catalyst for the resurgence and revitalization of native religions and cultures. Such cultural elements as art, music, architecture, language, literature, etc. began to develop and blossom with a new fervour. But in contradistinction to this attitude, until the post-conciliar period Christian communities continued to foster the borrowed elements of western cultures. The music, art, forms of worship, songs and hymns, religious customs and celebrations openly showed a cultural cleavage. Now there is a strong tendency to overcome this gulf and to enter the stream of the native socio-cultural life. Here again the process of contextualization has a dual role, namely of enriching the specific Christian content and of enlivening as well as challenging the local cultures with Christian values. Those oppressive elements such as caste distinctions, racial prejudices, inequality of women, dowry system etc. are yet other areas that need to be challenged and purified by the Gospel.

(c) REJUVENATION OF OTHER RELIGIONS

In the colonial period the spread of Christianity, with the tacit or direct support of the Western colonial powers,

was perceived by non-Christians as posing a formidable threat to the native religio-cultural traditions of Asia. Hence the religious elite initiated a process of rejuvenation by correcting and modifying some of the malpractices of their respective religions and reforming them according to the needs and exigencies of their times. In Sri Lanka, there are ample evidences to this effect. Both among Buddhists and Hindus, there emerged religious reformers filled with the fervour of restoring their respective religions to their rightful place. They did this by internalizing and integrating into their religions some of the positive elements found in Christianity.⁸⁰ They used these elements to their advantage to reform their religious practices or to rejuvenate their religious spirit.

For instance, the orderliness of Christian worship, their organizational efficiency, hierarchical structure, method of preaching and giving catechetical instructions were among some of the elements that both Buddhism and Hinduism absorbed and integrated to a certain degree into their respective religious professions and practice.

(d) THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE

But today the converse seems to take place. Other religions feel a sense of firmness and stability, whereas Christianity, because of its perceived Western orientation and its actual minority status amidst teeming millions of non-Christians, feels the need for a more meaningful religio-cultural integration and social incorporation. Inter-religious harmony and co-ordination supported by a sound form of dialogue in such a context becomes a practical and situational necessity rather than a theoretical or scholarly quest. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Catholic hierarchy came to the realization that inter-religious dialogue will be ineffectual unless the church in its efforts and activities entered into full solidarity with the whole trajectory of the contextual, socio-cultural ensemble.⁸¹

The wrongful and condemnatory judgements⁸² that had been pronounced by the church against the followers

of other religions in the past was yet another factor that prompted this positive initiative. This unhappy past characterized by deep scars with hurtful memories is yet to be healed in toto.

D. CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION: INCARNATION AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

In seeking to identify the origin and meaning of the process of contextualization, we explained in the preceding pages the ecclesiological, missiological and socio-religious factors as three major catalysts of contextualization. We stated that these three factors are inter-related to a certain degree. Now we shall focus our attention on the theological models and principles from which all these factors derive their sustenance.

1. THE USE OF MODELS IN THEOLOGY

In the post conciliar era it has become common place to understand or interpret theological realities by using the analogy of models. Avery Dulles has successfully demonstrated in two of his major works,⁸³ the feasibility of using models to interpret or understand theological realities. In the last two decades, many Protestant and Catholic theologians who have expounded the methods and approaches to contextualization or contextual theology have evolved various models to justify and substantiate their positions. In the realm of contextualization, the increasing interest in the use of models or methodological types in contemporary theology unveils a significant truth. First of all it indicates a clear shift in the way of doing theology. Secondly, it indirectly expresses that the method and content of theology should be liberated from the confines of monocultural expressions in order to facilitate its contextual relevance. Thirdly, the growing concern for contextual theologies has demanded a praxis-oriented and an inter-disciplinary approach. Fourthly, contextual theologies seek not only a new way of understanding theology but with equal emphasis they look for a

motivation that leads towards transforming action⁸⁴ in the church and in society.⁸⁵ In recent years, context-centred theological experiments and reflections have brought in a laudable wealth of insights on the models and methods of theology and theologising.⁸⁶

2. MODELS IN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Having surveyed a cross-section of some contemporary theological literature on contextualization and related issues, Stephen Bevans considers the following models as largely representative of and operative in contemporary theologies on contextualization.

The “anthropological” model, which lays particular stress on listening to culture; the “translation” model, which lays stress on the message of the Gospel and the preservation of Church tradition; the “praxis” model which sees as a primary **locus theologicus** the phenomena of social change, particularly the change called for by a struggle for justice; the “synthetic” model which attempts to mediate the above three by employment of an “analogical imagination”; the “semiotic” model which attempts to listen to a culture by means of semiotic cultural analysis; the “transcendental” model, a meta-model which focuses not on theological content but on subjective authenticity within theological activity.⁸⁷

These manifold models enumerated here bring to light some of the significant dimensions of the process of contextualization. What is relevant for our purpose here is that while differing among themselves in their specific emphasis, all these models possess two common traits. Namely they portray contextualization as a dynamic meeting and merging of the unique faith-content of the church with the concrete socio-cultural ensemble. Secondly, they illustrate that it is from this dynamic, dialectical interaction that an authentic ecclesial contextualization comes to birth.

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF INCARNATION

Despite the plurality of models proposed or advocated by Protestant and Catholic theologians there is a remarkable consensus regarding the basic biblical and theological principle that underlies these models as their source and support. When the Council explained the need for adaptation it invoked the the mystery of incarnation as the dynamic and inspiring base.⁸⁸ But the Council did not explore in depth the method and mode of translating this mystery in a concrete ecclesial context.

Since the close of the Council, Catholic theologians who set about to promote the process of indigenization and inculturation have appealed to the mystery of the incarnation as a valid theological model and pattern.⁸⁹

Protestant theologians who strongly advocated a missio-theological form of contextualization also sought to ground their arguments on the intrinsic dynamism of the mystery of the incarnation. Commenting on the "Contextualization of the Gospel,"⁹⁰ René Padilla states that "God has contextualized himself in Jesus Christ," and he adds that "the incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God's intention to make himself known from within the human situation."⁹¹ Shoki Coe, who was among the pioneers who originated the term "contextualization," asserts that "incarnation is the divine form of contextualization."⁹² R. D. Tano understands contextualization as a theological necessity demanded by the incarnation of the word.⁹³

Samuel Rayan's description of God's incarnational presence in Christ as a dynamic model for inculturation is summarily representative of the views held by many Catholic and Protestant authors. He explains:

Jesus was not simply God's Eternal word in a particular cultural clothing. He was deeply historical, densely human reality, a sharer in our bodily existence and earthly conditions, flesh of our flesh, man among men, like us in all things though never sinning, never closing himself

to God. His body was of this earth. It was not made of incorruptible star-dust in heavenly places and then imported here. In coming to dwell among us Jesus was not adapting or inculturating anything to anything. He was just being himself among his people.⁹⁴

Reflecting on the principle of incarnation from the context of the Philippine church, José de Mesa states that:

Fidelity to the Lord demands of the Church to follow the example of the Word of God in becoming human. This is what, in fact, the Church clearly intends to do when in her decree regarding missionary activity she explicitly states that she is acting "in imitation of the plan of the incarnation" (A.G. 22). It would violate the demand that the Word be made flesh if Christianity were treated as an abstract essence in any culture.⁹⁵

The extra-ordinary flexibility evidenced in the early Christian era with regard to theological, liturgical and ministerial expressions clearly reveal that the believing communities sought to integrate themselves creatively "into the variegated socio-cultural structures of the Mediterranean world."⁹⁶ The examples set by the early Christians bear courageous witness to their contextual openness and creativity. In his effort to interpret Christ's incarnation from a world religious perspective Paul Knitter argues that for St. Paul, Christ's incarnation in Christians was more important than God's incarnation in Christ.⁹⁷ In this context the mystery of Christ's incarnation has a significant ecclesiological implication, i.e. the unity and oneness of Christianity should be sought in the person of Christ and should not be reduced to the mere establishment of a uniformity in such external elements and expressions as liturgy, culture, language etc.

4. THE DYNAMISM OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

Another significant Christological mystery that should be seen as constitutive of the theology of contextualization is the "resurrection" of Christ. The dynamic implications of the entirety of the Paschal mystery on the process of eccle-

sial contextualization is hardly developed in theological writings.⁹⁸ But those who made an attempt to develop the inner dynamism of incarnation in the glowing light of Easter, rightly claim that it is through the mystery of Christ's resurrection that his incarnational involvement attains its completion and fullness. Samuel Rayan explains that "by resurrection, Jesus is released from the confines of local particularity in order to become really present to the whole of history. It is the fullness of his bodily commitment to historical human existence."⁹⁹ Briefly it can be said that while the mystery of Christ's incarnation provides the principle and model of contextualization, the mystery of his resurrection provides the energy and dynamism that is needed to realize this process.

5. THE DIALECTICS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION: CHURCH AND CONTEXT

It has been stated by us already that our specific focus in this study deals with the contextualization of the church. In this connection we also emphasized that any theology which claims to be authentically contextual should emerge from within the matrix of a contextualized church. From the perspective of evangelization Rene Padilla enunciated a similar conviction when he said that "the Contextualization of the Gospel can never take place apart from the contextualization of the Church."¹⁰⁰

Consisting of human individuals the church is constituted of men and women who share the dynamism and limitations of a particular social structure, a political system and a cultural heritage. In this sense all churches are by their very existence "local" churches,¹⁰¹ i.e. churches "in" a particular place. But the point at issue is whether they are also local churches "of" that place. It is here that the process of ecclesial contextualization enters, by inviting the church to evaluate itself with the principle of incarnation and to examine itself in the resplendent light of the Paschal mystery. This would

enable the local churches to recapture their primordial ecclesial content. It thereby facilitates the church's rediscovery of its communitarian image in all its pluriform dimensions. It also sharpens the church's intrinsic nature as a community that is saved and re-created in Christ and strengthens the church's extrinsic function as a sign and sacrament of this same salvation promised in Christ. Because the church should constantly test its realistic relevance by asking itself "whether it is an institution of the gnostic type, that is, one whose function is to transmit saving knowledge, or whether it is a people who continue the saving action"¹⁰² of Christ. When this saving action is truly manifested by a local church through its very presence as a "sign and sacrament" and when the same is rightly perceived, understood and interpreted by those outside of the church, then it can rest assured that it has authentically commenced the process of contextualization. With these ideas at the backdrop we shall now investigate the diverse components that are constitutive of the Sri Lankan nation. We shall also draw attention to the contextual and historical presence and activity of the church in this nation which has a non-Christian population of over 90%.

NOTES

1. For more on this see, Bruce C. E. Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology: An Evangelical Assessment*, William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1980, p. 3ff; Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1985, p. 2ff; D. S. Gilliland, (Ed.), *The Word Among us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, Word Publishing Inc., Dallas, Texas, 1989, 344pp. and D. J. Hesselgrave and E. Rommen, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods and Models*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI., 1989, 281 pp. Also Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1992, 146 p.

2. For an updated bibliography on inculturation, contextualization and related topics, see *Inculturazione e Formazione Salesiana: Dossier dell'incontro di Roma 12-17 Settembre 1983*, Angelo Amato and Andrzej Strus, (eds.), pp. 419-447 (This book contains over a 100 entries of books and articles published in Asia, Africa and Latin America) and *Theologie im Kontext*, a Bibliographical collection on Contextualization and related topics published by the Institute of Missiology, Aachen, since 1980. Also John C. England, "Contextual Theology in Asian Countries: A Selected Annotated Bibliography" in *Ching Feng: Quarterly Notes on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture*, Vol. 27 (1984), pp. 217-232.

3. Hereinafter referred to simply as 'the Council' or 'Vatican II'.
4. For more on this see, Tissa Balasuriya, "The Ceylonese Experience" in *Jeevadhara*, 3 (1963), No. 13, pp. 82-95 and N. Abeyasingha, "The 1960-1961 Schools' Crisis in Ceylon" in *ZMR*, 60 (1976), p. 217ff.
5. In order to implement in Sri Lanka, the programme of renewal launched by the Council, the Catholic hierarchy of Sri Lanka convened a "National Pastoral Council cum National Synod in 1968-69. For more details see, Frank, Marcus Fernando, "Introduction" in ASPSCC, pp. 1-6.
6. The vision of the bishops is clearly discernible in some of their joint pastoral letters, statements and other declarations. See for instance, PS, pp. 3-4; PSM, pp. 76-77; ASPSCC, pp. 13-17, 21-30; ECNE, pp. 1-2; SBMS, 284-286 and TRSLN, pp. 23-39.
7. The manner in which the Sri Lankan bishops have addressed themselves to issues concerning the socio-political, economic and religio-cultural situation of Sri Lanka reflects their contextual concerns and approaches. Ample evidence to this is found in ASPSCC, pp. 13-19; SBMS, pp. 284-286 and TRSLN, pp. 20-37.
8. See John C. England, "Contextual Theology in Asian Countries" in *Ching Feng*, 27 (1984), p. 217ff.
9. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia, The Church in Asia: Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission Community and Ministry 1970-1983*, Vol. 1, Texts and Documents, IMC Publications, Manila, 1984, p. 12 also D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Gospel and Culture: Evangelization and Inculturation*, NBCLC, Bangalore, 1978, p. 9.
10. Even a cursory survey of the theological literature on the subject of "Inculturation" would confirm that this term has been overwhelmingly used by Catholic theologians. See for instance *Inculturazione e Formazione Salesiana...*, pp. 419-447.
11. Of the many edited works published following the seminars and conferences organized at National and International levels are: *Evangelizzazione e Culture: Attidel Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia*, 5-12, Ottobre, 1975, Pontificia Universita Urbaniana, 3 Vols., Roma, 1976. "International Colloquium on Contextual Theology" in *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. 14, no. 40, 1979, 212p. And Peter Fernando, (ed.), *Inculturation in Seminary Formation*, Ishvani Kendra, Pune, 1980, 149p. M. Amaladoss et. al. (eds.), *Theologizing in India*, TPI, Bangalore, 1981, 445p. Claude Geffre, (ed.), *Theologie et choc des Cultures: Colloque de l'Institut Catholique de Paris*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1984, 190p.
12. "acculturation" and "localisation" are among other words used by certain theologians to denote this process of reform. Cf. for instance, D.S.

Amalorpavadass, *Destinee de l'Eglise dans l'Inde d'aujourd'hui*, ISPC, Fayard-Mame, Paris, 1967, esp. pp. 217-259. With more socio-political overtones, the word "contemporization" is used to express the same notion in **J. Moltmann**, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, SCM Press, London, 1974, p. 317.

13. Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* ..., pp. 1-3.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5.

15. For a more recent study on this subject see Ary Roest Crollius and T. Nkeramihigo, "What is so New about Inculturation", Centre "Cultures and Religions" Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1984, 54p. see esp. pp.2-9.

16. See Avery R. Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation*, Doubleday & Co. Inc., Garden City, New York, 1977, esp. pp. 10-29.

17. "... in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (Cf. Ps. 2:8). From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator" Decree of the Missionary Activity of the Church, art. 22ff.

18. D. S. Amalorpavadass explains, "In taking our nature, in making himself one of us, and in coming to save mankind, Christ has assumed, redeemed and integrated all that is human, not only the individuals but also the whole material reality, every civilisation and culture, every form of thought, all religions, all that go to make up man and all that man makes, all human existence and all human activity, every creation of God, particularly every expectation of and search for God and for salvation. Christ has restored everything, saved every-thing has marked everything with the sign of the Cross, has brought everything to its fulfilment by integrating everything in the march of the redeemed humanity towards the father, through the Spirit in the current of the trinitarian charity. Thus in the mystery of the Incarnation and of the universal Redemption, we find the foundation of every adaptation, and in Christ we have the perfect model of missionary adaptation" *Destinee de l'Eglise* ..., pp. 258-259.

19. Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education", in *Theological Education*, 9 (1973), p. 240.

20. See Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, Mo. 1953, p. 1. As quoted by Rodriogo D. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting: A Case Study in the Contextualization of Theology*, New Day Publishers, Quezon City, 1981, p. 7.
21. See, Kaj Baggo, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, CISRS, Bangalore 1969, 214pp. Also M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, CISRS, Bangalore, 1970, esp. pp. 58-155.
22. This formula was introduced in the 1850s by Rufus Anderson a Congregationalist and Henry Venn, an Anglican. See Peter Beyerhaus, "The Three Selves Formula - Is It Built on Biblical Foundations?" in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley, (eds.), William Carey Library, Pasadena, Calif., 1979, pp. 15ff. Also Tom N. Wisley, "Towards a Dynamic Indigenous Church", in *Ibid*, p. 208.
23. See Peter Beyerhaus, "The Three Selves Formula - Is It Built .." pp. 15ff. Rodrigo D. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting ...*, p. 52 And S. J. Emmanuel, *Recognizing the Faceless Minister*, Lake House Printers, Colombo, 1978, pp. 95-99. Here the author advocates the need to apply this formula to the ecclesiological realm of ministries. Krikor Haleblan, "The Problem of Contextualization" in *Missiology*, 11 (1983), p. 97 and Tissa Balasuriya, *Planetary Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1984, p. 11.
24. See D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Destinee de l'Eglise ...*, p. 227.
25. See *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227 also Claude Champagne, "Foi et Cultures a la lumiere du passe" dans *Kerygma*, 19 (1985), No. 44, esp. pp. 34-57.
26. See S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches: Ceylon Church History*, The Catholic Book Depot, Colombo, 1962, pp. 89-109. For a more detailed study see also S. G. Perera, *Life of Ven. Fr. Joseph Vaz*, The Catholic Book Depot, Colombo, 1943.
27. See S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches ...*, pp. 110-120, also Robrecht, Boudens, *The Catholic Church Under Dutch Rule*, Catholic Book Agency Rome, 1957, esp. pp. 173-175.
28. See Filomena Giese, "Fr. Joseph Vaz and the Image of the Goan Catholics" in *Vidyayoti*, 45 (1985), pp. 73-86. The author in her effort to disprove the prevailing perception that the Goan Catholics in India are very westernised, makes copious references to the missionary methods adopted by Fr. Joseph Vaz and argues that the missionary enterprises of Fr. Vaz contain many valuable insights to understand the concept of indigenization or inculturation. A similar claim is also advanced by Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1979, pp. 103-107.

29. In his critical review and appraisal of the Synod's proceedings, Rene Laurentin presents the discussions concerning indigenization. See his *L'Evangélisation après le IV^e synode*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1975, esp. pp. 64-66 and 169-172. Also D. S. Amalorpavadass who was one of the two special-secretaries at this Synod confirms this in his *Gospel and Culture: Evangelization and Inculturation*, NBCLC, Bangalore, 1978, p. 9. Also Joseph A. Komonchak, "La Realisation de L'Eglise en un lieu" dans *La Reception de Vatican II*, G. Alberigo et J. P. Jossua, (eds.), Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1985, esp. pp. 116-124.

30. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All The Peoples of Asia ...*, esp. p. 16, and also "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC, p. 29. See also *Africa's Bishops and the World Church: Relevant Documents of the Roman Synod of 1974*-AMECEA Publications, Nairobi, pp. 20ff. And M. Pasynia, "Inculturation du Message a lexemble du Zaire, Conference au conseil missionnaire" allemand lors de son Congres a Wurzburg, 7-9 juin, 1978, *Spiritus*, No. 74, 1979, pp. 93ff

31. See D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Gospel and Culture ...*, pp. 33 also Aloysius Pieris, "Inculturation in Non-Semitic Asia", in *The Month*, March 1986, pp. 83-87.

32. Aloysius Pieris, "Western Models of Inculturation: How Far are they Applicable in Non-Semitic Asia" in *EAPR*, 22 (1985), p. 117, See Ary A. Roest Crollius, "What is so New about Inculturation?" in *Gregorianum*, 59 (1978) p. 722, footnote no. 3.

33. See, John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation: Catechesi Tradendae*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome, 1979, no. 53, Id., *Apostolic Exhortation: Familiaris Consortio*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome, 1981, no. 10, Id., *Encyclical Epistle: Slavorum Apostoli*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome, 1985, no. 21 Also *Synod Report: The Final Report and Message to the People of God of the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops Rome, 24 November - 8 December, 1985*, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1986, p. 21 and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome, 1986, art. 96.

34. See "Final Statement of the Fifth EATWOT Conference, New Delhi, Aug. 17-29, 1981" in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, V. Fabella and S. Torres, (eds.), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1983, pp. 198-199. Also Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, trans., M. J. O'Connell, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1984, pp. 18-23.

35. See Ary A. R. Crollius, "What is so New about Inculturation ..." p. 736. Roger D. Haight, "The Established Church as Mission: The Relation of the Church to the Modern World" in *The Church as Mission*, James H. Provost, (ed.), Canon Law Society of America, Washington D.C., 1984, pp. 23-25. Also "Workshop: Inculturation and the World Church" in

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36. Richard P. Hardy, *Ating Mga Kapatid: A Spirituality of the CBCP* Maryhill School of Theology, Quezon City, 1984, p. 57.

37. See D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Gospel and Culture* ..., pp. 17-21, 33-40; also A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, "Some Thoughts on Inculturation" in *Vaidikamitram*, 12, (1979), pp. 3-11. For a fuller treatment of the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions of inculturation, see the special issue of *Jeevadhara* on "inculturation", 6 (1976), No. 33, pp. 255-320.

38. See Tissa Balasuriya, "The National Synod", in *Quest*, 1 (1966), esp. pp. 185-187 and "The Draft Documents Prepared for the National Synod" in *Quest*, 25 & 26 (1968), pp. 142-147, 153-155. *After Vatican II* ..., pp. 14-15 22-27. See also S. Arasaratnam, "The Christians of Ceylon and Nationalist Politics" in *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times*, G. A. Oddie, (ed.), Manohar, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 172-179. Also K. M. de Silva, (ed.), *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, C. Hurst & Co., London, 1977, p. 395.

39. The TEF was a sponsored agency of the World Council of Churches and it worked under the administration of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism. "Each mandate period has consisted of approximately five years of funding activity with two-year intervals for study and reflection." See Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education", in *TE*, 9 (1972), p. 233

40. *Ibid.*, p. 240

41. Theological Education Fund, *Ministry in Context*, Bromley, Kent, 1972, p. 20

42. Krikor Haleblian, "The Problem of Contextualization" in *Missiology*, 11 (1983), p. 96

43. See "Editorial", in *IRM*, 61 (1972), p. 321

44. K. Haleblian, "The Problem of Contextualization ...", p. 96

45. *Id.*

46. See Editorial, in *IRM*, 61 (1972), p. 321

47. H. M. Conn, "Contextualization: Where Do We Begin?" in *Evangelicals and Liberation*, C. E. Armerding, (ed.), Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., Nutley, N.J., 1977, p.90
48. See, Jon Sobrino, *The True Church ...*, p. 4
49. See Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal ...", p. 241
50. *Id.*
51. R. D. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine ...*, p. 51
52. See Aloysius Pieris, "Western Models of Inculturation: How Far are They Applicable in non-Semitic Asia?", in *EAPR*, 22 (1985), pp. 117-119
53. *Ibid.*, p. 118
54. *Id.*
55. *Ibid.*, p. 117
56. *Id.*
57. As quoted in Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 53-54
58. See Karl Rahner, *Concern for the Church: Theological Investigations XX*, Tr. Edward Quinn, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1981, p. 79. Also R. J. Schreiter, *Constructing local Theologies ...*, pp. 2-5
59. See, Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Doubleday, New York, 1974, pp. 19-86
60. Roger D. Haight, "The Established Church as Mission ...", p. 4
61. See *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, art. 1 & 8
62. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden, Crossroad, N.Y., 1981, p. 73
63. See *Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, art. 26 and *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, arts. 19-22
64. See A. J. V. Chandrakathan, "Evangelization in the Multicultural and Pluri-religious Context of Sri Lanka" in *Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 75 (1991), No. 2, esp. 142-149

65. *Ibid.*, p. 141
66. Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II", in *AFER*, 22 (1980), p. 328
67. *Ibid.*, p. 323ff.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 325
69. A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, "Evangelization in the Multi-Cultural ..." art. cit., p. 146
70. See D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Main Problems ...*, p. 10
71. See, Colossians 1: 6-16 and *Ad Gentes, Missionary Activity of the Church*, art. 22
72. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church in Historical Perspective" in *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, ed., James Manor, Croom Helm Ltd., London, 1984, p. 201
73. See D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Destinee de l'Eglise ...*, p. 227 and Samuel Rayan, "Inculturation and the Local Church" in *Mission Studies*, 3 (1986), No. 2, pp. 14 - 15.
74. See N. Abeyasingha, *The Radical Tradition: The Changing Shape of Theological Reflection in Sri Lanka*, The Ecumenical Institute, Colombo, 1985, pp. 26 - 34.
75. See *Id.* and Filomena Giese, "Fr. Joeeph Vaz ...," pp. 75 - 80.
76. See B. Deogupillai (Bishop of Jaffna), "Joseph Vaz: A Hero Who Saved the Church of Sri Lanka" in *The Catholic Guardian*, (in Tamil), June 12 & 19, 1987, pp. 2 - 3.
77. See D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Destinee de l'Eglise ...*, p. 227ff. Also Claude Champagne, "Foi et Cultures" pp. 37 - 40 and 47 - 56
78. Josef Neuner et al., (eds.), *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, The Mercier Press, Dublin, 1973, p. 294.
79. In the Synodal declaration the bishops stated frankly that "the final stage of colonialism regarded the Church with certain benevolence." See ASPSCC, p. 22.
80. See K. Malalgoda, "Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka" in *Religion South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval And Modern Times*, G. A. Oddie, (ed.), Manohar

- New Delhi, 1977, p. 184 also **S. J. Tambiah**, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London, 1986, pp. 69, and 107 - 108 also **K. Kailasapathy**, *Illakiya Cinthanikal* The Kumaran Press, Colombo, 1983, p. 34.
81. **ASPSCC**, pp. 26 - 28; **SBMS**, pp. 284 - 285 **TRSLN**, pp. 20 - 26, 37 - 38
 82. **F. Houtart**, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, TPI, Bangalore, 1974, pp. 114 - 115.
 83. See **Avery Dulles**, *Models of the Church . . .*, pp. 19 - 108 and **Id.**, *Models of Revelation*, Image Books, Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1985, pp. 19 - 130.
 84. See **Harvie M. Conn**, "Contextualization: Where Do We Begin? . . . pp. 110 - 110 and **A. M. Varaprasadam**, "Theology Must Happen . . . in *Theologising in India . . .*, pp. 164 - 175 and **Jon Sobrino**, *The True Church and the Poot . . .*, pp. 20 - 21 and 256.
 85. See **Dermot A. Lane**, *Foundations for A Social Theology: Praxis Process and Salvation*, Paulist Press, New York, 1984, pp. 6 - 24. 110 - 129 and **Roger Haight**, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology*, Paulist Press, New York, 1985, pp. 40 - 41.
 86. The following works present a synthesis and critique of some of the major trends in context-centred theology. See **M. Amaladoss et al.** (eds.), *Theologising in India . . .*, pp. 23 - 438; **Roger Haight**, *An Alternative Vision . . .*, esp. pp. 43 - 204 **Charles Davis**, *Theology and Political Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, pp. 51 - 130 and **Edward Schillebeeckx**, *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual Ethical and Political Dimensions*, Crossroad, New York, 1987, pp. 2 - 84.
 87. **Stephen Bevans**, "Models in Contextual Theology," in *Missiology* 13 (1985), No. 2, p. 186.
 88. See, *Ad Gentes, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, arts. 10, 15, 19 & 22.
 89. See **D. S. Amalorpavadass**, *Gospel and Culture . . .*, pp. 18 - 21, **Samuel Rayan**, "Flesh of India's Flesh" in *Jeevadhara*, May - June 1976, No. 33 pp. 260 - 261 **Ary A. Roest Crolius**, "Inculturation and Incarnation: On Speaking of the Christian faith and the Cultures of Humanity" in *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis*, 13 (1978), 134 - 140 and **Jose M. de Mesa**, *And God Said, Bahala na: The Theme of Providence in the Lowland Filipino Context*, Maryhill Studies 2, 1979, pp. 20 - 29 and **Richard P. Hardy**, *Ating Mga Kapatid . . .*, pp. 12 13.

90. **Rene Padilla**, "The Contextualization of the Gospel," in *Readings in Dynamic Idigeneity . . .*, p. 286.
91. *Id.*
92. **Shoki Coe**, "In Search of Renewal . . .," p. 242.
93. **R. D. Tano**, *Theology in the Philippine . . .*, p. 10.
94. **Samuel Rayan**, "Flesh of India's Flesh . . .," p. 260.
95. **Jose M. de Mesa**, *And God Said Bahala na . . .*, p. 21.
96. **George Soares-Prabhu**, "The New Testament as a Model of Inculturation" in *Jeevadhara*, May - June 1976, No. 33, p. 268. For a more elaborate treatment of the role and function of culture in relation to the mystery of Jesus' incarnation, see Chapter 6 of **Paul Beauchamp**, *Le Recit, La Lettre et Le Corps*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1982 To understand the role of culture in the life and ministry of St. Paul, the Apostle see, **Krister Stendahl**, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976, pp. 7 - 24.
97. **Paul F. Knitter**, *No Other Name: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1985, p. 179.
98. **Samuel Rayan** explains this notion within the frame-work of inculturation, see his "Flesh of India's Flesh . . .," pp. 260 - 261. The same notion has also been developed by **Leonardo Boff** as part of his effort to enunciate a contextual ecclesiology, see his *Church: Charism and Power - Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, SCM Press Ltd., London 1985, pp. 144 - 147.
99. **Samuel Rayan**, "Flesh of India's Flesh . . .," pp. 260 - 266.
100. **Rene Padilla**, "The Contextualization of the Gospel . . .," p. 307.
101. See **Aloysius Pieris**, "The Non-Semitic Religions of Asia," in *Mission in Dialogue: SEDOS Research Seminar on the Future of Mission*, Mary Motte, (eds.), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1982, pp. 427 - 431.
102. **Jon Sobrino**, *The True Church and the Poor . . .*, p. 256

Chapter 2

THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT

A NATION IN CHANGE AND CRISIS

The island nation of Sri Lanka, with all its problems and crises is the proper **locus** of this study and reflection. The attempts and efforts made by the Sri Lankan Catholic hierarchy, to initiate a pattern of ecclesial renewal along the direction of contextualization is the central focus of this study. In order to be well-grounded and relevant in our analysis and critique of the attempts made by the Sri Lankan Catholic hierarchy towards realizing this goal, it is necessary that we make a survey of those diverse components that constitute the Sri Lankan "socio-historical ensemble."¹ This is undertaken here as an essential and integral part of this study and analysis because it is against such a backdrop that the pastoral letters and statements of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sri Lanka can be rightly understood and meaningfully interpreted.

A. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

It has been clearly enunciated by us in the previous chapter that contextualization as a process of creative ecclesial presence requires an authentic rootedness of the church in a particular socio-historical milieu. Hence such vital social functions as politics, economics, culture, education, religion etc. necessarily fall within the purview of this all-embracing process.

Furthermore, Catholic Christianity which entered into Sri Lanka in the early part of the sixteenth century with an European cultural identity and political patronage has since then been an active agent of social change.² For the past four centuries, Catholic leadership with its various missionary institutions has directly and tacitly exerted a great deal of influence on the social, political, economic, cultural, edu-

cational and religious evolution³ of this non-Christian nation. Today there is a perceptible decline in this sphere of influence,⁴ but over the years this influential position of Catholic Church has earned the enmity and rancour of other religious and ethnic groups,⁵ particularly from the Sinhala-Buddhist sectors of the population.

History clarifies and confirms that the kind of influence wielded by Christianity was not a mere unilateral affair. It had its own inevitable dialectics.

In this process, the Catholic church in Sri Lanka as an institution has also allowed the diverse components of the Sri Lankan social context to determine the direction of the Church's missionary pursuits, pastoral priorities and theological themes.⁶

Employing the principle of "Contextuality," here we shall draw attention to those socio-historical, religio-cultural and political elements that have a direct bearing on the missionary and pastoral activities of the Sri Lankan church. Even though our study seeks to understand the brief span of thirty years, i.e. 1960 - 1990, in the post independence era, this period cannot be arbitrarily isolated as a "block of time" without adequate reference to the epochs preceding these two eventful decades.

It is therefore necessary to maintain a meaningful historical perspective, by resuscitating an awareness of certain significant aspects and events that have contributed to the flow of Sri Lankan history. Because, as we shall illustrate later, the root causes of some of the current problems that confront the church and the nation lie buried in the country's past. Hence a cautious and critical revisitation to this past will shed light on the current national situation.

It should also be admitted that for the contemporary Sri Lankan Catholic community, this post-colonial, crisis-ridden, stive-torn, poverty-stricken, nation of Sri Lanka is the direct

and immediate context of their **missionnaire pastorale**. Because it is within this context that the bishops as well as the Christian faithful live their social responsibility, express their religious loyalty and search for their cultural or ethnic identity.

One of the noteworthy factors that characterizes Sri Lankan society is the deep-seated affinity that joins religion with language, culture and ethnicity. The two major religions of Sri Lanka, namely Buddhism and Hinduism claim a symbiotic relationship to the Sinhala and Tamil cultures respectively.⁷

In recent years it has become very evident that on the basis of language, ethnicity and religion, Sri Lanka, has witnessed and is witnessing programs of unprecedented magnitude that are unbecoming of a civilized nation.⁸ The customary sense of inter-religious tolerance and inter-ethnic accommodation seems to have come to a grinding halt in an environment fraught with factionalism, fragmentation and a secessionist warfare of serious proportions.⁹

Understandably in such a situation, the church cannot isolate itself nor can it abdicate its communitarian and societal responsibility. The very notion of mission which is the **raison d'être** for the existence and continuity of the church demands that the church be truly and fully present to this complex context.

Largely motivated by the spirit of service and dialogue, characteristic of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic bishops of Sri Lanka have addressed themselves to problems and issues arising out of this complex national context. A year after the close of the Council, the bishops wrote, "The universal Church has come to far reaching conclusions in order to adapt its pastoral life to the needs of modern times. The Church in Ceylon must keep pace with this movement."¹⁰ They further maintained that "if we are to do this effectively we must first make a careful survey of our present situation."¹¹

In seeking to make a "careful survey" of the situation that exists in Sri Lanka, the bishops not only make copious references to the concrete Sri Lankan context with all its socio-political and religio-cultural ramifications,¹² but also endeavour to evoke this complex context as an indispensable component of their collective pastoral ministry.

As we shall illustrate later in the recent past more serious efforts have been made by the bishops to address themselves to very specific national questions and issues.

In the very opening sentence in one of their recent joint pastoral letters the bishops quite pertinently state their perception of the contemporary Sri Lankan situation as "a time of grave crisis."¹³ With a tone of anxiety they ask, "In this sad situation what is our responsibility and role as Christians?" The bishops believe that such questions should be responded to within the frame work of the contemporary socio-historical context. Hence they state, "We shall first recall the background to our crisis and reflect on the basis of our faith, to draw orientations for our responses to the crisis."¹⁴

Before we venture to analyse and critique the bishops' statements and letters, it is incumbent upon us that we examine those ingredients that go to make up the Sri Lankan context in all its diverse ramifications. It remains to be seen whether the bishops were always successful in grasping, internalising, interpreting and responding to this reality with justifiable objectivity and fidelity.

B. THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Sri Lanka is relatively a small island in the Indian ocean, with a land surface of 25,332 square miles, located around twenty miles off the southern tip of the Indian sub-continent. The country was known as Ceylon¹⁵ until May 22, 1972, whence it assumed its present name, adopted a new constitution and became a republic within the British Commonwealth. Sri Lanka's population currently stands at 17.2 million with an annual growth rate of 1.4%.

The beauty and richness of this palm-fringed island, lie not only in its ancient ruins, imposing mountains, lush valleys and evergreen plains, but much more in its pluriform socio-cultural and ethno-religious mosaic. This mosaic comprises of at least four ethnic groups, namely Sinhalese, Tamils, Malays and Eurasians¹⁶, and four major, living religions, i.e., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Thus, the people of Sri Lanka who are known as Ceylonese or Sri Lankans do not come from the same ethnic or racial stock, nor do they use a common indigenous language.

As we shall explain later, Sri Lanka's strengths and weaknesses, to a large extent are rooted in this multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition, which has on many occasions given rise to bitter conflicts charged with ethno-religious passions.

As in certain other parts of South Asia, in Sri Lanka too, religion and ethnicity coalesce together and create a sense of communal solidarity. Therefore any serious effort to understand the Sri Lankan social ensemble should pay adequate attention to this ethno-religious symbiosis which has become a disturbingly dominant factor in the contemporary history of this island nation. Within the Sri Lankan polity, this symbiosis is bedevilled further by the numerical strength of the two ethnic groups. In other words, Sri Lanka's ethnic majority, namely the Sinhalese, is also a religious majority i.e., Buddhist, and its major ethnic minority, namely the Tamils, is a major religious minority, i.e. Hindus. It is even correct to say that in Sri Lanka, all Buddhists are Sinhalese and all Hindus are Tamils. But the converse is not true, because the Christian population in the island is interspersed among the two ethnic communities, i.e., the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Herein lies the dilemma of the church, inclusive of its leadership, concerning its attitudes to this complex national situation.

The nation's Muslim community is comprised of people from both Arabic and South Indian extraction who migrated to Sri Lanka at various periods. Majority of the Muslim population use Tamil as their main language at home and are

also living in the North and East of Sri Lanka.¹⁷ There is also a sizeable population of Eurasians, who are the descendants of the Portuguese, Dutch and the British. Majority of them are Christians by religion and their political influence has almost faded out in the national scene. The table given in Appendix I has the details of the ethno-religious composition as presented in the 1992 census.¹⁸

Certain perceptible changes have taken place at least in some regions of Sri Lanka in the demographic patterns particularly when compared to the demographic data of pre-independent times. This area of research needs substantial data-analysis as this remains one of the thorny issues fuelling the ethnic conflict.

1. THE SINHALA-BUDDHIST ETHNO-RELIGIOUS COHESION

The Sinhalese people who occupy the Southern, South-western and central regions of Sri Lanka, and their language called "Sinhala" are found only in Sri Lanka. There is today, a growing consensus among historians and archaeologists that the ancestors of the present-day Sinhalese migrated from the North of India to Sri Lanka at different periods, beginning from the fifth or fourth century B.C.¹⁹ Archaeological and philological evidences also suggest that the Sinhala language and race have evolved to its present stage through significant intermingling with the South Indian peoples, cultures and languages.²⁰

The "origin myth" of the Sinhalese is described with imaginative embellishments in two ancient mythohistorical chronicles named **Dipawamsa**²¹ and **Mahawamsa**²² which were composed by Buddhist monks, around the 4th and 6th centuries A.D. respectively in Pali, the scriptural language of the Buddhists. Some scholars who have made a critical study of these chronicles are of the opinion that these chronicles were written from a pro-Buddhist, pro-Sinhala stand point, and therefore, with an ethno-religious bias.²³ The current

relevance of these chronicles lies in the fact that they contribute even now to fan the flame of ethno-religious passions and rivalries, by lending credibility to extremist religious presuppositions and ethnic prejudices.²⁴

It is necessary to enumerate here some of the adverse consequences which the contents of these chronicles have brought into effect. Firstly an ethno-centric interpretation of these chronicles widen the ethnic and racial division by eulogising the origin of the Sinhala race as descendents of a pure Aryan breed.²⁵ Secondly they make an attempt to politicize the advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka²⁶. In doing this the authors not only try to strengthen the political base of Buddhism, but also confer on the king the dual duty of "head of state and defender of the faith."²⁷ Thirdly they make a zealous effort to promote a pro-Buddhist extermism, by undermining the non-Buddhists as equivalent to animals and by referring their cultures and religious practices as those of the "wrong believers."²⁸ Fourthly they tend to exaggerate the racial and religious divisions between the Sinhalese and Tamils by "deridding the latter as invaders, vandals, marauders and heathens."²⁹ In order to cement the the ethno-religious identity of the former, these chronicles praise them as the sole champions, protectors and preservers³⁰ of the **Buddha Sasana**.³¹

The contemporary relevance of these chronicles rests on the fact that despite their polemical tone, obvious religious overtones and mythical character,³² these chronicles are interpreted even by academic historians as containing "a surprisingly full and accurate account of the island's early history."³³ Successive groups of the Sinhala political leadership and militant Buddhist clergy have rejuvenated some of the contents of these chronicles, by confering on them historical certitude and by advancing arguments based on these chronicles to prove the inseparable link between Buddhism and the Sinhala culture. As pertinently observed by S. J. Tambiah, these chronicles are "reactivated and recontextualized to give shape to political aspirations in the twentieth century."³⁴

According to these chronicles Vijaya the legendary founder father of the Sinhala race and his retinue of 700 men reached the shores of Sri Lanka, on the very day of Lord Buddha's **parinibbana**, (the passing away).³⁵ By deliberately grafting these two events, the authors of these books intend to give a religious legitimation to an otherwise uneventful geographical migration. This has become an unquestionable ideological base for the contemporary cry of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.³⁶ But an objective analysis would reveal that underneath this shroud of nationalism lies a fatal form of ethno-religious zealotry.³⁷

The particular form of Buddhism currently practised in Sri Lanka is known as **Theravada** or **Hinayana**.³⁸ There is agreement among scholars that this school of Buddhism was officially established in Sri Lanka around mid-third century B.C. by Mahinda, a chosen emissary of the great Indian Buddhist emperor Asoka, during the reign of Deva Nambia Theesan.³⁹ The latter's conversion to Buddhism enabled the unhindered spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It was in Sri Lanka that the scriptures and monastic codes of Theravada Buddhism were first committed to writing. These scriptures which are known today as "The Pali Canon,"⁴⁰ conferred on Sri Lanka an additional prestige as the seat of orthodoxy, for the **Theravada** School.⁴¹

Today, Mahinda is remembered as the father of Sinhalese culture, as it was the faith that he introduced among the Sinhalese that sustained their communal solidarity, supported their cultural traits such as art, architecture, sculpture, literature, law and morality and served as a bulwark of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-religious and political cohesion.⁴²

2. THE TAMIL HINDU ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

Tamils of Sri Lankan and Indian origin⁴³ form the major minority ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Contemporary archaeological excavations seem to support the theory that the ancestors of the present-day Tamils, who were then known as **Dravydas** or **Dravidians**, migrated to Sri Lanka

from the Indian mainland, probably in the 6th or 7th century B.C. or even before.⁴⁴ Certain references made in the *Mahawamsa* to "Nagas and Yakkshas"⁴⁵ as an aboriginal human species, has led some scholars to conclude that those aboriginals were members of the South Indian, Dravidian tribes.⁴⁶ The geographical proximity of Southern India to Sri Lanka further strengthens this theory.⁴⁷ Even the religious beliefs and practices that prevailed in Sri Lanka in the pre-Buddhist period, (some of which were later assimilated into Buddhism)⁴⁸ contain substantial elements of the religious totems of the protohistoric Dravidian tribes.⁴⁹

Hinduism⁵⁰ as a religion and a way of life is well integrated into the mores and ethos of its adherents. In Sri Lanka, Hinduism was the only religion of the Tamils until the arrival of the Portuguese. In particular Tamil Hindus are known as "Saivites," i.e. they worship Lord Siva as the Supreme Being of the Godhead.⁵¹ Because of an underlying religio-cultural affinity, Saivism and Tamil have both contributed towards the promotion and development of a Tamil cultural identity.⁵² Temples and shrines dedicated to the different gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are the fountainheads of Hindu religiousness and devotion. As a matter of fact the cultural components such as art, architecture, sculpture, music, dance, drama, etc. were centered around the temple. It was the temple that sustained and supported the development and continuity of these cultural traits until the early part of the twentieth century.

The different religious sects that come under the umbrella of Hinduism have no institutional religious organization or priesthood. Those who perform religious rites and rituals in Hindu temples are considered "priests" not by any form of institutional or charismatic ordination but by virtue of their birth in a priestly family. There is a significant lay participation in religious affairs. But very often the temple administrators and other religious leaders are drawn from the upper layers of the caste hierarchy. Unlike the Catholics,

Hindus have no missionaries, parish systems or organizations, that devote their entire energy on religious and liturgical concerns.

It is this organizational deficiency coupled with the traditional attitude of religious tolerance and caste stratification that provided a fertile soil for such missionary religions as Christianity and Islam to win good number of followers from among the Hindus.

Conversion to Hindusim from another religion is a practical impossibility because of the caste-system⁵³ that undergirds the religious practice. A Hindu is one who is born in a Hindu family. It is common belief among the Hindus that one's birth into a particular caste group is determined by one's past actions or *karma*.⁵⁴ The religious and social life of the Hindus are very much influenced by their belief systems, some of which border on fatalism or predestination.

As observed by Satchi Ponnambalam, "The Tamil ethnic identity remains a linguistic and cultural identity, unlike the all-inclusive ethno-religious identity of the Sinhalese Buddhists. To the Tamils, it is the language-culture index that is dominant and commands loyalty, not any particular religious adherence."⁵⁵

3. THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS

The Muslim community of Sri Lanka, is comprised of two groups — the "Ceylon Moors"⁵⁶ mostly of Arab and Indian extraction who came as traders to the island during the seventh to the fifteenth centuries and inter-married with the natives, and the Malays, of more recent origin, descendants of Javanese mercenaries brought by the Dutch."⁵⁷

A vast majority of the Muslim population use Tamil as their mother tongue "but they do not seek their collective identity in language or culture but in their religion Islam."⁵⁸ It is their Islamic religion that gives them a collective consciousness and sustains their communal solidarity. Since they lack

an ethno-cultural base, the Muslims do not form a distinct ethnic entity. A fair section of the Muslims engage themselves in small-scale businesses and in such occupations as fishing and farming. Muslims are also dispersed all over the island, with a fair section of them living in the Eastern province.

4. EURASIANS AND MALAYS

Eurasians and Malays are two other ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. The Eurasian population is comprised of Portuguese and Dutch descendants who embraced English as their main language after the British conquered Sri Lanka. As for their religious affiliations they are divided between the Catholics and Dutch Reformed Church. Although small in number, in the first decade after independence, Eurasians or Burghers, as they are popularly known in Sri Lanka, wielded an influence in political affairs far exceeding their numerical strength. Subsequent to the introduction of Sinhala as the sole official language, the influential position of the Eurasians began to decline. In recent years most of them have migrated to Australia, Britain, or Canada. Others who remain are gradually absorbed into the two major ethnic groups. The census of 1981 registered their population as 37,000.

The Malays who number 47,000 as per census of 1981, are descendents of Javanese mercenaries brought by the Dutch.⁵⁹ Most of them follow the Islamic faith and still use Malay as their language, while manifesting remarkable adaptability in learning and using English, Tamil and Sinhala.

C. COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

1. SOME GENERAL REMARKS

It was in the year 1948 that Sri Lanka emerged to a life of freedom, having been under three successive European colonial powers, namely the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796) and the British (1796-1948). History attests that when the Portuguese set foot on the island, there were

three independent kingdoms⁶⁰ in Sri Lanka identified as the kingdom of Kotte, the kingdom of Jaffna and the kingdom of Kandy. Buddhism was the religion of the majority in the kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy, and it was protected and promoted with state patronage. The Saivite version of Hinduism was the religion of the people in the kingdom of Jaffna.

During their period of occupation the Portuguese and the Dutch exercised their domination over the kingdoms of Kotte and Jaffna but met with disastrous defeats in their attempts to conquer the kingdom of Kandy, as a result the Sinhala Buddhist elite opposed to the rule of Portuguese and Dutch found a safe haven in the kingdom of Kandy. Having defeated the Dutch in 1796, the British succeeded also in conquering Kandy around the year 1815.⁶¹ Thus, they became the first and the only European power to bring the entire island under their sway. Later, in 1832 the British unified the three separate kingdoms as a single national entity⁶² for their own administrative convenience.

The colonial period had been a time of political chaos and social disorder. At times it even resulted in wanton blood shed, death and destruction. The debilitating consequences of the oppression, maladministration and misrule of this period are found even today in diverse forms.⁶³ Nearly four centuries of colonial occupation has changed or marred Sri Lankan history in every aspect, whether it be social, political, economic, cultural or religious.

The negative impact of this period continued to wield a strong influence in contemporary history. Because of the church's practical identification with colonial powers and its religio-cultural affinity with Europe, the Christian communities have often been the objects of numerous accusations and charges in the post-colonial era.⁶⁴ Hence a critical overview of this historical period will help to understand some of the accusations heaped upon the church by other religious groups and the subsequent measures⁶⁵ taken by the successive governments in the post-independence period. These measures as

foreseen by the governments had a strong negative impact on the missionary efficiency of the church at institutional levels. They also served as incentives for the church to guide her future missionary projects in the right direction without repeating the errors of the past.

2. THE ADVENT OF CATHOLICISM AND THE RESPONSE OF OTHER RELIGIONS

The advent of Catholicism, its numerical growth, social integration and cultural distancing should not be seen in isolation. In order to have a holistic view of the modern missionary consciousness of the Catholic church in Sri Lanka and its relation to other religious groups, the growth of Catholicism during the colonial era should be seen in the light of the glowing reforms that revived and re-shaped the non-Christian religions of Sri Lanka. History attests that the success of the Portuguese missionaries not only led to religious conflicts but sparked off a vigorous religious revival both among the Buddhists and the Hindus. Analysts of the Buddhist and Hindu religious history and the inter-action between the different religious groups in the colonial period find clear traces of "Catholic" influence on other religions. A certain Buddhist reformer even openly encouraged other Buddhists to imitate Christian missionary methods.⁶⁶

Catholicism entered Sri Lanka, as a religion deeply embroiled with the expansionist motives of the Portuguese colonial power. Even though Portuguese expansionism was guided by political and commercial impulses, "religious goals provided an explicit and convincing rationale for political expansionism."⁶⁷ Despite the fact that Portuguese missionaries consciously distanced themselves from the political power game, they nevertheless enjoyed the protection and patronage of the Portuguese rulers in their missionary efforts and enterprises.⁶⁸

Organized missionary activities began in Sri Lanka with the arrival of the first band of Franciscan missionaries in 1543,⁶⁹ who were joined by the Jesuits in 1602. Missionary efforts were initially concentrated in the maritime provinces

which were, by then, under the direct control of the Portuguese. Toward the end of the sixteenth century Catholicism managed to enter the portals of the local royalty.⁷⁰ This move sounded a serious alarm to the Buddhists, who looked upon the king as the chief protector of the Buddhist heritage. To make matters worse, the Portuguese confiscated lands and properties belonging to the Buddhists and transferred them to the Catholic missionaries.⁷¹ Catholicism almost replaced Buddhism as the religion of the State.⁷² There is strong evidence that sacred sites and objects that belonged to the Buddhists and Hindus were desecrated or destroyed.⁷³ The customs and culture of the Portuguese were forced upon the natives and indigenous religious practices were belittled as "devil worship".⁷⁴

Added to these were the unabated economic and commercial exploitation and the uncontrolled atrocities perpetrated by the Portuguese military and political powers. Even though the missionaries dissociated themselves from any political activity, this unchristian behaviour and the attitudes of their compatriots did affect the credibility of their evangelizational task.

3. CONVERSION TO CATHOLICISM AND ITS SOCIAL IMPACTS

Another important element that antagonized the Buddhists was the method of education imparted in the schools established by the Portuguese missionaries. The educational system introduced by the Portuguese was seen by the Buddhists as a mechanism to promote conversions. It is said that "the school was looked upon as the nucleus of a future congregation. It was in the schools that baptisms were administered and marriages were solemnized".⁷⁵

The educational mission had some important effects at the social level too. As in other traditional societies of South Asia, the caste system is deeply embedded also in the socio-religious traditions of Sri Lanka.⁷⁶ The caste hierarchy was substantially based on the occupations or different social groups. Since the Portuguese had full control over the maritime regions, the missionaries found it easy to gain large

number of converts in these regions. Fishing was the main occupation of the residents of these regions. They constituted the fishing caste which according to Sri Lankan caste stratification ranks next to the land-owning farmer caste.⁷⁷ In the pre-colonial feudal structure the elite of the farmer caste held an influential and a dominant position.

Conversion to the Catholic faith and the concomittant allegiance to the Portuguese rule, afforded the fishing caste the benefit of education, better employment and a swift social mobility. This enabled them to compete with the dominant social groups. The increasing number of converts eventually also contributed toward the creation of a third social class, or a meta-caste origination thus causing an imbalance in the social equilibrium. This further exasperated the fears of the upper caste elites among both Buddhists and Hindus.

It should also be noted here, that the Portuguese missionaries made efforts to convert communities of caste groups or families so that these could stand united and support each other linked by a sense of caste or family solidarity. Catholic missionaries did not pay as much attention to individual conversion as they did to groups. This is seen as one of the reasons why many Catholics did not relapse to their previous religious faith even amidst persecutions.⁷⁸

It is necessary also to state here some of the factors that were conducive to mass conversions, from among the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Besides the benefits of education, employment and rapid social mobility, the colourful ceremonialism⁷⁹ and ritualism of Catholic worship was very appealing and attractive to a people whose traditional religiosity is saturated with pietism, devotionism and colourful ceremonies coated with ritualism.

4. THE DECLINE OF RELIGIONS UNDER DUTCH RULE

The Dutch entered the scene in the mid-seventeenth century, promising to alleviate the fears of the Sinhala Buddhists of Kandy by helping them to oust the Portuguese.⁸⁰

But with their eyes fixed on the commercial and economic profits that they were able to reap, they became the second colonial power to rule the lowlands of Sri Lanka.

Religion had no priority in their list of ambitions. Though some natives were converted to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), these conversions were said to be elicited by the desire for obtaining political privileges.⁸¹ This was proved by the fact that subsequent to the defeat of the Dutch by the British, many of the converts to the DRC either returned to their previous religious faith or sought membership in the Church of England to win the favour of the British. Dutch were more opposed to Catholicism than to any other religion in Sri Lanka.⁸² There were several cases of Catholic priests and faithful who were tortured, persecuted and killed by the Dutch, for the sole reason of their faith.⁸³

A noteworthy factor during the Dutch period was the remarkable service to the Catholics rendered by the Indian Oratorian missionary Fr. Joseph Vaz who out of fear of the Dutch came disguised⁸⁴ as a labourer to Sri Lanka. During this period when the Dutch rulers had the Catholic priests officially proscribed, the laity played a significant role in preserving and nurturing their faith without the ministry or support of ordained ministers.⁸⁵ This period also witnessed the birth of the first vernacular Christian literature in the form of prayers and sermons.⁸⁶

In sum, during the period of Dutch administration there was a general decline of interest in religions on a mass scale, except for Catholicism which underwent a creative form of purification⁸⁷ largely necessitated by the prevailing political conditions.

5. RELIGIOUS REVIVAL UNDER BRITISH RULE

The British, who replaced the Dutch as the third colonial power in Sri Lanka, restricted their activities initially to matters of political, economic and administrative nature. Their official policy with regard to religion was occasioned by the conquest of Kandy which was then considered the seat of orthodox Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Under the Kandyan Convention of 2nd March 1815, the British gave assurances to the Buddhist monks and chiefs that they would protect Buddhism and would allow the latter to practice their religion as warranted by tradition.⁸⁸ The British also promised to guarantee the rights, privileges and powers which were enjoyed by Buddhist monks in the pre-Portuguese era. But both sides accused each other of backsliding in keeping the terms of the promises.⁸⁹ This was partly due to the revolts and rebellions organised by Buddhist chiefs and monks and also due to the realization by the British that "Buddhism was not merely a faith to be tolerated but an institutional entity at odds with the administrative policies of colonialism..."⁹⁰ In 1818, the British issued a proclamation which effectively separated Buddhism from politics.⁹¹

On the other hand for the Catholic church and other Christian denominations, British rule provided an atmosphere that was conducive to productive missionary enterprises. By the end of the first quarter of the 19th century several Christian denominations⁹² were present in the country. They established an excellent school net-work and educational system to the envy of the Buddhists and Hindus. Commenting on the pattern of Christian missionary activity at this period P. A. Saram writes,

Education was the primary medium of diffusing Christianity, and there was much translation and publication of Christian literary material. Many organizations and special societies were established for the purposes of religious propagation. Yet, interestingly enough, despite the intensive proselytization and fairly systematic attacks on Buddhism of this period the Buddhist response tended to be one of uniform astonishment; not only did the Buddhist appear to have felt that the different religions could co-exist, but they also appear to have assisted the missionaries, even to the extent of translating the Bible.⁹³

But this form of co-ordination and cordiality was only skin deep. By the turn of the 19th century Buddhist monks and their supporters staged several revolts, and accused the British of favouritism toward Christians. The British did provide financial and other support to the educational institutions established by the missionaries because these schools produced the clerks and administrators whom the British colonial system needed in large numbers to intensify their economic and commercial exploitation.

Fuelled by the growing popularity of Christian educational institutions and the increasing number of converts to Christianity, the Sinhala-Buddhist resurgence and militancy started to get itself organized.⁹⁴ It began with the foundation of two Buddhist Training Colleges for monks. These institutions promoted very liberal forms of Buddhist monastic training and encouraged the political involvement and activism of monks.⁹⁵ This period also witnessed an enthusiastic Buddhist revival among the Buddhist laity. Anagarika Dharmapala and his associates carried out this movement with a crusading missionary zeal. The British rule, its economic exploitation, cultural influence and its alignment toward the church came under severe attack. As Sri Lanka entered the second half of the twentieth century Buddhist militancy became more organized.

This militancy ignited several conflicts between Buddhists and Christians particularly against the Catholic church and its institutions. Occasionally these conflicts took violent forms.⁹⁶ For a long period this conflict continued in the form of verbal abuses, accusations and the publication of provocative and apologetic religious tracts.⁹⁷ The dailies and weeklies owned and published by the various religious groups used the press as a weapon of offence and defence.⁹⁸ Open confrontations took place also in the form of public debates, on matters pertaining to the religious doctrines of Christianity and Buddhism. Since the debates were held in Sinhala, the Buddhist monks could out do their Christian

counterparts who found it difficult to master the local language.⁹⁹ Through various other means the Buddhist organizations attempted also to regain political control reminiscent of the pre-colonial era.

Christian missionary enterprises came to be interpreted as attempts to "disestablish" Buddhism¹⁰⁰ in order to replace it with Christianity. The resurgence that characterized the attitude of Buddhists in their confrontation with Christianity has been labelled as a form of a "Protestant Buddhism,"¹⁰¹ — for two important reasons. One is that it openly protested against almost every aspect of Christianity, secondly in doing this it imitated many of the norms, practices and organizational forms of Protestant Christianity.¹⁰²

The rapid spread of Christianity among the Tamils also provoked considerable reactions from the Hindu leadership. However it was much less militant in content and character. It paved the way for very productive Hindu revivalism. The pioneers in this process were keen on correcting some of the abuses in Hindu religious practices, particularly those belittled by Christian missionaries.¹⁰³ The Hindu revivalists also sought to modernize Hinduism in keeping with the demands of the times. Arumuga Navalar spearheaded this movement¹⁰⁴ with undaunted courage and remarkable religious zeal.

Parallel to this Buddhist and Hindu revival was the cultural awakening of the English-educated, westernized native elite and intellectuals, both among the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups. They found a common enemy in the British and together began agitating for self-government as a means of recapturing their indigenous cultural heritage, which they claimed was rapidly deteriorating under foreign rule. It is observed today that those who demanded self-rule were motivated more by the desire for power than by a love for their native culture. This group founded the Ceylon National Congress (C.N.C.) in 1918 to consolidate under one banner this plea for self-rule. The British government responded to this demand by introducing a few constitutional

reforms at several stages. But finally this agitation did lead to a partial victory when the British Parliament adopted the Ceylon Independence Act in December 1947 and on the 4th of February, 1948 Sri Lanka became once again a sovereign state.

A significant feature of this period was that the advocates of independence, though the majority of them were Sinhalese, did not pay much attention to the simmering problems based on religion and ethnicity. Their western education coupled with an European cultural identity prevented them also from paying heed to several other issues and problems faced by the Sinhala and Tamil masses. These problems became uncontrollably assertive in the post-independence era.

D. FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE MODERN PERIOD

1. RELIGIO-POLITICAL TRENDS

The post-independence political stage was controlled by the English-educated, western-oriented native elites from among the Sinhalese and Tamils, who together formed the United National Party (U.N.P.). With its multi-religious and multi-ethnic composition, this party constituted the first government of independent Ceylon. The type of government and political administration established by this party was based on the Westminster model. Though the majority of its members were Buddhists its "attitude towards Buddhism was somewhat ambiguous."¹⁰⁵

This western orientation of the political leadership enabled the Catholic hierarchy to align themselves with the U.N.P.¹⁰⁶ Even the official political stance of the Catholic leadership during the times of general elections were publicly known. A joint pastoral letter released on the eve of the 1952 elections stated that "no Catholic with even an atom of Christian conscience can vote for a candidate who subscribes to a political creed banned by the Church..."¹⁰⁷ Though this

instruction was clearly aimed against the communist party, it was interpreted as a veiled condemnation of the S.L.F.P. Some interpreted the admonition of the bishops as indirectly inviting the Catholics to vote for the U.N.P. As Francois Houtart observed: "The Catholic elite favoured the U.N.P., which both defended its social interests and guaranteed at the same time the existence of Christian institutions."¹⁰⁸

Before the close of the first decade of independence, some serious problems began to surface. Marxist-socialist ideologies which had their roots in the country already in the 1930s now came out with more force and ferocity. They held on to a strong anti-Catholic and pro-Buddhist stance and whipped up the feelings of the Sinhala - Buddhist masses. A new legislation enacted by the U.N.P. government in 1948-49 "which disfranchised and decitizenised overwhelming numbers of domiciled Indian Tamil minority"¹⁰⁹ angered a section of the Tamil leadership,¹¹⁰ thus paving the way for a progressive ethnic divide. The measure of support enjoyed by the Christians, especially the Catholic leadership with the ruling party created envy among the Buddhist militants and confirmed a public misconception that the catholic influence was leading the nation to become "an Eastern outpost of the Vatican."¹¹¹

In 1951, S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake,¹¹² broke away from the ruling party and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (S.L.F.P.), pledging to advance the cause of the Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion. Despite his promises to choose the "middle path" without resorting to extreme right or left ideologies, circumstances forced him to lean heavily on the leftist groups for political support and stability. His party sought to win the general election in 1952 and failed. But it managed to build later on a strong religio-political base among the Buddhist masses which enabled it to win the general elections of 1956. The Buddhist clergy played a pivotal role and the S.L.F.P. was voted into power. During this election campaign issues related to the Sinhala language and Buddhist religion became the dominant factors. The tide of anti-Catholic feelings were very high.¹¹³

One of the chief factors that unleashed anti-Catholic animosities among the Buddhists was the publication of a report entitled **The Betrayal of Buddhism** in 1954 by a group which called itself "the Buddhist Commission of Inquiry." This commission claimed that they were mandated by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) to study and report on the state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, the commission instead of reporting on state of Buddhism, "actually reported on the Catholic Church in Ceylon."¹¹⁴ The committee openly advocated effective control on Christian mission and its educational and other institutions so that Buddhism could be revived.¹¹⁵ This message received the acclamation of the Buddhist masses.

Ironically enough Bandaranayake, who championed the Sinhala-Buddhist cause, was felled by the bullet of a Buddhist chief-priest in 1959.¹¹⁶ As a result of this murder the Buddhist presbyterium fell into disrepute for a brief period and was politically less active in the two elections that followed. But that did not diminish the anti-Catholic feelings already aroused by various groups of Buddhist laity.

In the general elections of 1960, the widow of the murdered premier, identified herself with the extremist Sinhala Buddhist elements and launched a vigorous electoral campaign on an anti-Catholic note. P. A. SARAM, observes,

Although anti-Catholic sentiments have been expressed by Buddhist militants since the early 1950s, it was not until 1960 that these sentiments were translated by the SLFP into official policy, largely for political reasons. Buddhist activists had long resented what they considered to be the unfair privileges enjoyed by Sri Lanka's Catholics.¹¹⁷

When the SLFP came to power and formed the government it directed its attention on Christian missionary activities in general and the Catholic school system in particular. Furthermore, incited by the Buddhist Commission report, the conviction grew strong among the Buddhists that "What

Buddhism has to protect itself from today is not the Catholic Church, but the Catholic school."¹¹⁸ Hence "the Buddhist activists urged the nationalization of all denominational schools as the single action most effective in reducing the Catholic advantage."¹¹⁹

The communist parties¹²⁰ also served as a strong anti-Catholic catalyst because of the anti-communist stance openly advocated by the Catholic hierarchy. Certain pronouncements¹²¹ made by the bishops against the communists provoked the latter.

As promised in her election campaign, Mrs. Bandaranayake had the majority of denominational schools nationalized in 1960 - 61 by enacting parliamentary legislations. It was an open secret that the measures taken to nationalize the school net - work was ostensibly done to curb the influence of the Catholic church which owned and effectively maintained over 750 schools across the island. The Catholic hierarchy at first advised their faithful to occupy the school premises as a protest to the take-over. The nationalization bill was seen by them as a violation of a basic human right.¹²² "The head of the Roman Catholic Church, Archbishop Thomas Cooray, declared that the faithful would continue to resist 'even unto blood.'"¹²³ A potentially explosive situation was soon averted due to the mediation of Valerian Cardinal Gracias of Bombay, who acted most probably on the instructions of the state of Vatican.

Under the S.L.F.P. government, i.e. from 1960 - 1965, relations between the Catholic church and the government reached a pitiable nadir. Anti-Catholic sentiments on the part of the government and of the Buddhists solidified when an abortive *coup d'état* in 1962 disclosed that over two thirds of the conspirators involved were Catholics.¹²⁴

From the 1960s to date, the Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion gained great political ground much to the dismay of the minorities. Even though the U.N.P. was elected to power in 1965, they did not have the usual cordiality

towards Catholicism. The Catholic leadership believed that the U.N.P. would provide a certain measure of assistance to their privately run schools, but the government shied away from its promise.¹²⁵ On the contrary, in order to please the Buddhists, the UNP government introduced **poya days**¹²⁶ as holidays instead of Sunday and made Sunday a working day. As expected, this move caused many practical difficulties to Catholics,¹²⁷ who were then galvanized by a Pre-Vatican II Spirituality and liturgy.

2. OFFICIAL CATHOLIC ATTITUDES

It is important at this juncture to analyse some of the actions and attitudes of the Catholic hierarchy which have over the years contributed to foment anti-Catholic feelings among the Buddhist monks and the Buddhist laity.

First among these is the inflexible claim advanced by Christians in general and Catholics in particular that their's is the one, true religion that possesses the authentic mandate of the one true God. Secondly Christians and Catholics considered all other religions, faiths and cultures as products of the false god or of the devil.¹²⁸ Thirdly they feared that permitting to teach other religions in their schools would amount to co-operation with something that is idolatrous and immoral.¹²⁹ Fourthly, Christians and Catholics caused a cultural rupture by belittling the local cultures and by thrusting the European cultural values on the converts. Fifthly, despite the fact that Buddhists and Hindus were willing to open their temples to Christian pastors and priests to conduct religious services, the gesture was never reciprocated.¹³⁰ Often such requests were flatly turned down.¹³¹ Finally with their schools, colleges, hospitals, lands, and other sizeable financial resources, the Christians exerted an influence on the socio-political realms, far exceeding their minority status.

3. BUDDHIST RESURGENCE

Buddhist religious consciousness in the twentieth century received an added social prestige subsequent to the conver-

sion¹³² of certain Europeans and Americans to Buddhism. An interesting feature of Buddhist resurgence in Sri Lanka was that while opposing the alleged proselytization and the excessive socio-political influence of Christians, in their efforts to reform, revive and revitalise Buddhism the Buddhists resorted to the same mechanism used by the Christian missionaries.¹³³

Besides this, one of the chief ideas that the Buddhists learnt from their Christian counterparts was the effective laicization¹³⁴ of Sri Lankan Buddhism. It was the active and unflinching involvement of the Buddhist laity that largely contributed to its reform and revival. The patterns of Buddhist monastic training, certain aspects of religious worship, the emphasis on preaching of the doctrines are some of the elements that Buddhism adopted from Christianity.

The glamorous celebration of the 2500th anniversary of **Buddha Jayanthi** (the birth of Lord Buddha) from 1954 - 1956, helped a great deal to heighten the Buddhist - Sinhala ethno-religious consciousness¹³⁵ with a new vigour and fervour.

4. RELIGIONS AND THE STATE IN MODERN TIMES

Issues related to or centred on language and religion repeatedly surfaced in the first quarter of the post-independence era. The problems reached a climax in the year 1972 when the government in power promulgated a new Republican constitution and elevated Buddhism to the level of state religion. This Republican constitution promulgated on May, 22, 1972 states that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to foster and protect the Buddha Sasana."¹³⁶ The provision implies that financial support from the state will be extended to Buddhism, whereas other religious minorities have to develop their own means of maintenance and support.

In a pluralistic society like Sri Lanka such an action was bound to cause serious problems. On the one hand it relegated other religions to second class status, thus causing envy and enmity among other minority groups. Secondly it violated the secular ideology of the state. Thirdly it has once again resuscitated the notion that Sri Lanka was the land destined by Buddha for the Sinhala-Buddhists. This was a consciousness that entailed very serious and formidable consequences. The constitutional guarantee promised to Buddhism had also rejuvenated the socio-political role of the Buddhist clergy. Today no political party can be voted to power or remain in power without their direct and active support. As a result of this politico-religious interpenetration, the Buddhist religion and the Sinhala culture have acquired a secure national status.

Today the Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness is so deeply entrenched in the socio-political system that it is perceived as a serious threat to the future of non-Buddhist and non-Sinhala minorities. From the early 1960s to date, the ethnic divide has widened to such an extent that it has nearly become impossible for the two ethnic communities to live in a unitary nation.¹³⁷ This polarization has been feeding itself on communal riots, wanton destruction of properties and blood-spilling programs.¹³⁸

On the other hand the religious minorities especially the Catholics have taken a different attitude. The Catholic church and other Christian communities stand seriously divided by the ethnic conflict. The Sinhalese Catholics with their hierarchy and the priesthood have progressively sought to consolidate their identity on ethnic rather than religious lines. R. L. Stirrat's pointed observation is relevant here. He states,

From being a unified, self-confident and assertive body, the Catholic Church as an institution today tries to keep out of politics and to avoid any actions which might offend the Sinhalese-Buddhist dominated state.

Rather than stress a common religious identity, Catholics today are divided on grounds of ethnicity, a split which affects not only the laity but also the priesthood.¹³⁹

As a matter of fact, the Second Vatican Council's invitation for indigenization was liberally interpreted to justify the Sinhala church's growing tendency toward Sinhala-Buddhist ethnocentrism. The increasing numbers of local priests and religious, and the use of the vernaculars in liturgy served as powerful catalysts along this direction. Quite pertinently Prof. Stirrat remarks that "this process of indigenization eroded the barriers between the Catholics and members of other religions in Sri Lanka, whilst at the same time creating new barriers between Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics".¹⁴⁰ We shall have occasion to return to this point later.

5. INTENSIFICATION OF CRISES AND CONFLICTS

Within the last two decades the crises and conflicts in Sri Lanka have reached very crucial and critical proportions. Open and liberal economic policies, free-trade and unlimited private enterprises have contributed to uncontrolled economic disasters leading to stages of inflation and devaluation of the Sri Lankan rupee. The slum dwellers, the estate labourers and those below the official poverty line are the worst affected. Infant mortality and malnutrition have reached epidemic proportions among the poor.

In the post-independence era anti-government activities took a violent form when a radical left wing movement based on the Che Guevera model attempted to capture power in 1971. This insurrection was contained by a ruthless use of force by the government. Over 20,000 youths, the majority of whom were Sinhalese were reportedly killed in this conflict.

In present day Sri Lanka the ethnic conflict has reached a very critical stage with over 40% of the national expenditure being spent on the so called national security or defence. A political scientist of international repute recently remarked,

"Within the next few decades the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka will determine whether the island is destined to be involved in the continuing haemorrhage of a Lebanon- or Ulster-style internecine civil war, or whether it might end up dividing itself into two separate mini-states."¹⁴¹

In their effort to understand the ethnic conflict and to propose certain remedies, the Catholic hierarchy published a joint pastoral letter, the first letter that sought to address the national problems in a holistic perspective with strong socio-historical overtones.¹⁴²

The periodic anti-Tamil riots and pogroms perpetrated since 1956 have taken a toll of over 10,000 innocent human lives, which includes many women and children. Over 2,000 young Tamil males are still in prison and there were a few hundred cases of "disappearances".¹⁴³ Catholic priests and nuns were not spared either.¹⁴⁴ Catholic schools and church buildings were among those destroyed by air raids and artillery shellings.¹⁴⁵

Besides this there are several other simmering problems based on caste and class segregations and rivalries, ideological conflicts, increasing state repression and the oppression of women and other weaker sectors of society.

It is within this complex social ensemble and critical phase of history that the Sri Lankan Catholic community is seeking to be truly and fully contextual. A majority of the Catholics eke out their existence within these social conditions. Hence, it is this same socio-historical labyrinth that presents itself as the proper locus of contextualization. It is therefore this very same situation that can receive any ecclesial efforts towards contextualization as relevant or reject them as esoteric theoretical luxuries. It is against the backdrop of this national situation that we shall endeavour to analyse and critique the efforts made by the Sri Lankan Catholic hierarchy towards leading the church in the direction of contextualization.

In Sri Lanka, the phenomena of religious pluralism and multiculturalism are interwoven into the social fabric. Hence a realistic vision of contextualization cannot afford to ignore this complex and assertive religio-cultural ferment. In sum the present national situation with its multifaceted challenges and conflicts, with its problems and prospects, agonies and achievements should therefore be the proper matrix of contextualization.

NOTES

1. The phrase "socio-historical ensemble," is used here to refer to the totality of societal functions such as politics, economics, culture, religion etc. and the dynamic interactions that exist among these functions as part of an historical process of development in a given society. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*. pp. 10
2. See K. M. De Silva, "The Religions of the Minorities" in *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, Id., (ed.), C. Hurst & Company, London, 1977, pp. 394-395. Also F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology* . . . , esp. pp. 108-135, and 251-290, and S. Arasaratnam, "The Christians of Ceylon and Nationalist Politics," in *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times*, G. A. Oddie (ed.), Manor, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 164-181.
3. See R. Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, Catholic Book Agency, Rome, 1956, pp. 132-157 and his *Catholic Missionaries in a British Colony: Successes and Failures in Ceylon 1796-1893*, Nouvelle Revue de science missionnaire, Immensee, 1979, pp. 25-36. Also K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, pp. 28-46; 258. And A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka: 1948-1979*, Second Edition, The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1979, p. 45.
4. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics of a Buddhist State" in *Religions and Societies: Asia and the Middle East*, C. Caldarola, (ed.), Mouton Publishers, Berlin, 1982, p. 333.
5. For a detailed presentation of the conflict between Buddhist and Catholics, see, A.C. Dep, *A History of the Ceylon Police 1866-1913*, Vol.2, Times of Ceylon Press, Colombo, 1969, pp. 7-8, 186, 197, 202-207, 212, 253-254, 257-258, 351-355 and S. Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, Zed Books Ltd., London, 1983, p. 22. Also R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church in Historical Perspective" in *Sri Lanka: Change and Crisis*, James Manor,

- (ed.), Croom Helm, London, 1985, pp. 196-212. G. D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, Delhi, 1992, pp.45-75.
6. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology...*, pp. 109-130. Also Nihal Abeyasingha, *The Radical Tradition: The Changing Shape of Theological Reflection in Sri Lanka*, The Ecumenical Institute, Colombo, 1985, pp. 37-39 and 40-73. The author presents here a few pertinent historical situations which influenced the theological and pastoral orientations at different historical periods.
 7. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology...*, p. 33. Also P. A. Saram "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics..." art. cit., pp. 335-337 and Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question...*, p. 22.
 8. See S. J. Thambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London, 1986, pp. 21-28. And D. L. Horowitz, *Coup Theories and Officers' Motives: Sri Lanka in Comparative Perspective*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980, p. 38.
 9. See S. J. Thambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide...*, p. 3 also A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "Introduction to the Second Edition" in *Politics in Sri Lanka...*, p. xv.
 10. PSM, 76-77;
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
 12. ASPSCC, pp. 12-19 also TRSLN, pp. 23-39.
 13. TRSLN, p. 1.
 14. *Id.*
 15. "Ceylon" is the anglicized form of the name "Ceilao" given to the country by the Portuguese colonizers.
 16. There is also a small number of aboriginal people known as Vaddas who live in the jungles of the South West province with very limited contact with the general population of Sri Lanka,. For more on this see C. G. Seligmann and B. Z. Seligmann, *The Vaddas*, Anthropological Publications, Oosterhout N.B., 1969, 463 p.
 17. See, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka...*, pp. 47-48.
 18. For more details see, Appendix I.
 19. Robert N. Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)*, Cornell University Press, London, 1973, p. 3 and K. M. De Silva, "Historical Survey," in *Sri Lanka: A Survey*, p. 32.

20. See for instance some of the arguments advanced by Susantha Goonatilaka, in his "The Formation of Sri Lankan Culture: Reinterpretation of Chronicle and Archaeological Material," in *Ethnicity and Social Change: Papers Presented at a Seminar Organized by the Social Scientists Association, December 1979*, Navagama Printers, Dehiwela, 1985, pp. 21-51, Also Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question . . .* pp. 19-20 and S. J. Thambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide . . .*, pp. 5-6
21. *Dipawamsa*, literally *Story of the Island*, for further details see, H. Olden, berg, (ed. and trans.), *Dipawamsa*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1879.
22. *Mahawamsa* literally *Story of the Great Dynasty*. In the words of the Buddhist monk Mahanama, the author of *Mahawamsa*, the purpose of his writing the chronicle was "for the serene joy and emotion of the pious" as quoted by Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka The National Question . . .*, p. 15. See W. Geiger, (ed. and trans.), *Mahawamsa*, Ceylon Government Information Department, Colombo, 1950.
23. In his enthusiasm to glorify Buddhism, the author of the *Mahawamsa* describes non-Buddhists as "wrong believers" and equates them to mere animals. See for instance W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism . . .*, pp. 65 and 79. See also H. Bechert, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: Mahawamsa and Political Thinking" in *Religious and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, B. L. Smith, (ed.), Anima Books, New York, 1978, p. 7.
24. See Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question . . .*, p. 15 and R. A. L. H. Gunewardena, "The People of the Lion: Sinhala consciousness in History and Historiography," in *Ethnicity and Social Change . . .*, pp. 67-68.
25. *Mahawamsa*, xiv, 37 as quoted by W. Rahula, in *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period*, M. D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., Colombo, p. 21. The Sri Lankan Buddhist theory of the Aryan origin of the Sinhalese has over the years contributed to widen the gulf between the Sinhalese and Tamils. This theory is contested by modern archeologists, see for instance Senake Bandaranayake, "The Peopling of Sri Lanka: the National Question and Some Problems of History and Ethnicity," in *Ethnicity and Social Change . . .*, pp. 5-8.
26. *Dipawamsa*, vii, 18, 19 and *Mahawamsa*, v, 195, xiii and xiv, as cited in W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism*, pp. 48-50.
27. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics . . ." *art. cit.*, p. 335.
28. W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism . . .*, pp. 65, 79.

29. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question . . .*, p. 15.
30. See S. J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide . . .*, p. 6.
31. The Buddha Sasana, is a collective term used to refer to the Buddhist teachings, doctrines, institutions, regulations and practices. Buddhists in Sri Lanka firmly believe that "the island of Ceylon was destined by the Buddha to be the repository of the true doctrine, where the *Sangha* (the Monastic institution) and the *Sasana* would be firmly established and shine in glory." As quoted by K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society . . .*, p. 22. Also K. M. De Silva, *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, ICES, Colombo, 1993, pp. 316-317; 324-328.
32. H. Bechert, "The Beginnings . . .", pp. 7-9.
33. K. M. De Silva, "Historical Survey," *art. cit.*, p. 32.
34. S. J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide . . .*, p. 58.
35. Historical research in modern times has uncovered that in their effort to wed Buddhism with Sinhala culture the chroniclers have even falsified the date of Buddha's *parinibbana*. See, Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question . . .*, p. 23.
36. Basing his arguments on these chronicles the Sri Lankan scholar-monk W. Rahula writes, "for more than two millennia the Sinhalese have been inspired that they were a nation brought into being for the definite purpose of carrying the torch lit by Buddha" as quoted in Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question*, p. 23.
37. Despite the doctrinal pronouncement of Buddhism that *metta* (compassion) toward all living beings is one of the fundamental teachings of Buddha, and that human life is an indispensable condition to attain *nibbana* or "enlightenment," the monk-author of *Mahawamsa* seemed not to realize the contradiction when he recommends killing as a virtue when it is done in defence of Buddhism. See for instance W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism . . .*, pp. 79-80.
38. *Theravada* literally "School of Elders" is also known as *Hinayana* meaning "small vehicle" as compared to the other major school of Buddhism, known as *Mahayana* or "Great Vehicle." For more on this see A. L. Herman, *An Introduction to Buddhist Thought: A Philosophic History of Indian Buddhism*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1983, pp. 119-348.
39. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics . . .", *art. cit.*, p. 334.

40. The Buddhist doctrinal teachings brought to Sri Lanka by Mahinda were probably transmitted orally from one generation to the next until the end of the first century B.C. when it was committed to writing. In the 5th century A.D. these writings were compiled together to form the *Pali Canon* "which today provides doctrinal guidance for the Theravada orthodoxy" See. P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics . . . , art. cit., p. 335.
41. *Theravada* school of Buddhism is being practised also in Burma, Kampuchea, Laos and Thailand.
42. P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics . . . , art. cit., p. 336.
43. "Tamils of Sri Lankan origin" also known as "Ceylon Tamils" are those who have been living in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka for the past several centuries. "Tamils of Indian origin" are those who were brought to Sri Lanka from India in the 19th century by the British plantocracy as indentured labourers.
44. Certain Philologists affirm that the **Dravidians** were the ancestors of the present - day Tamils, their language then known as "Diramila," was the archaic form of the Tamil language. For further details see S. Gnana-pragasar, *An Etymological and Comparative Lexicon of the Tamil Language*, Vol. 1, Thirumagal Press, Chunnakam, 1940, pp. 4-8. For more recent scholarly study on this subject, see, S. U. Deraniyagala, *The Prehistory of Sri Lanka, Part 1*, Dept. of Archaeological Survey, Colombo, 1992, pp. 362-366, also by the same author "Pre-history and Lanka's indigenous people", *The Island*, Sunday (20-02-1994) p. 12.
45. Naga means cobra and Yakksha means demon, thus one interpretation of **Nagas and Yakkshas** consider them as worshippers of Cobras and Demons.
46. This is upheld by the fact that to date "Naga" or Cobra evokes religious feelings among Tamil Hindus and several of the Tamil epics as well as art and sculpture contain the power of the Supreme Reality manifested in fearful demonic images and forms. See Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question . . .*, pp. 18-19, 39. also see S. U. Deraniyagala, *The Prehistory . . .* pp. 350-366
47. There are some who maintain that the island of Sri Lanka was physically united to India and the people who lived in South India might have walked across before the island got separated by a narrow stretch of sea. See, G. C. Mendis, *The Early History of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1946. p. 3 also S. U. Deraniyagala, *The Prehistory . . .* pp. 291-366
48. See W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism . . .*, pp. 36-38.

49. See Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question* , pp. 18-19.
50. Hinduism is a common word used in South Asia to refer to the different sects as *Saivism*, *Vaishnavism*, and *Sakthism*. For more See R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, 262 p.
51. For more on *Saivism* see, K. Sivaraman, *Saivism in Philosophical Perspective*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973, 687 p.
52. K. Sivathamby, *Thamil Illakiyathil Mathamum Manudamum*, (in Tamil), Tamil Puthakalayam, Madras, 1983, p. 18.
53. R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* . . . , p. 49.
54. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question* , p. 31.
55. *Id.*,
56. "The name Moor was applied to the Muslims encountered in Ceylon by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and has remained in use." R. N. Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)* , p. 5.
57. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka* , p. 47.
58. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question* , p. 36.
59. See B. H. Farmer, *Ceylon: A Divided Nation*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963, p. 30.
60. See W. L. A. Don Peter, *Studies in Ceylon Church History*, The Catholic Press, Colombo, 1963, pp. 104-105.
61. P. A. Saram, "The Evolutionary Dialectics . . .," p. 344.
62. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy 1948-1980*, Zed Press, London, 1981, p. 5.
63. See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "Sri Lanka and its Future: Sinhalese versus Tamils" in *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, (eds.), A. J. Wislon and D. Dalton, C. Hurst & Co., London, 1982, pp. pp. 296-298 Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question* . . . , pp. 46-49 and also S. J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide* . . . , p. 13-15, 19-30, 34-87.
64. R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church . . .," pp. pp. 199-201 P. A. Saram, "The Evolutionary Dialectics . . .," p. 358.

65. The measures taken by the government include the sudden nationalization of denominational schools without paying any compensations, the expulsion of Catholic nuns from hospitals, the ban on entry permits to foreign missionaries etc. For more see P. A. Saram, "The Evolutionary Dialectics . . .," p. 358.
66. Col. H. S. Olcott, an American convert to Buddhism is quoted to have said, "look at your great enemy Christianity" and follow their methods to spread and reform Buddhism, See K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhala Society . . .*, p. 245. See also L. A. Wickremaratne, "Religion, Nationalism and Social Change in Ceylon, 1865-1885" in *JRAS*, 1969, pp. 123ff. and S. Pathmanathan, "The Hindu Society in Sri Lanka: Changed and Changing" in *Religiousness in Sri Lanka*, J. R. Carter, (ed.), Marga Institute, Colombo, 1979, p. 149ff.
67. P. A. Saram, "The Evolutionary Dialectics . . .," p. 341.
68. See S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches: Ceylon Church History . . .*, pp. 58-65.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
70. See W. L. A. Don Peter, , *Ceylon Church History . . .*, pp. 104-116.
71. See S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches . . .*, p. 62.
72. F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 171.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-116, 153.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-116. A good example to this is the defence presented by Father Belchior of Lisbon when he was arrested by the King of Jaffna for destroying temples and images of Hindu gods. The priest said, "that being dedicated to the devil who had no right to possess anything on earth, they were an insult to the glory of God, the only Lord of the universe; and that for this reason, he a servant of God, had destroyed them." As cited by S. Gnanapragasar, *A History of the Catholic Church in Ceylon: Period of Beginnings 1505-1602*. Printed at the Messenger Press, for the Literature Committee of the Catholic Union of Ceylon, Colombo, 1924, p. 150.
75. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society . . .*, p. 30.
76. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, pp. 321, 405.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 320ff.
78. K. Sivathamby, *Thamil Illakiyathil . . .*, p. 39.

79. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society* . . . , p. 33.
80. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary Dialectics . . ." p. 343.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 342.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
83. R. Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule* . . . , p. 71, 93.
84. See S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches* . . . , pp. 88-109.
85. See *Ibid.*, p. 21.
86. See *Ibid.*, p. 113-119.
87. See *Ibid.*, pp. 20-23.
88. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary Dialectics . . ." p. 344.
89. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka* . . . , p. 5.
90. P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary Dialectics . . ." p. 344.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
92. Around the year 1818 several missionary groups were engaged in educational and other apostolates, leading among these groups were the London Missionary Society, the Baptists, the Wesleyans, the Church of England, and the Congregationalists. See *Ibid.*, p. 347.
93. *Id.*
94. It was during the British period that organizations such as the **Sinhala Maha Sabha**, (The Great Council of the Sinhalese), All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, The United Council of Monks, The United Monks Front, **Bauddha Jathika Balavegaya** (National Front for the Protection of Buddhism) etc. were formed to agitate for greater political recognition of Buddhism.
95. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics . . . , p. 350.
96. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church . . ." pp. 196-200.
97. See L. A. Wickremeratne, "Religion, Nationalism and Social Change . . . pp. 142-146 also K. Kailasapathy, "Cultural and Linguistic Consciousness

- of the Tamil Community" in *Ethnicity and Social Change*, p. 164. also G. D. Bond Buddhist Revival..... pp. 3-8, 46-87
98. See *Ibid.*, pp. 142-147.
99. See K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 199ff.
100. See *Ibid.*, p. 191.
101. See K. Malalgoda, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" in *Sri Lanka: A Survey . . .*, p. 386.
102. *Id.*
103. See K. Kailasapathy, *Illakiya Cinthanaikal . . .*, p. 34.
104. *Id.*
105. P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary . . .", p. 352.
106. F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, pp. 254-255.
107. As quoted by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka . . .*, p. 45.
108. F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 254.
109. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "Sri Lanka and its Future," in *The States of South Asia . . .*, p. 298.
110. See *Id.*
111. F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 253.
112. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who was born in an Anglican family and later chose to become a Buddhist, was a leading figure of the Buddha-Sinhala movements from the 1930s to the 1950s. For more, see, F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 236ff.
113. See *Ibid.*, pp. 249-253.
114. F. O. Tambimuttu, *A Profile of Ceylon's Catholic Heritage*, *World Horizon Reports*, No. 28, Maryknoll, New York, 1964, p. 59.
115. *Ibid.*,
116. See D. E. Smith, "The Sinhalese Buddhist Revolution" in *South Asian Politics and Religion*, D. E. Smith, (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, pp. 449ff.

117. P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary . . . ," p. 358.
118. *The Betrayal of Buddhism: An Abridged Version of the Report of the Buddhist Commission of Inquiry*, Colombo, 1956, p. 89.
119. P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary . . ." p. 358.
120. The Communist Parties of Sri Lanka include, Communist Party (Moscow), Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Ceylon Equal Society Party), Revolutionary Marxist Party.
121. The Archbishop of Colombo published a letter stating that all Catholics who support or co-operate with the Communist party will be excluded from the Eucharist, deprived of Christian burial and the blessing of their houses and will be considered public sinners. See Thomas Cooray, "Pastoral Letter - Reconciliation of Public Sinners," Catholic Press, Colombo, 1950, pp. 1-2.
122. See N. Abeyasingha, "The 1960-1961 Schools' Crisis in Ceylon" in *ZMR*, 60 (1976), p. 219 and W. L. A. Don Peter, *View Points on Education in Sri Lanka*, Evangel Press, Ltd., Colombo, 1987, pp. 9-42.
123. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Electoral Politics . . .*, p. 24.
124. See R. N. Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon . . .*, p. 180.
125. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka*, p. 18.
126. Poya days are calculated on the basis of the waxing and waning of the Moon and these days are of religious significance to the Buddhists.
127. See A. Fernando, "No More Sunday in Ceylon," in *Worldmission*, 17 (1966), pp. 68-72.
128. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 113.
129. See *Ibid.*, p. 256.
130. See K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society . . .*, p. 211.
131. See *Id.*
132. See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Electoral Politics . . .*, p. 10.
133. See K. Malalgoda, "Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka," in *Religion in South Asia . . .*, p. 184.

134. See **K. Malalgoda**, "Buddhism in Sri Lanka" in *Sri Lanka: A Survey . . .*, p. 386. Laicization is used here to refer to the methods and means adopted by the monks to involve the active participation of the Buddhist laity in matters related to Buddhism. This practice was uncommon in doctrinal Buddhism which relegates laity to a very limited role in religious matters.
135. See **P. A. Saram**, "Sri Lanka: Evolutionary . . .," p. 354. Also **K. M. De Silva**, (ed.), *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, ICES, Colombo, 1993, pp. 317 - 318.
136. *Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka (Ceylon)*, Section VI, Ch. 2.
137. **A. Jeyaratnam Wilson**, "Sri Lanka and its Future . . .," p. 298. Also his book entitled, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese Tamil Conflict*, C. Hurst & Co., London, 1988.
138. **A. Jeyaratnam Wilson**, "Tamils and Their Future in Sri Lanka" in *Tamil Times*, (London - U.K.), 5 (1986), No. 12, pp. 6-7.
139. **R. L. Stirrat**, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church . . .," p. 197.
140. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
141. **A. Jeyaratnam Wilson**, "Sri Lanka and its Future . . .," p. 295.
142. See **TRSLN**, pp. 1-39.
143. See **V. A. Leary**, *Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka*, ICJJ, Geneva, 1st edition, 1981, 87 p. and revised edn. 1983. (This book contains the report of an International Commission of Jurists' mission to Sri Lanka from 1981-1983. See also Amnesty International Report "Sri Lanka: Allegations of Extrajudicial Executions and Disappearances, 1983-1985," London, 1985 and Amnesty International - File on Torture: Sri Lanka, *Newsletter*, V. 15 (10), London, October, 1985, pp. 3-5.
144. See **R. L. Stirrat**, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church . . .," p. 204. See also Amnesty International's report on the torture of Fr. A. Singarayer, O.M.I., in *Newsletter*, April, 1984, p. 4. See also "Bishops Conference Writes to Government: Probe Death of Priest" in *The Messenger*, Colombo, January 13, 1985, p. 1 also "Bishops Call for Report on Inquiry into Killing" in *The Messenger*, Colombo, March 3, 1985, p. 1 also "Methodist Minister Burnt to Death" and "Troops Kill Priest in his Church - Nunnery Ransacked" in *Tamil Times*, 4 (1985), No. 3, p. 3 also "A Scene out of Hell" in *Time*, Feb. 11, 1985., Asian edition, pp. 39-40.
145. See "The Bishop of Jaffna Threatened" in *Tamil Times*, 3 (1984), No. 11, p. 5 & 16.

Chapter 3

THE CHURCH IN THE NATION:

THE SRI LANKAN BISHOPS' EFFORTS AT CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

A. TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THRUST

The Sri Lankan "socio-historical ensemble" with all its complex and diverse constituent elements is the proper **locus** of any meaningful pastoral effort towards contextualization. Unsurprisingly the bishops of Sri Lanka often made deliberate attempts to evoke this multi-faceted national context¹ as an indispensable component of their pastoral planning and missionary action.

1. SOME PERTINENT ISSUES

Basing ourselves on the pastoral letters, statements and other official documents published by the Sri Lankan Catholic hierarchy, we shall examine, in this chapter, the means and methods of contextualization of the church, propounded and practised by the bishops. Even a cursory reading of the joint pastoral letters, declarations of the National Synod, and other official statements of the Sri Lankan hierarchy would disclose that the questions and issues addressed by the bishops within this twenty year period, (i.e. 1965-1985) encompass the whole gamut of the "Sri Lankan social ensemble". The themes and topics of study chosen by the bishops clearly point toward a well-knitted contextual thrust. Whether the bishops were adequately prepared for such a challenging venture, or whether they were successful in internalising and interpreting the diverse components of this context, with justifiable objectivity and fidelity, remains an issue of critical study and examination.

But what is to be affirmed for the present is that during this period of thirty years (1960 – 1990) the bishops have made very specific efforts to study and reflect upon several contextual issues that have a direct bearing on the fields of politics, economics, culture, education as well as ecumenical collaborations particularly with the non-Christian religions. In the light of the Church's mission and the Catholic tradition, they have also striven to redefine the right attitude that the church as a faith-centred community should adopt in its living encounter with these inseparable realities of the Sri Lankan social ensemble.²

The statements of the bishops bear demonstrable evidence that they were mindful of the changing needs and exigencies of the Sri Lankan national context and the relevant response these changes conversely demand from the church.³ In other words, the contextual path decisively chosen by the bishops was partly prepared by the existing socio-political and religio-cultural conditions of post-colonial Sri Lanka. While seeking to establish the process of "contextualization of the church" as envisaged by the bishops, it is fitting that we make also some relevant references to other issues that are closely related to this theme. Hence we meet such questions as: What are the missionary motives and theological basis of contextualization envisaged by the bishops? What are the means and methods of contextualization contained in their statements? What are the possibilities and prospects, obstacles and oppositions encountered by the bishops in their actual efforts at contextualization? And what are the perceptible impacts that the process of ecclesial contextualization has had on the social ensemble of Sri Lanka? As an integral aspect of the process of contextualization we shall also identify and illustrate some of the major areas of contextualization particularly along the direction of inter-religious dialogue, socio-cultural development and ethno-political integration.

We shall analyse these and other relevant issues related to the process of contextualization of the church by having them situated within the context of the thirty year period which our study proposes to cover. A relevant methodological

approach also demands that the contents of the bishops' statements be studied and analysed against the background of the concrete socio-historical context of Sri Lanka. Because the bishops themselves have acknowledged on many occasions that it is this same socio-historical context that had determined the method and content, the force and focus of some of their statements, particularly those directly related to the Sri Lankan social ensemble.

In order to sharpen our focus on the multifarious elements that go to constitute the Sri Lankan socio-religious ensemble, we propose to study these two decades by dividing them into three phases, based on the major socio-political, ethno-cultural and religious developments as well as on the eventful transformations found within the Sri Lankan church. It is our hope that such a division would enable us to pay close attention to the complexity and magnitude of contextual issues treated by the bishops within this period. Each phase will form a single but inter-related unit, constituting the following three chapters.

The first phase covers the period from the year 1965 up to 1977. These twelve years were as challenging to the nation⁴ as they were to the church. But looking from within the church, despite the crises entailed, these years proved to be an active and productive period. It opened up a period of intense intra-ecclesial renewal. These years witnessed numerous renewal seminars, the National Pastoral Council, the National Synod and an extensive socio-religious research conducted by a team of experts under the able direction of Prof. Francois Houtart,⁵ at the request of the Catholic hierarchy. It may also be pointed out that the social, political, ethnic, economic and religious problems of the three phases have distinct sources and causes.

2. THE PRE-1965 SOCIO-ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

Since our study covers a span of three decades, beginning from the year 1960, it is proper that we make a relevant reference to the social ensemble and to the religious climate that prevailed in the early 1960s. This would enable us to

compare and contrast critically the gradual shift concerning the self-understanding of the church and its relationship to the nation, before and after 1960. It has been observed by us in the previous chapter, that to the Sri Lankan nation in general and to the Catholic church in particular, the first half of the decade that began with the year 1960 was marked by several challenges and controversies. Political turmoil, economic stagnation, religious conflict, cultural resurgence, and violent confrontations over language rights characterized the national scene at this period.⁶

It should also be recalled that during this period the church in Sri Lanka had to accommodate itself to a political creed and leadership whose policies and programmes were devised with an open hostility towards the church and its institutional interests,⁷ thus resulting in a mounting deterioration of relationships between the church and the State. The nationalization of over 750 Catholic schools, the concomitant financial loss incurred by the Catholic church, the curtailing of the sphere of influence in the socio-religious fields which the church was able to exert through its efficiently administered school network, the forced expulsion of foreign missionary nuns working in the hospitals and the promulgation of a law demanding entry permits for foreign missionary priests, considerably exasperated the strained relationship between church and State. Even the abortive **coup d'état** of 1962 was exploited for promoting political advantages and for intensifying inter-religious ill-feelings by the ruling parties which maintained that "**Christian officers had sought to overthrow a pro-Buddhist government**".⁸

This beleaguered situation induced the Catholic leadership to seriously rethink its missionary and pastoral orientations.⁹ In the course of time the Catholic hierarchy realized the need to abandon the attitude of conflict and to evolve a workable compromise. Such an attitude of conciliation was largely facilitated by the spirit of openness and dialogue promoted by the Second Vatican Council which was in session from 1962 through 1965.

3. THE MISSIONARY AND PASTORAL CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH IN SRI LANKA IN THE 1960s

At this juncture it is important to make a brief survey of the pastoral tides and missionary trends that prevailed within the church in the 1960s and later. This is all the more necessary because the efforts toward ecclesial renewal, leading to contextualization launched by the bishops were often "labelled" as pastoral, whether these were really so in their content and character remains to be seen. Besides, the bishops took as their starting point the existing reality of the church, i.e. its pastoral practices, missionary enterprises, ecclesial structures and other ministerial activities.

These in our view could be broadly classified as constituting three basic pastoral trends, with a certain degree of interdependence. According to the descending order of importance given to them by the Sri Lankan church, these trends are: **cultic trend**, **militant Christian trend** and **social development trend**.

To date, the cultic dimension of Christianity is given top priority and primary attention by the bishops, priests and the laity in Sri Lanka. By cult we mean, all worship-related activities such as the regular celebration of the sacraments, religious festivals, novenas, religious processions, pilgrimages etc. As a matter of fact when the Sri Lankan bishops initiated the process of adaptation at the post-conciliar period, they deemed "liturgical adaptation" to be the focal point of renewal.¹⁰ The bishops maintained that "liturgical renewal will be a sign of renewal in all other sectors".¹¹ They stressed that "problems will be solved in the spirit of the liturgy which is a spirit of dedication to God and fellow men".¹² Even the bishops' conception of the sacraments as "external signs productive of inward grace"¹³ manifests a reified notion of grace, that is unknown to Vatican II.

The cultic-trend did help to consolidate the institutional dimension of the church. But the risk entailed in such an approach is that it downplays the role of creative action-

oriented involvement and tends to dichotomise Christian life and worship as two distinct compartments. In practice all cultic functions are within the domain of the hierarchy. Hence it undermines the role of the laity and disregards the charismatic aspect of the church. Pastoral experience in Sri Lanka shows that in the last three decades, an over-emphasis of cult with an excessive other-worldly spiritualism has led to passivity, non-involvement and pietistic escapism in matters that warrant an action-oriented Christian participation.¹⁴

The second trend, namely the militant Christian trend is manifested in the bishops' understanding of the "Biblical, Evangelizational and Catechetical apostolate"¹⁵. Proclaiming the Gospel to the non-Christian majority with a direct or indirect intention of drawing them into the institutional church and expanding the territorial boundaries of the church are among the basic *raison d'être* of this trend. This trend which is overtly church-centred and was very pronounced during the colonial period, became visibly less articulate in the post-conciliar era.¹⁶ While projecting the image of the church as an affluent society with spiritual and material wealth, this trend continues to send such uncritical messages like Christianity being the sole possessor of the Ultimate Truth and the "*vera religio*" in contrast to other religions as "*falsa religio*". As a result this trend renders inter-religious dialogue or collaboration next to impossible. To a great extent this trend served as the indirect *motif* of the church's "missionary activities".¹⁷ This trend not only alienated the church from the religio-cultural context of Sri Lanka but it solidified the image of the Sri Lankan church as a western cultural monolith. It presented Christianity as a foreign doctrine and institution rather than a Gospel to be lived and experienced within the Sri Lankan national context, with all that it implies and contains

The third trend which is geared toward "social development" has been inspired by the social encyclicals published since the beginning of this century and the audacious openness to the world manifested by the Council. This trend is kept alive by the prevailing socio-economic conditions and problems

in Sri Lanka. In the past few years the bishops have sought to address the importance of the church's collective and responsible participation in various socio-economic development projects.¹⁸ In its essence the social development trend is a form of social action directed to help in the increase of economic productivity and improving the country's multifaceted development. The decision by the CBCSL to establish the "Socio Economic Development Centre" (SEDEC)¹⁹ as integral to the pastoral pursuit of the church consolidates this trend as an indispensable aspect of the church's program of a context-centred reform. To date these three trends are present and operative within the Sri Lankan church with varying degrees of emphasis and intensity. Since these are some of the basic characteristic traits of the Sri Lankan church, we shall discuss later the specific impacts these trends have had on the process of contextualization initiated by the bishops.

4. SOME BASIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE PROCESS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

As a matter of fact, the exigencies that surfaced at this period, both from within and without the Sri Lankan church required a relevant reorientation of its **pastorale**. More pointedly, the nationalistic resurgence, to which we have alluded to in the previous chapter, coupled with strong anti-Catholic sentiments that prevailed during post-independence times induced the church and its leadership to look for more cordial and credible forms of pastoral presence. Besides, in the pre-1960 period the institutional church confined a major part of its pastoral ministry to the fields of education, social and charitable services and the promotion of cult. But the sudden nationalization of the Catholic school network, the eviction of Christian missionaries from hospitals and the direct control exercised by the government on all welfare services and still later even abolition of Sunday as a weekly holiday induced the bishops to seek a new orientation of the church's pastoral response.²⁰

Fortunately for the church in Sri Lanka, at this critical period, it did possess the creative potential to make a favourable

and a positive response to the needs and demands of the times. Because the Catholic community of Sri Lanka possessed almost all the elements that are enumerated in the Council's definition of a vibrant "young church".²¹ In 1962 there were over 525 priests actively engaged in pastoral ministry, of whom nearly 400 were of native origin.²² "Even within religious communities of European origin the ratio of native membership was high; 260 out of the 344 Oblates were Ceylonese, as were 684 out of the 741 sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux."²³ Except one bishop all others were sons of the soil. It is therefore rightly observed that the growing number of indigenous clergy and religious eminently facilitated the process of indigenization.²⁴

In our effort to spell out the origin, theological basis and the contemporary pastoral import of the process of contextualization, we stated that in the Catholic Church the recent attempts at contextualization should be situated within the ambience of ecclesial reform and renewal sought by the Council. As a matter of fact the mode of change launched by the Council provided the vision and spirit for renewal to the Sri Lankan church.²⁵

Such Conciliar documents as "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World",²⁶ "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions",²⁷ and the "Declaration on Religious Freedom"²⁸ promoted a positive and cordial relationship toward the world, and toward the followers of other faiths and religions. The Council also redefined the notion of religious conversion and the motivation for missionary activities and evangelization. The changes wrought by the Council opened up an entirely new chapter in the relationship of the church toward other religions. For the Sri Lankan church this helped in no small measure toward easing inter-religious tensions²⁹ and in intensifying the right spirit of self-renewal and church-renewal. The Sri Lankan church began to recognize the values of dialogue and collaboration with other religions as integral to its life and mission.

Besides, at that point of time the existing socio-political conditions were so hostile to the Catholic church³⁰ that the Council's tone of cordiality and dialogue prepared the Sri Lankan church leadership to seek a way of conciliation rather than that of confrontation. The Catholic leadership came to the gradual realization that they had to discover their missionary and pastoral role within the confines of the multi-religious and multi-cultural mosaic of Sri Lanka.

In keeping with the spirit of the Council the Catholic hierarchy began to recognize the value of religio-cultural pluralism from a positive perspective. The bishops rightly felt that they had a duty to rectify the erroneous judgements of their predecessors and to restore a relationship of trust and co-operation with the political and non-Christian leadership of the nation.³¹ This required a genuine conversion in the church's attitudes and approaches concerning the very fundamental motive of missionary activities. The church's militant trend has to be replaced by a mission of service and co-operation.

B. THE BISHOPS' DILEMMA:

ADAPTATION OR CONTEXTUALIZATION

In marked contrast to the pre-Vatican II period, the years stretching forth from 1965-1977 were a time of serious self-discovery for the church at various levels of its pastorate. Realizing the adverse effects of the "closed-in and defensive attitudes",³² that had been maintained thus far, the Catholic leadership, decided to move into the mainstream of national life with an attitude of openness and service-oriented co-operation. The bishops asserted that the church "must serve the world and in particular, the Nation" where it lives.³³

The bishops' approach to reform did possess certain important ingredients of contextualization because they sought primarily to review the mission and pastoral life of the church in the light of the concrete needs of the nation.³⁴ But an absence of a consistent and synthetic missio-theological vision, coupled with the church's monarchical form of government

and a pietistic approach to reform³⁵ seem to have crippled the relevant dimensions of an authentic ecclesial contextualization, particularly in the decade immediately following the Council. Besides, the bishops preferred to choose the notion of adaptation³⁶ to circumscribe their approach to reform. But we shall illustrate later that in articulating the significance of this concept within the Sri Lankan context they did go beyond its narrow limitations. In the following pages we shall also seek to demonstrate the intrinsic strengths and weaknesses entailed in the process of contextual reform embarked upon by the bishops.

1. SOME POSITIVE CATALYSTS FOR REFORM

The winds of change and renewal began to blow with new vigour and vitality in the Sri Lankan Catholic church from January 1965. It auspiciously commenced with a renewal seminar animated by Fr. Riccardo Lombardi,³⁷ which was attended by over 500 persons including bishops, priests, religious and members of the laity.³⁸ From then on this flame of renewal was kept burning by means of renewal programmes organized for religious men and women at the Aquinas University College in Colombo, the publication of theological journals such as *Quest* and *Logos*,³⁹ and by conducting several seminars and conventions at district or diocesan levels.⁴⁰ As a result of these activities, a new desire for change exuded into the Catholic community at the diocesan or regional levels and prepared the way for a productive and fruitful ecclesial reform.

In March 1965, a more right wing government was voted to power. Unlike its predecessor, this government was more disposed to inter-religious amity and the church leaders showed a better spirit of accommodation in responding to the policies and programmes initiated by this government.⁴¹ Another strong impetus for renewal was provided by the fact that toward the end of 1965 all the bishops of Sri Lanka were in Rome attending some of the crucial, final sessions of Vatican II.⁴² As to how the bishops disposed themselves individually and collectively to translate the transforming vision of the council into reality remains a matter to be assessed.

2. THE BISHOP'S EFFORTS AT REFORM THROUGH THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

The first collective appeal for an overall renewal of Christian life came from the bishops after their Easter Conference in April 1966. The bishops announced their decision "to hold a Provincial Council or Synod"⁴³ in order to implement in Sri Lanka, in a more systematic manner the decrees and declarations of the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁴ In accordance with the conciliar theme of adaptation prevalent at that period, the bishops sought to gather all the elements and aspects of renewal under the banner of "adaptation".⁴⁵ In their attempt to actualize the process of adaptation the bishops grappled with the question, "Where does the so called **"aggiornamento"** or adaptation to present times and conditions come into play?"⁴⁶ They resolved to implement the process of adaptation by assessing and examining the exigencies of the national situation. Hence they said:

The Universal Church has come to far reaching conclusions in order to **adapt** its pastoral life to the needs of modern times. The Church in Ceylon must keep pace with this movement. **If we are to do this effectively we must first make a careful survey of our present position.**⁴⁷

This venture brought to light some unresolved conflicts in the church's pastoral practice. In addition to this, the approaches and attitudes to reform adopted by the bishops seem also to conceal a crippling dichotomy.⁴⁸

Basically this dichotomy surfaced as an immediate result of the bishops' attempt to concretise in Sri Lanka the Council's decrees and directives for renewal,⁴⁹ which were unavoidably generic, abstract and universal in nature. Plainly, the conflict faced by the bishops was a test of their fidelity to the context. On the one hand they desired to be meticulously faithful to the church of Rome, and in that they looked upon Rome to give them decrees, directives, endorsements and approvals.⁵⁰ On the other hand, they were confronted by the glaring situation of the national context with all its peculiarities and complexities that understandably defied any predetermined or

prefabricated generic solutions. The bishops vainly attempted to strike a balance.⁵¹ Therein lies the dichotomous approach to the context enunciated by the bishops: a dichotomy that is blatantly evident in many of their attempts at concretising and implementing this process of context-oriented ecclesial reform.⁵² Thus, despite the bishops' expressed intention to be faithful to the socio-political, economic, cultural and religious situation⁵³ that obtains in Sri Lanka, the methods and approaches employed by them in actual pastoral practice were rather ineffective in the consequences they sought to bring into effect. We shall explain this with examples in the succeeding pages.

3. BEYOND THE LIMITS OF ADAPTATION

The experience of antagonism from other religions coupled with the age-old socio-cultural rupture, that was perpetuated directly or tacitly in the Sri Lankan church reminded the bishops of the need for a radical ecclesial conversion. The bishops were also motivated by the conviction that in order to implement effectively, the renewal envisioned by the Council, and to respond adequately to the exigencies of the national situation, they must make a clear assessment of the position of the church in that country.⁵⁴ They sought to make this assessment by situating the church and its pastoral and missionary efforts over against the national context of Sri Lanka and by evaluating the progress made by the church *vis-a-vis* the manifold changes and transformations taking place in the Sri Lankan nation. The bishops also resolved that the answers and solutions they come out with, were not to "remain a dead letter" but that "they must be put into operation."⁵⁵ In this manner their deliberations manifest a desire for an action-oriented approach to reform.

The bishops sought to contain and convey all their efforts toward reform by the limited notion of "adaptation". Little did the bishops realize that the whole gamut of issues and concerns raised or addressed by them far surpassed the conceptual limits of "adaptation". Because in actual pastoral practice the areas, measures and magnitudes of renewal⁵⁶ they had undertaken, far exceeded the narrow boundaries

normally assigned to the notion of "adaptation". Here again, the conflict and dichotomy between the bishops' theory and praxis appear very pronounced. For instance, in the pastoral letter announcing the National Synod, the bishops elaborated the need for a missio-pastoral orientation saying,

The Church is a living organism, like a living tree. It was first planted in Ceylon some 450 years ago. Since then, external conditions have changed much - moral, religious, economic, educational, social, political. Has the Church had a normal growth under these varying conditions? Are there incrustations of the past, dead wood and unproductive branches that must be removed? Are there new sources of better nourishment, more sunshine that will increase its vitality, growth and fruitfulness? Does it need better safeguards for its production and security? These and many similar questions will have to be asked and suitable answers found. Then these answers or solutions are not to remain a dead letter. They must be put into operation. In so doing, however, we must not forget that we are dealing with a living organism.⁵⁷

The ecclesiological conflicts and dichotomies we have referred to above are clearly discernible in this paragraph. By presenting the birth and growth of the church in Sri Lanka through the imagery of a "potted plant" the bishops seem to have endorsed the preconiliar notion of mission, as planting of a prefabricated entity in an ungodly virgin soil. This manner of understanding the church, contradicts the very foundation of ecclesial contextualization, as outlined by us in this study. In seeking to describe the intrinsic dynamism of this process, we emphasized that an authentic approach to this process should promote a creative and enlivening encounter between a Christian community and the constituent elements of a given social ensemble, so that an authentically contextual church may evolve and emerge out of such vital encounter.

The bishops did in fact, recognize the need for a realistic and meaningful change in the ecclesial realm. Having called to mind the manifold changes that had taken place in the

Sri Lankan social ensemble,⁵⁸ they also point out the need to align the ecclesial reforms within the horizon of those changes. But here again the imageries used by the bishops smack of sheer external decorations and modifications. Their efforts as expressed in these imageries do not point toward a positive change or a substantial integration into the national stream with all its challenges and concerns. Rather, the bishops explicate their work more as a decorative undertaking.⁵⁹ The bishops' conception of the church also reveals a tendency to objectify the church at the cost of overlooking the need for a subjective self-criticism.

A critical assessment of the bishops' approach to reform unfolds two paradoxical aspects. On the one hand they emphasize the need to be relevant to the situation that obtains in Sri Lanka and consider the Sri Lankan social ensemble as the proper "locus" of an authentic ecclesial reform, but on the other they sought to contain every dimension of ecclesial reform within the narrow concept of adaptation.

A closer and critical review of the National Synod from the angle of contextualization would help us to illustrate this paradox in greater details in the succeeding pages.

C. THE NATIONAL SYNOD AND THE SEARCH FOR AN AUTHENTIC LOCAL CHURCH

As an important ecclesial event the National Synod occupied the attention of the hierarchy and to a limited extent of some members of the clergy and laity of the church of Sri Lanka, for over a period of three years, i.e. 1966-1969. One of the chief purposes of this Synod was to redefine the role of the church in the nation. A critical evaluation of synodal declarations is important because in them the bishops sought to articulate the pattern of ecclesial reform as applicable to the Sri Lankan situation.⁶⁰ For our purpose here we shall invoke some of the relevant sections that are directly related to our area of analysis.

1. A SEARCH FOR THE TRUE IMAGE

The re-discovery of the “true image of the church” in Sri Lanka⁶¹ was one of the central concerns of the hierarchy at the National Synod. This can be partly ascertained by the fact that when the bishops announced their intention to hold a National Synod, they stated their threefold purpose for convoking such a Synod in the following manner:

1. To show out better the **true image** of the Church, namely what it should be as intended by Christ Our Lord.
2. To examine ourselves according to this **true image** as in a mirror, and bring bout the necessary reforms, changes, adjustments etc.
3. Thus purified to manifest to the world around us this **true image of the church** which is the manifestation of Christ Himself Who is the Light of the World.⁶²

Within the general frame of ecclesial contextualization, the desire shown by the bishops to recapture and restore the “true image” of the church in Sri Lanka bears a particular relevance. As part of our effort to spell out the ecclesiological dimension of contextualization, we highlighted in the first chapter the indispensability of the sign aspect of the church and its particular relevance in a non-Christian milieu. It may also be recalled that the sign aspect of the church was among the important ecclesiological models emphasized at the Council.⁶³

There is also another important reason as to why the hierarchy of Sri Lanka began to search for the “true image of the church”. The current image projected by the church in Sri Lanka became a topic of criticism in public circles.⁶⁴ A leading Sri Lankan English daily, had this to say about the church on its Christmas day editorial for the year 1965,

.... the social pursuits of Christianity have so often created situations far removed from those which would

have won the approval of Christ. In a country whose wide religious and cultural traditions evoke quiet introspection, the extrovert ebullience of the Christian minority has caused suspicion - perhaps envy? - and dissension. The Churches in Ceylon for the most part have indulged in a fair share of good works. But some of this has become suspect ... too many of the social pursuits of the Christian minority were alien from beginning to end ...⁶⁵

The bishops' keenness to restore the image of the church did bring in many good results. The most fruitful among these was the re-discovery of the church as a communion of persons with a diversity of service and unity of purpose.⁶⁶ The bishops rightly realized that it was not the episcopate that had the sole monopoly in fashioning the true image of the church. They saw it was their shared leadership in a spirit of co-responsibility and collegiality⁶⁷ that could mould and galvanize the "true image" of the church⁶⁸. The Council's understanding of the church in such biblical imageries as "people of God", "Body of Christ" and "herald and servant" underlined the essential role and function of the laity. This had a profound influence on the communitarian vision of the church envisaged by the Sri Lankan bishops.⁶⁹

Since the primary purpose of the National Synod was the restoration of the "true image" of the church, the bishops accented the need for the "Christian community to become a valid SIGN to those who come into contact with it ..."⁷⁰ They affirmed that "the public image of the Church, especially in her communitarian aspects has a direct bearing on her mission."⁷¹ More pointedly, the bishops' keenness to discover and restore the right image of the church led them to re-conceive the missionary function of the church in a manner that is more dynamic, open and far-reaching. Having made a brief but critical survey of the image projected by the church, particularly in the post-independence period, the bishops sought to recapture and restore the image of the church in its biblical roots and in consonance with the national context

of Sri Lanka. In this way they endeavoured to re-formulate the missionary role and function of the church in Sri Lanka, saying:

In recent times the work of the Church, its mission, was in practice considerably of a functional nature; administration of dioceses and parishes and within their jurisdiction, the administration of Sacraments and other spiritual benefits and material goods, administration of schools and other undertakings in the field of social service. Today the Church finds herself, because of new orientations given by the Second Vatican Council, trying to place a vigorously **new emphasis on her primary mission of bringing the challenge and strength of the Word of God to men of our time in our country, and presenting them with truth, freedom, brotherhood, love, justice and peace of Christ.**⁷²

The shift in the focus of mission as explicated here clearly points toward a major change from an institutional, parochial and sectarian understanding to one that is prophetic, evangelical and communitarian. The bishops acknowledged that the primary duty of the church is to "bring the Word of God to men of our time in our country",⁷³ not in the form of an information about Jesus Christ but as "challenge and strength" to the people. This new vision demands that the church becomes a herald of the basic values of the Gospel, namely "truth, freedom, brotherhood, love, justice and peace".⁷⁴ These values which are constitutive of the new society envisioned by Christ are also the qualities of the Kingdom of God inaugurated in and by Jesus Christ.⁷⁵

The bishops' affirmation points also to a radical re-formulation of the **motif** of ecclesial mission because it brings out an understanding of the church's mission in socio-economic and political categories. In this way it stands for a refashioning of the image of the church in accordance with the "social ensemble" within which the church finds herself.

2. ECCLESIAL CORRESPONSIBILITY

While commenting on the missio-pastoral context of the Sri Lankan church we observed that the cultic aspect of Christianity was given priority by the priests and the people in Sri Lanka. One of the chief consequences of this trend is that it assigns a dominant role to those who occupy the upper layers of the hierarchical structure. This is all the more true of the church of Sri Lanka where a major part of church administration and other ministerial responsibilities lie in the hands of the bishops, clergy and religious.

It is not surprising, that this pyramidal structure induced the bishops to see their role as that of the primary movers of change or reform. Thus, despite the nice words they said about the laity,⁷⁶ they decided to limit the participation and the right of deliberative voting at the proposed Synod only to the members of the hierarchy and other canonical members.⁷⁷ As a result of this narrow approach, on the local level the preparatory stages of the Synod did not receive anything more than a formal mention from the pulpit.⁷⁸ The church leadership also did very little to disseminate the views expressed in the various documents of the Council. Thus the laity and clergy were not properly up-dated about the reforms proposed at the Council. As a result of all this, in the early stages of its planning, the Synod failed to create a climate that would ensure a dynamic and substantial ecclesial reform in consonance with the needs of the church and of the nation.

The bishops and those involved in the preparation for the National Synod overlooked the need to involve general participation and collaboration, especially of the laity. Already then this omission was pointed out as indicative of an impending failure of the Synod. This observation was voiced through articles, editorial comments and opinion surveys published in Sri Lankan theological journals.⁷⁹

The bishops soon realized the need to involve the active and responsible participation of the laity and clergy in the

Synodal procedures in order to carry out effectively the programme of reform which they sought to bring into effect. Thus it was decided, "to broaden the base of consultation so as to include not only the bishops and other canonical members but the laity, the religious and the priests as well, at least in the preparatory stages"⁸⁰ of the National Synod. This in fact eventually led to the "calling of a National Pastoral Convention (NPC),⁸¹ as representing the people of God in Ceylon, reflecting its difficulties, anguishes and aspirations and participating with the Bishops in the task of Church renewal."⁸²

A significant outcome of the National Pastoral Convention was that it brought together for the first time, the bishops, clergy and the laity for the singular purpose of rejuvenating their ecclesial solidarity and missionary responsibility.⁸³ In this manner the NPC provided a fresh ecclesial experience of communion and corresponsibility.⁸⁴ It also helped to unlock the doors of ecclesial ghettoism and opened new vistas for a fresh and creative relationship at the intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial levels.⁸⁵ By emphasizing the need for the active participation of the laity in the mission of the church, the NPC delineated the importance of redefining the different dimensions of the local church as a necessary prerequisite for an effective ecclesial reform.⁸⁶

Taking their cue from the NPC, the bishops in their Synodal declarations developed the notion of inter-ecclesial solidarity and co-operation. They felt that an authentic local church is inconceivable without the active collaboration of the laity, the clergy and religious.⁸⁷ Their evaluation of the existing situation revealed that an individualistic spirituality characteristic of pre-Vatican II times coupled with a juridical and authority-oriented approach to pastorate had widened the gulf between the different groups in the church. The bishops also observed that the church has failed in her mission to foster community consciousness among Catholics and Christians at national level. They stated that:

... just as the Church as a whole has lived in disconnection from the National Community, different units or categories of persons (clergy, religious, laity) within the Church have lived more or less in a ghetto with a minimum of dialogue. Relationships which did exist have been more juridical, governed by law and authority, than personal and pastoral. Each diocese lived and worked in splendid isolation It is possible that this was a reflection on the level of the apostolate of the individualistic and exclusively vertical-oriented ("God and myself") spirituality which was characteristic of that Christian era.⁸⁸

In the opinion of the bishops, the pattern of relationship that links the different communities did not reflect the right Christian spirit. The bishops pointedly observed that:

... relationships between different categories of persons in the Church - Hierarchy and Laity, Bishops and Priests, Superiors and Subjects, etc. - are more often characterized by commands, prohibitions and sanctions (the language of authority) than by freedom, responsibility and love (the idiom of community).⁸⁹

Hence they emphasized the need to strengthen the bonds of dialogue and communion between the different groups within the church. The bishops stated that "all of us - clergy, religious, laity - belong to the One Christian Family in which each and every member must feel at home and be free 'to be himself (herself)' and express himself without fear or uneasiness".⁹⁰

Against the backdrop of an overwhelming non-Christian population, the search for an inner unity and communion of the Sri Lankan Catholic church reveals a special missionary relevance. In fact the earnestness shown by the bishops in promoting an intra-ecclesial solidarity cuts across the divisive barriers of language and culture.⁹¹ The bishops sought this corresponsibility at inter-diocesan and national levels because they were convinced that the sense of unity and fellowship that undergirds the church has a specific symbolic and witnessing value,⁹² within the Sri Lankan ethno-cultural mosaic.

3. RE-VITALISING THE LOCAL CHURCH

The re-vitalization of the local church was another important theme addressed by the bishops at the National Synod. Within the frame work of ecclesial corresponsibility the bishops endeavoured to re-define the various dimensions of the local church in Sri Lanka.⁹³ Understandably, several pastoral concerns related to the Sri Lankan church such as the church's relationship to the nation⁹⁴ its understanding of mission and worship, its approach to other religions and their followers etc. received lengthy treatments at the synod.⁹⁵ In order to study these issues from a contextually relevant perspective, the bishops emphasized the need for intra-ecclesial unity among Catholics from the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities.⁹⁶ The bishops maintained that "the whole church of Ceylon must form one community — the community that bears witness to Christ before the Nation."⁹⁷ This affirmation clearly illustrates a communitarian vision of ecclesial contextualization. This becomes more vivid in the concept of the church espoused by the bishops. They defined the church as "the whole community of believers called the People of God, gathered together in faith and love, **committed to carry out in the world the saving purpose of God the Father in His Son Jesus Christ Our Lord, in the power of God's Spirit,**"⁹⁸ Here the bishops stressed the need for the formation of Christian communities as visible SIGNS of the saving mission of Christ and explained that the task of carrying out this mission is incumbent upon every Christian.⁹⁹

The bishops attributed the missionary inefficiency of the local church in Sri Lanka to the sense of socio-cultural alienation then prevalent within the church. In their assessment of the popular image projected by the church, they deplored that the church is "...regarded as being wedded to western ways of life and thought, as a community which does not place enough emphasis on such values as poverty and simplicity."¹⁰⁰ Hence the bishops maintained that as a result of this western-oriented attitude, "people find it difficult to fully accept that the Roman Catholic community is really interested in being an integral part of the nation."¹⁰¹ This realization strongly prompted them to work out viable

means of integrating the church into the national context. It is for this reason that the bishops stressed the need to re-discover and restore the "true image" of the local church of Sri Lanka.

Seen from the perspective of contextualization, the recapitulation of an authentic local church is conceivable only in terms of that church's capacity to integrate itself into the national stream with all its exigencies and vicissitudes. The bishops did underline the notion that the church and its mission in Sri Lanka will become meaningful and relevant only when the church is able to align itself critically and creatively along the direction of change that animates the social, economic, cultural, political and religious spheres. But in seeking to actualize this notion with realistic relevance, the bishops succumbed again to the same dichotomy to which we have made allusions earlier.

Despite their strong national consciousness, the description of the diverse structures and functions of the local church as enunciated by the bishops made it only a territorial sub-division or an administrative unit of the church of Rome.¹⁰² In addition to this a clear lack of a coherent ecclesiology coupled with a vague evangelizational praxis seem to compound further this dichotomous notion of the church expressed by the bishops.¹⁰³ As a result they fail to see the local church as an event and as a concrete realization of the mystery of the church in a specific place and time. They fail to recognize the identity of the local church as the dynamic and on-going incarnation of the person and mystery of Christ within a concrete community in a particular place and culture.

D. SOME POSITIVE TRENDS TOWARD CONTEXTUALIZATION

In the preceding pages we made an effort to bring together some of the basic thrusts toward post-conciliar reforms as enunciated by the bishops of Sri Lanka. At various stages of our analysis we pointed out that the path of reform opted for by the bishops contain some of the basic ingredients of

contextualization. The word, "contextualization" is in fact not explicitly used by the bishops in any of their statements, pastoral letters or declarations. But the sense and meaning of the process of contextualization is clearly implied in the expressed motive of the bishops to be authentic to the Sri Lankan context and in their desire to initiate an ecclesial renewal from within the concrete national situation. Even their determination to wipe away the foreign image of the church and their understanding of the mission of the church as rooted in the mystery of the incarnation, provide arguable evidence that in seeking to re-vitalize the **pastorale** of the Sri Lankan church, the bishops decisively began to move along the lines of contextualization.

This is further confirmed by the fact that the bishops of Sri Lanka openly acknowledged that even though the initiative for renewal is largely prompted by the "new orientations given by the Second Vatican Council",¹⁰⁴ the real thrust for renewal comes from the urgency and complexity of the Sri Lankan situation. The bishops' graphic portrayal of the situation that obtains in Sri Lanka, and their determination to bring Christ's message of reconciliation to this fevered society confirms their approach as one oriented toward a radical contextualization. The bishops poignantly observe,

In our country today ... there are men in revolt against social and economic injustices. Masses of less articulate persons are hungering for true freedom, peace, equality and fraternity and are struggling to gain their basic rights and human dignity ... There are rich men who have lost their perspectives in life indulging in luxurious and wasteful living, unmoved by the life of misery around them and indifferent to the cries of the poor and distressed. Men of every class and condition, both urban and rural, alienated from their true selves, by ignorance, sin, frustration and despair are unconsciously seeking for truth, peace and a meaning to life. To all these men and to those involved in the economic struggle, workers and potential workers, the Church wishes to bring Christ's message of reconciliation ...¹⁰⁵

The desire of the bishops "to promote human dignity, human rights and brotherly union in every sphere of life ..." ¹⁰⁶ reflected their quest for a contextual approach toward some of the malevolent malaises of the Sri Lankan society. It is with a sense of a collective responsibility that the bishops remark, "We have to be alive to the problems of the rural situation as well as those created by rapid urbanisation whether they are of poverty, social degradation or inhuman living conditions." ¹⁰⁷ By stating that "the Church through her children wishes to become increasingly one with men of every condition, especially with the poor and afflicted" ¹⁰⁸ the bishops seek to restore the primordial significance of proclaiming the Good News as directed to the poor. ¹⁰⁹

Acknowledging the initiation for renewal extended by Vatican II as a call to a "new vision", the bishops emphasize the need to translate this vision according to the concrete national context. They maintain that

in seeking to be faithful to this new vision of her people the Church takes into account not only insights provided by the Second Vatican Council, but also the vastly changed and changing conditions occurring in Ceylon, the life and aspirations of her people and their movement in history. She acknowledges the inadequacies of the past and commits herself to the present with sincerity. ¹¹⁰

These words very clearly indicate the direction of renewal envisioned by the bishops. While expressing their determination, to take into account the prevailing national conditions, the present quest and aspirations of the people, the bishops firmly stated their option for ecclesial renewal as partly dictated by the national situation.

1. CONTEXTUAL ROOTEDNESS

We have already seen that the bishops' use of the notion of adaptation was more open-ended and dynamic than the meaning usually assigned to this term. The bishops' attempt to re-discover the "true-image" and identity of the local

church in Sri Lanka demonstrates that they set out on this task with the conviction that an objective understanding of the Sri Lankan social ensemble is a **conditio sine qua** for re-orienting the mission of the church. There is ample evidence to prove that the bishops strove to understand the pastoral mission of the church in relation to the nation and vice versa.¹¹¹ This is evident even from the bishops' use of the collective noun "We Ceylonese". They maintain, "we Ceylonese live in a developing country. This term must be used to describe not just a single aspect of our national life, but the whole of it. We are in via as a people, in search of an authentic national image."¹¹² Such an approach is in contrast to the isolationist and ghetto attitude of pre-Vatican II times. It clarifies also an important shift in the self-understanding of the church. This becomes more vivid as we seek to establish the areas and agents, the methods and ways of contextualization envisioned by the bishops.

2. SOME AREAS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Recognizing the religio-cultural and socio-ethnic plurality of Sri Lanka, the bishops stress that unity in diversity is an essential prerequisite for development and progress in Sri Lanka. While decrying some of the negative expressions of this multi-cultural mosaic, the bishops underlined the need to consolidate a meta-religious unity, saying:

In our transition from a colonial period, in which all our differences were submerged under the pressure of a foreign image, to full-blown independent nationhood, we have passed through an adolescent period of self-awareness, as Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, Burghers etc. This period which is still not over, was marked by an acute awareness of racial and religious differences and tendencies to aggressiveness. But we now stand at the threshold of a more demanding stage of our progress to nationhood, when we are ready to move out of and beyond our separate communal and religious identities into a larger and richer national unity, in which all our separate aspirations are caught up into an inclusive living mosaic.¹¹³

The concern as evidenced in these words reveals an acute sense of national solidarity that arises out of a sincere search for an ecclesio-national integration. In order to be realistic in their method of approach the bishops chose certain specific areas, as urgently in need of an adequate ecclesial response. The areas chosen are: culture and language, politics and economic justice, inter-religious relationships and social development.

A. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Problems related to the two major languages and cultures, namely Sinhalese and Tamil, have been in the forefront of the national scene since 1956. Hence a contextual approach that fails to pay attention to the issues involved in these spheres would have been counted as an irrelevant effort. Among the specific and practical issues addressed by the bishops, "culture and language" lead the list. The bishops, while appreciating the cultural progress that was taking shape in the post-independence period, earnestly entreated that "the Catholic Community must pledge itself resolutely and unambiguously to the cause of the country's cultural renaissance ..." ¹¹⁴

Assessing the velocity of cultural renaissance, that feeds itself on the spirit of nationalism, the Sri Lankan hierarchy stressed that the pluralistic nature of the Sri Lankan society demands that unity be sought not in uniformity but in diversity. ¹¹⁵ An appeal was made to the Christians that they must identify themselves with the masses of the people whose cultures and languages are still developing. In this context the bishops pointed out that "cultural strength is not a disruptive but an integrative force." ¹¹⁶ Commenting on the growing alienation due to English education and the increasing ethnic tensions based on issues related to the Sinhala and Tamil languages, the bishops observed,

Language being an integral part of the people's identity, has loomed large as a problem in the evolution of the national consciousness. Language is not a mere functional aspect of human life; it is inherent in our

nature as human beings. The native genius of a people can be expressed in no other tongue without violence to the character and ethos of the people as a whole. It is, therefore, a matter for regret that although Sinhala and Tamil are the languages of 99% of the people of Ceylon, English had been given undue prominence at the centre of social, religious and political life of the country.¹¹⁷

In the post-independence period, Sri Lanka had witnessed several pogroms that have been ignited by ethno-lingual conflicts. Against the backdrop of these growing inter-ethnic animosities, the assessment and advice of the bishops appear rather general and feeble. Within the Sri Lankan context, any objective opinion on the issue of language is bound to have socio-political repercussions, and the bishops were not willing to undertake what seemed to them fraught with serious consequences. The bishops therefore eluded the real problem and blamed it on the English language. There is a clear lack of a prophetic foresight in the bishops' attitude. We shall have occasion to refer to this thorny issue in the next chapter.

b. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES

Despite the minority situation of Christianity and the precarious nature of the church's relationship with the political apparatus, the bishops were quite articulate and forthright in expressing their concern about the political and economic structures in Sri Lanka. Having reminded the State of its basic responsibility toward the society, the bishops, sought to re-kindle in the Christian faithful their obligation to work towards the economic development of the community and the duty to co-operate with the State toward achieving this goal.¹¹⁸

Evaluating the economic systems that are operative in the country, the bishops commented saying that they deplore the existence of the great disparity in wealth that results in degrading forms of poverty and unemployment. At the same time they felt that the "use of economic planning, monetary policy, budgetary policy and fiscal policy towards the achieve-

ment of a sufficiency of employment opportunities and the common good",¹¹⁹ deserve to be appreciated.

The comments made by the bishops concerning the economic system in Sri Lanka were largely motivated by the bishops' contextual, pastoral concern for the poor and the underprivileged classes. In seeking to identify the causes that perpetuate poverty and misery in Sri Lanka, the bishops rightly point out that the economic crises of Sri Lanka should be seen within an international context. In this respect they maintain that it is the duty of Christians, both individually and collectively, to work for international economic justice.¹²⁰ As a matter of fact the problem of poverty and economic justice had been addressed by several national episcopal conferences in Asia. Urged by the overwhelming presence of poverty in Asia, the Asian bishops at their Manila meeting emphasized that the Church in Asia must identify itself with the poor and the marginalized.¹²¹ The same theme was discussed with a sharp contextual focus by the Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA) of the FABC.¹²²

It should also be delineated here that the bishops do not treat the national economical crises in isolation. Rather they tried to view these problems within the entire national frame work that constitutes the Sri Lankan social ensemble. But the major lacuna here is that the bishops refer to poverty only as an economic problem. In doing this they also give the understanding that the Sri Lankan church is a rich church that has to manifest "some" concern for the poor. It fails to portray the contextually relevant image that the local church of Sri Lanka, should be a poor church working not only for-the-poor but with-the-poor of Sri Lanka.

C. INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Affirming the fact of Sri Lanka's religious pluralism and the considerable influence exerted by such ideologies as Marxist communism, rationalism and secularism¹²³, the bishops reiterate the need for an ongoing dialogue, and express the hope that joint efforts would help to dispel the "existing

suspicion, mistrust and hostility.”¹²⁴ They do not hesitate to state that the church of Sri Lanka must initiate this process by tearing away the self-protective isolation of the past. Hence the bishops hold that

in order to move out of isolationism, it is important that we stand together shoulder to shoulder, to build a society on the enduring foundations of justice and freedom for all. It is only in so far as we join battle to secure these ends, share in a common call, carry common burdens and sufferings, that we shall know the joy of sharing a common humanity transcending all our petty differences.¹²⁵

The clarion call for unity expressed by the bishops manifested their keen desire for an amiable form of religious dialogue. The bishops expounded inter-religious unity as solidly founded on the principle of universality that brings together the whole of humanity as one human family.¹²⁶ Dialogue in its diverse shapes and shades is characterised by the bishops as an important way of promoting a meaningful integration into the national stream. The bishops recommended that in order

to contribute to the greater good of the larger human community, it is important to undertake a totally positive approach to other religions, ideologies and philosophies since Christ who enlightens all men who come into the world (Jn. 1:9) is in some way present among them too. The Church must recognize, preserve and foster the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the social and cultural values found among the followers of other religions.¹²⁷

These words signify a magnificent theological breakthrough. The assertion of the bishops that these religions too are sanctified with the presence of Christ amidst them, indicates a radical conversion in the attitude of the bishops toward non-Christian religions. This becomes more pronounced when one finds that even in the 1960s Catholics of Sri Lanka maintained a cautious isolation from other religious

communities and the bishops considered the teaching of other religious faiths in Catholic schools as an ungodly undertaking.¹²⁸ Hence the initiative toward a cordial recognition and the desire to "preserve and foster" the good things found in other religious traditions stand out as a major step forward in inter-religious relations.

Having taken cognizance of the growing tendency toward secularism in Sri Lanka, the bishops made a very pertinent observation, saying that it is the failure of religious people to integrate their religious values with their actual lives in a meaningful way that has expedited the process of secularism.¹²⁹ They added that "Secularism flourishes most where organized religion denies in practice what it affirms in theory."¹³⁰

D. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Caste and class divisions are two major social maladies that have over the years caused grave social backwardness in the Sri Lankan societies. In seeking to uproot these social evils the bishops remarked that Christians must take a firm stand against these social ills and all other forms of discrimination, especially the discrimination based on caste divisions.¹³¹ The Sri Lankan caste hierarchy is a complex phenomenon that impedes social progress and human development. Rooted as it is on one's traditional occupation, the caste system has promoted many forms of injustices and inequalities.

Against the backdrop of numerous discriminations based on caste stratification, the bishops stress the need to recognize the dignity of all types of work as a means of overcoming this anti-social condition.¹³² They also emphasize that "the Catholic Church in Ceylon must be a champion of justice and human rights against all forms of discriminations, especially those based on caste, race, language or religion. Hence, Catholics must bear witness to the dignity of the human person in their homes, in places of worship and of work."¹³³

3. SOME POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD CONTEXTUALIZATION

A clear line of contextual approach is eminently manifest in some of the pastoral programs collectively advocated by the bishops. As a practical means of promoting the process of reform envisaged by them, the bishops opted to choose "service" and "dialogue" as two basic ways that would help to strengthen the contextual concern of the church.

As a matter of fact the bishops deemed service and dialogue as two indispensable forms of responses that can cure not only the maladies of the nation but can serve also to restore the right image of the church. They sought to initiate an effective praxis of service and dialogue as indispensable steps to actualize the process of renewal. These two approaches are strongly recommended by the bishops to the laity, priests, and religious, as worthy values of Christian life. Even though the bishops advocate service and dialogue as integral to the mission of the church in Sri Lanka, neither of the two is considered an end in itself. Both approaches are used as practical **modus operandi** to activate the process of post-conciliar renewal which as projected by the bishops contains all the ingredients of contextualization in the full sense of the term.¹³⁴

A. THE PATH OF SERVICE

The bishops understand that being at the service of the nation is imperative to the mission of the church. They emphasized that all Christians "must serve the world and in particular, the Nation where they live."¹³⁵ This attitude is lucidly perceptible in many of the pastoral letters and other official statements of the bishops.¹³⁶ Their notion of service bears a christological stamp. They envision a pattern of service whose justifiable praxis is based on the **kenosis** of Jesus Christ.¹³⁷ Hence the bishops expressed that it is an important duty of the church to carry out the mission of Jesus, by self less service to the world and particularly to

one's nation.¹³⁸ It is here that we hear the echo of an intrinsic link between the mission of the church and contextualization.

As an integral aspect of post-conciliar ecclesial renewal the theme of service gained a special missionary and pastoral significance at the level of the universal Church in the mid 1960s.¹³⁹ This theme did not fail to leave a few realistic imprints in the church of Sri Lanka.

Speaking in reference to the multi-dimensional mission of the church in Sri Lanka, the bishops emphasized the need to relate this mission to the diverse components of the social ensemble. Here the bishops interject the Christian value of service as the regulating and driving force. The bishops delineate the fact that "in order to realize her mission the Church has to adopt the same means as Christ, namely, poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice ..." ¹⁴⁰ The Catholic communities are urged and exhorted by the bishops to engage themselves in a spirit of "selfless service" in the diverse societal areas of culture, economics and politics.

It is against the backdrop of a context-centred, missionary understanding of service that the bishops offer the advice that "Catholics should take an active share in the struggle against poverty, ignorance, disease and inadequate housing and in the efforts to develop the resources of the Nation. The faithful should be willing to offer their services to projects sponsored by public and private organization" ¹⁴¹

The bishops also felt that their advice about service will be ineffectual unless they seek to enkindle the spirit of service in their own ministry. Therefore invoking the mission of Jesus as "selfless service", ¹⁴² the bishops endeavoured to portray their own ministry as one of service, modelled on that of Christ. They explained this saying, "we are enjoined by Christ to serve our fellow-men by our help and witness. We fully commit ourselves to participate in our country's development" ¹⁴³ In this manner "service" not only vivifies the communitarian dimension of the church but also consolidates its contextual concern.

B. THE PATH OF DIALOGUE

The bishops employed the notion of dialogue as a channel of entry into the multi-faceted Sri Lankan reality.¹⁴⁴ It is in a spirit of dialogue that the bishops sought to express their opinion¹⁴⁵ on the diverse aspects of the Sri Lankan social ensemble.

The positive facets of dialogue is also seen by the fact that the bishops considered their role as chief initiators and partners in dialogue.

Their inclination to initiate dialogue in the different spheres of social and religious life indirectly affirms the spirit of conciliation and collaboration sought by the bishops both within and without the church. Partly impelled by the conditions and attitudes that prevailed in the past especially between Catholics and the followers of other faiths, the bishops felt the urgency for a cordial form of dialogue and co-operation. In order to remind the Catholic community of the contemporary relevance of dialogue the bishops emphasized that "the development of dialogue and collaboration at the human and religious levels with the members of other religions in our country must be one of the deep concerns of the Christian Community"¹⁴⁶ It is therefore within this atmosphere of dialogue that we should interpret the open invitation extended by the bishops: "the Church **must** recognize, preserve and foster the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the social and cultural values found among the followers of other religions,"¹⁴⁷ should be interpreted. Seen against the backdrop of the hostile inter-religious conditions that prevailed in the 1960s and later, this spirit of openness manifested by the bishops has a profound contextual significance.

As a practical and realistic way of promoting this spirit of dialogue the bishops suggested that Christians should re-evaluate their attitude toward other religions, and must try to co-operate with them in common social and cultural projects. They urged Christians to collaborate with the followers of other religions in fostering human values that promote mutual understanding and enrich each other in spiritual growth.¹⁴⁸

Dialogue is also seen by the bishops as a powerful means of overcoming the isolationism or ghetto mentality so consciously practised by the church in the past.¹⁴⁹ It also became a way of rectifying the wrong impressions and images created in the past. It was in a spirit of sincere dialogue that the Catholic hierarchy decided to retract some of the direct and veiled condemnations of the past made by them or by their predecessors on other religions and cultures.¹⁵⁰

Three major factors seem to have induced the Sri Lankan episcopate to choose the way of dialogue as an effective means of rejuvenating the mission of the church in Sri Lanka. One is the spirit of dialogue and openness so strongly manifested by the Council. The second impetus came from the growing sense of internationalism and the tangible experience of interdependence of nations for trade, commerce and other forms of economic and national development which made dialogue the mood and method of the times. The third factor was dictated by the Sri Lankan church's own historical experiences which demanded dialogue with all the constituent elements of the national context as an indispensable undertaking.

The hierarchy also felt the strong need to install proper mechanisms for a creative dialogue even within the church.¹⁵¹ The bishops as well as the laity, religious, and clergy felt the pastoral urgency of dialogue as a contextual necessity. In the same strain the bishops felt that the existing divisions and differences among the various Christian denominations should be smoothly overcome by promoting a right spirit of ecumenism.¹⁵²

There is ample evidence to the effect that by paving the way for dialogue both within and without the church, the bishops envisioned a relevant and positive mode of integrating and incorporating the church into the Sri Lankan national context.¹⁵³ The Catholic church of Sri Lanka is yet to realize more fully that it is through a process of genuine dialogue that the strained relationships and misconceptions of the past can be healed.

4. THE LOCAL CHURCH AS AN AGENT OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Our effort thus far has been to demonstrate that the methods of reform and renewal initiated by the Catholic hierarchy of Sri Lanka has several implicit elements that are required for the promotion of the process of contextualization. The need for evolving a church that is truly and fully authentic in the national context has been explicitly mentioned at least in some of their statements. In this regard the bishops have paid careful attention to the task of restoring the image and identity of the local church as indispensable for the authenticity of the church's mission and ministry. Commenting on the missionary potential of the different groups within the church, such as the laity, lay apostolate associations,¹⁵⁴ catechists,¹⁵⁵ priests and religious,¹⁵⁶ the bishops underlined the importance of corresponsibility.

The bishops are conscious of the unavoidable limitations of the historical situation within which the church is called to proclaim the Gospel and to live its mission. As an historical reality in a particular place and time the local church bears the stamp of the same historical conditions. As a community of individuals the church too shares all the predicaments of history. This radical historical consciousness itself provides a strong argument in favour of the bishops contextual outlook.

This historical sense is further strengthened by the communitarian notion of the church spelt out by the bishops. They clearly articulate that the task of implementing and realizing the vision of reform should be seen as a collective responsibility of the "entire Catholic Community".¹⁵⁷

5. THE CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MYSTERY OF INCARNATION

The bishops understanding of the mystery of incarnation as the perfect model and pattern for the mission of the church in Sri Lanka, indirectly brings out the theological principle of contextual rootedness enshrined in their vision of reform.

This can be ascertained by the fact that the bishops' concept of service pivots around the mystery of incarnation. Thus, speaking on the fundamental characteristic trait of Christian mission, the bishops uphold that,

In Christ, Christians believe, the love of God for men was manifested in its highest form Christ's love for His fellowmen was selfless, self-sacrificing and boundless¹⁵⁸

6. CONTEXTUALIZED CHURCH: A VISIBLE SIGN

The Sri Lankan Catholic church with its diverse functions and activities, with its racial and cultural distinctions has been the central focus of the bishops' concern. As a dialectical and critical process of creative transformation that links the church with its historical context, contextualization also has to begin and mature within the Sri Lankan nation. It is within this frame of understanding that the "sign" aspect of the church bears a particular relevance. The bishops considered the sign aspect as imperative to the church when they expressed that "in this visible sign, men **should** see that God loves the world"¹⁵⁹

Commenting on the sign aspect of the church, we stated in the first chapter that the notion of the church as a sign has far reaching consequences for the church, particularly in a non-Christian milieu. A sign does not exist for itself nor is it centred on itself. A sign becomes valid only when it faithfully signifies the reality for which it is meant. Otherwise it may run the risk of losing its "significance" or even become a counter sign. This means that those who encounter this sign must be able to discover the reality signified by this sign. Therefore the church's role as a sign of a people who are justified by God in baptism, as a people who are re-created and called to a life of salvation in Christ and sent into the world as a "sacrament of salvation" should be made visible in their very coming together as "church". Motivated by this notion of the church as "SIGN", the bishops attempted to restore the right image of the church by correcting some of the wrong impressions and prejudices. They positively affirmed

the basic necessity of the church to become a valid and relevant sign by stressing the witnessing aspect as an important ecclesial dimension that should be exercised in word and deed.¹⁶⁰

In this respect the bishops reiterated that the primary element in the mission of the Church is to develop Christian witness as "love of Christ in action", operative in all areas of human life and activity.¹⁶¹ Here the contextual thrust is neatly interwoven into the missionary function of the church. The sign aspect spelt out here calls also for an action-oriented manifestation of Christian discipleship.

In the context of the sign aspect of the church the bishops also developed the notion of "proclamation of the Good News of salvation to all men".¹⁶² Here the bishops explicitated the transforming power of missionary witnessing in a given context. But this witnessing through oral proclamation must emerge from the church's contextual rootedness. To do this in a fitting manner a community should identify itself fully with the needs and exigencies of its existential milieu. Therefore the bishops delineated that "the Gospel has to come to meet men in their deepest aspirations and pre-occupations and **must be seen** as a restoration of full human dignity to men called to be God's sons with Jesus Christ".¹⁶³

Another element of mission refers to the dynamic function of this sign aspect in terms of communitarian service, in a given context. The bishops pointed out that

to form Christian community which continuously grows into the sign that Christ meant it to be, accomplishing ever better its mission of witness and verbal evangelization. The members of the Community experience the Charity of Christ in faith, confidence, sacramental life and service ... and presenting their own selves with Christ as dedicated to humble service for the good of the world.¹⁶⁴

The sustained efforts made by the bishops to sharpen the sign aspect of the church and its mission clearly illustrate

the bishops' conviction that it is a community which plunges into the very heart of culture, and penetrates into all the inner layers of the socio-political and economic fabric and manifests a willingness to transform itself while positively challenging the manifold constituent elements of a particular context, through a process of dialogue and service, can truly arise as a contextualized church.

In the next chapter we shall analyse the second phase of this contextual reform initiated by the bishops beginning from the year 1977 to 1990.

NOTE

1. Two major factors prompted the Catholic hierarchy of Sri Lanka to view the image, role and function of the church within a unified "national" frame-work. The first is that the entire nation of Sri Lanka forms one ecclesiastical province with the archdiocese of Colombo as the Metropolis and the other nine dioceses as suffragans. The second factor was the increasing opposition faced by the Sri Lankan church from outside since the 1960s beginning with the schools' crisis. Within the church this national consciousness was fostered by the bishops who at the same time delineated the cultural and linguistic pluralism that undergirds the national mosaic. A closer reading of the joint pastoral letters, Synodal declarations and other official statements made by the bishops since the close of the second Vatican Council also uncovers that the bishops sought to evoke the diverse elements that constitute the national context as an indispensable backdrop of their missionary and pastoral concerns. See for instance, PS, p. 5; also PMAS, p. 1 and ASPSCC pp. 12-19 ECNE, p. 1.
2. It has been demonstrated by us in the previous chapter that the Catholic church in Sri Lanka has been very influential in the socio-political scene. This influence was motivated by a spirit of triumphalism and religious militancy characteristic of pre-Vatican II times. But in contrast to the past, the image the Catholic hierarchy sought to evolve since the mid-1960s was inspired by the post-Vatican II understanding of the Church as a "sign and sacrament" and as a community called to be at the service of people in the world. See PS, p. 3, PSM, pp. 78-79; ASPSCC, pp. 13-17 and 24-26.
3. PS, p. 3; PSM, p. 77 and ASPSCC, pp. 14-17.
4. See Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis . . .*, pp. 52-61 and 93-135.

5. At the request of the Catholic hierarchy of Sri Lanka, a team of Sociologists from the Centre for Socio-Religious Research of the University of Louvain conducted a Socio-Religious survey in 1969 - 1970. For a full report of this survey, see, **F. Houtart** and **T. G. Lemercinier**, *Opinions and Attitudes of Catholics in Ceylon*, 2 vols., (mimeographed), C.R.S.R., Louvain, 1970.
6. **A. Jeyaratnam Wilson**, *Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: The Ceylon General Elections of May 1970*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 24-27 and **Satchi Ponnambalam**, *Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle . . .*, pp. 119-139.
7. During this period, certain key cabinet positions of the government were held by persons who were of the Marxist Communist Party that was openly critical of the church and its influential position in the Sri Lankan society. On its part the Catholic hierarchy earned this enmity as a result of their public remonstrations of Communist leaders. See **F. Houtart**, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka . . .*, pp. 254-255 and **A. Jeyaratnam Wilson**, *Electoral Politics . . .*, pp. 24-25.
8. **A. Jeyaratnam Wilson**, *Electoral Politics . . .*, p. 27 (emphasis mine).
9. See **Tissa Balasuriya**, "Examples of Attempts at Reform in the Church of Ceylon," in *Concilium*, 8 (1972), pp. 143-144 **ASPSCC**, pp. 12-19, 40-43.
10. See **ASPSCC**, pp. 50-65, esp. p. 62. See for instance the bishops understanding that "mission is one of worship of God and love for all men," *Ibid.*, p. 13.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
12. *Id.*,
13. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
14. See **Tissa Balasuriya**, *Eucharist and Human Liberation*, Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, 1977, pp. 3-4 and his *Planetary Theology . . .*, p. 1.
15. See **ASPSCC**, pp. 39-49; **ECNE**, pp. 1-7.
16. This is largely attributed to the resurgence of native religions in the post-colonial period and to the Council's positive recognition of the spiritual wealth enshrined in the non-Christian religions.
17. The Sri Lankan Bishops Commission for Missionary Activities, explicitly or implicitly acknowledges that converting of non-Christians is integral to the mission of the Church. See **ASPSCC**, pp. 30-31.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 15-17, 25-26; see also "The Objectives and Activities of the SEDEC" in *Social and Economic Development Centre*, (pamphlet), Colombo Catholic Press, (no date), pp. 1-3.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 1 SEDEC was established by the CBCSL in 1973 for the purpose of providing services and co-ordinating the works of the Catholic community in the field of social action and charities, today it envelopes the whole gamut of issues related to Justice and Peace.
20. On several occasions the bishops stressed the need for this re-orientation, see for instance, ASPSCC, pp. 40-41, ECNE, p. 1, See also Tissa Balasuriya, "The National Synod," in *Quest*, 1 (1966), No. 7, p. 185.
21. Opus plantationis Ecclesiae in determinato hominum coetu certam attingit metam, cum congregatio fidelium, in sociali vita iam radicata culturaeque loci aliquatenus conformata, quadam stabilitate et firmitate fruitur: propria nempe, etsi insufficienti, instructa copia localium sacerdotum, religiosorum et laicorum, iis ministeriis et institutis ditatur quae ad vitam populi Dei sub ductu Episcopi proprii ducendam ac dilatandam necessaria sunt. "Decretum de Activitate Missionali Ecclesiae" in *AAS*, 58 (1966), p. 969.
22. See Robrecht Boudens, "Ceylon" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, p. 418-419.
23. *Id.*, Missionaries from these two religious congregations have been engaged in various forms of pastoral activities in Sri Lanka since the 1850s and to date these two religious congregations have the largest membership among the male and female religious congregations respectively, in Sri Lanka.
24. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church..." p. 201.
25. See Tissa Balasuriya, "Introduction" in F. Houtart, *Summary of the Socio-Religious Research in Ceylon 1969-1970*, Catholic Press, Colombo 1971, pp. 1-3.
26. See "Contitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis" in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 1025-1120.
27. See "Declaratio de Ecclesiae Habitudine ad Religiones Non-Christianas, in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 740-756.
28. See "Declaratio de Libertate Religiosa" in *AAS*, 58 (1966), pp. 929-946
29. See K. M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies Sri Lanka 1880-1985*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1986 pp. 203-204 and 253-254.

30. See P. A. Saram, "Sri Lanka: The Evolutionary Dialectics . . ." p. 358
31. See ASPSCC, p. 22, esp. No. 6, also pp. 27-28.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 13 see also pp. 15, 21-55, 26-29.
34. PS, p. 2; PSM, pp. 76-77, p. ASPSCC, p. 25.
35. See Tissa Balasuriya, "Examples of Attempts at Reform . . .," p. 143
36. PS, p. 3; PSM, p. 77; ASPSCC, p. 62.
37. Fr. Riccardo Lombardi was the founder of the "Movement for a Better World." He laboured to promote a spirit of renewal at various levels such as individual, family, parish, diocese etc. For more on this see his *Hope For a Better World*, St. Paul Publications, London, 1958, esp. pp. 46-63.
38. See, Tissa Balasuriya, *Creative Tensions in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka Since 1960*, (mimeographed), CSR, Colombo, 1973, p. 4.
39. See Tissa Balasuriya, "Examples of Attempts at Reform . . .," p. 145
It was during this time that more reform minded members among the laity edited and published periodicals which were very critical of the Catholic church and of the hierarchy. The names of these journals published in English, Sinhala and Tamil respectively were *Out look*, *Jana Handa* and *Unmai*.
40. See T. Kuriacose and T. Balasuriya, "Is this the Public Image of the Church in Ceylon Today?," in *Quest*, 1 (1966), No. 2, p. 42.
41. See Tissa Balasuriya, "Examples of Attempts at Reform . . .," p. 145.
42. *Id.* "Creative Tensions . . .," p. 4.
43. PS, p. 1.
44. *Id.*
45. In fact the reform envisioned by the bishops as spelt out in the "Joint Pastoral Letter on the Proposed Synod" touched upon the whole gamut of religio-cultural, political, educational and other aspects of national life, but the bishops endeavoured to accommodate these diverse factors within the notion of adaptation. See PS, pp. 1-3, and ASPSCC, pp. 14-18, 60-64.

46. PS, p. 3.
47. PSM, p. 77 (emphasis mine).
48. As a preparation of this process of reform the bishops invited a team of sociologists from Louvain under the leadership of Francois Houtart to make a survey of the state of Christianity in Sri Lanka. But when this survey revealed the darker side of the reality of the church in Sri Lanka, the bishops totally ignored the survey. Thus it would seem that the bishops are "in two minds about scientific socio-religious research. They want such research but are uncomfortable when the reports are challenging." See Tissa Balasuriya, "Creative Tension in the Church . . .," p. 7.
49. The systematic and collaborative effort toward implementing the Council began with the National Pastoral Convention and the subsequent National Synod. See DDPNS, pp. 138-250 and ASPSCC, pp. 12-122.
50. Even though the bishops realized the need to evolve a church that is truly and authentically local, yet for every small detail of change they looked to Rome for approval. See PD, p. 3, ASPSCC, p. 8, HY, pp. 1-2, LHF, p. 1, GLM, 2-3 MM, pp. 1-7.
51. We shall explain later with examples as to why we consider the bishops efforts to strike a balance as vain.
52. In the succeeding pages we shall discuss this point with a few examples taken from the bishops letters or statements.
53. See ASPSCC pp. 13-17 and 21-27.
54. See PSM, p. 77.
55. *Id.*,
56. As we have shown earlier, at least in theory, the program of renewal envisaged by the bishops enveloped the entirety of national life with its social, economic, political, educational, developmental and religious functions. See for instance ASPSCC, pp. 13-26.
57. PSM, p. 77.
58. *Id.*
59. *Id.*
60. PS, p. 3; PSM, p. 76.

61. PS, pp. 4-5; PSM, p. 81.
62. *Id.*
63. See "Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia" in *AAS*, 57 (1965), art. 1, p. 5
64. See T. Kuriacose and T. Balasuriya, "Is this the Public Image of the Church . . .," pp. 41-48. Here the authors make an effort to present briefly the image of the church as perceived by the Sri Lankan public.
65. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 25th Dec. 1965, p. 4.
66. ASPSCC, p. 21.
67. See *Ibid.*, p. 21-23; 107-115.
68. See *Ibid.*, p. 21-22; 112-114.
69. See *Ibid.*, pp. 13; 21-23; 26-28.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
71. *Id.*
72. *Ibid.*, p. 23 (underlining mine).
73. *Id.*
74. *Id.*
75. M. George Soares-Prabhu, *The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society*, NBCLC, Bangalore, 1981, esp. pp. 25-30.
76. When the bishops made their first announcement about the Provincial Synod, they wrote about the important role that the laity must play to realize locally the vision of Vatican II. They even cited the first Council of Jerusalem as an example to emphasize the indispensable role of the laity in the affairs of the church. See PS, p. 3 and PSM, p. 79.
77. See F. Marcus Fernando, "Introduction" in *After Vatican II . . .*, pp. 1-2
78. See Patrick Fernando, "Editorial," in *Quest*, 2 (1967), No. 14, p. 98.
79. See, Tissa Balasuriya, "For a Truly National Council" in *Quest*, I (1966), No. 10, pp. 281-283. The entire issue contains a number of articles by Sri Lankan priests and theologians expressing the different expectations they had of the Synod, on matters related to Christian Community,

Liturgy, Catechetics, Pastoral Structures, Women, Youth etc. See esp. pp. 285-313. Also see A. R. Thomas, "On Preparation for the Synod: Are we Adequately Prepared?", in *Quest*, 3 (1968), No. 23, pp. 82ff.

80. F. Marcus Fernando, "Introduction . . .," p. 2.
81. The National Pastoral Convention which was considered the first stage of the National Synod met in two separate sessions, i.e., from June 2-10, 1968 and August 26-30, 1968. For more details see, DDPNS, pp. 138-250.
82. F. Marcus Fernando, "Introduction", p. 2.
83. DDPNS, p. 148.
84. *Id.* pp. 140-144; 238-243.
85. *Id.* pp. 142; 160; 238-242.
86. *Id.* p. 154.
87. ASPSCC, pp. 107-115.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
89. *Id.*,
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
92. *Id.*
93. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-19, 107-109.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-19.
95. See *Ibid.*, pp. 20-34; 50-67.
96. See *Ibid.*, p. 114.
97. *Id.*
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21 (emphasis mine).

99. See *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
101. *Id.*
102. This attitude is traceable in the themes and issues addressed by the CBCSL see for instance *CAP*, p. 1; *GLM*, p. 2-4; *ECNE*, pp. 2-3.
103. The bishops emphasize the need for a workable intra-ecclesial collaboration, at the same time they stress the superior privileges of the hierarchy over laity, see *ASPSCC*, pp. 104-105.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
108. *Id.*
109. See Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, Trans. M. J. O'Connell Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 1984, pp. 139-141.
110. *ASPSCC*, p. 23.
111. See, *PS*, p. 3; *PSM*, pp. 77-78, *ASPSCC*, pp. 13-17; 22-25; *ECNE*, p. 1.
112. *ASPSCC*, p. 13.
113. *Id.*
114. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
115. *Id.*
116. *Id.*
117. *Id.* Despite the generalities of this statement the fact remains that the Catholic Church was one of the foremost institutions that promoted the English language in Sri Lanka, specially through its educational system.
118. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
121. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia . . .*, pp. 11, 15-16, 19-21.
122. For the texts and a critical analysis of the BISA papers see, Richard P. Hardy, *Being with the Poor*, Office for Human Development, Manila 1986, esp. pp. 3-7.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 18. In seeking to explain the need for dialogue, the bishops make explicit reference to these ideologies that are present and operative in Sri Lanka. It may be recalled here that in the 1950s the bishops openly condemned such ideologies and instructed the Christian faithful to dissociate themselves from those who advocate them. See F. Houtart *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 255.
124. ASPSCC, p. 18.
125. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
126. *Id.*
127. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
128. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .*, p. 256.
129. ASPSCC, p. 18.
130. *Id.*
131. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
132. *Id.*
133. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
134. The conviction that underlies the planning and actual implementation of the process of post-conciliar ecclesial renewal in Sri Lanka is that the rays of renewal should touch and transform the entire context within which the church is called to live its mission. See PS, pp. 3-4, PSM, p. 77, ASPSCC, pp. 13-19, 22-33.
135. ASPSCC, p. 13.
136. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-17, 21-29, PS, p. 3, PMAS, p. 1.
137. See *Philippians* 2: 6-11.

138. See ASPSCC, p. 13.
139. The servant ecclesiology gained currency at the Second Vatican Council. Its strong impact on the Asian Bishops is very evident in many of the statements made by the FABC. See for instance *For All the Peoples of Asia, The Church in Asia . . .*, pp. 11, 15-16, 19-21. For a systematic study and critique of the BISA statement on the theme of service to the poor, see, Richard P. Hardy, *Being with the Poor . . .*, pp. 3-31. Examples at the level of the Universal Church can be found for instance in the pastoral letter "The Servant Church" issued by Cardinal Cushing of Boston in Advent 1966. The World Council of Churches, *Uppsala Report*, Geneva, 1968. *The Conclusions of the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin*, 1968. Also Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, Vatican Press Office, Vatican City, 1971, pp. 3-10 and see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 98-99.
140. ASPSCC, p. 24.
141. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
142. *Philip.* 2: 6-11; *Matt.* 20: 28, *Mark.* 10: 45, *Luke.* 22: 27.
143. ASPSCC, p. 13.
144. See *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19, pp. 26-29.
145. In the past certain comments made by the bishops on issues related to the socio-political sphere were largely motivated by narrow ecclesial interests, but in the 1960s and later it was the spirit of dialogue and the desire to be at the service of the nation that underlined the relationship between the church and the social realm.
146. ASPSCC, p. 28.
147. *Id.*
148. *Id.*
149. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
150. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
151. One full document of the National Synod is devoted to the study of developing "Relationships within the Church and Structures for Dialogue". See *Ibid.*, pp. 107-115.
152. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
153. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27, 114-115.

154. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-73.

155. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

156. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84, 91-96.

157. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

159. *Ibid.*, p. 21 (underlining mine).

160. *Ibid.*, p. 21-22, 26.

161. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

162. *Ibid.* p. 21.

163. *Id.*

164. ASPSCC, p. 21.

Chapter 4

ECCLESIAL CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THE EFFORTS AT SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION

A. A PERIOD OF GRAVE CRISIS

Having analysed the first phase of the bishops' attempts at contextualization we now move on to the second phase beginning from the year 1977 to 1990. In the assessment of historians, political scientists and economists, this brief period is of crucial significance¹ to the Sri Lankan nation. Since the year 1977 the ethnic conflict has become endemic and has almost placed the very foundations of the concept of a unitary state in jeopardy. In the judgement of the Catholic bishops, the nation is going through a "time of grave crisis".² The bishops also feel that in the face of this national crisis the Catholic community cannot and should not abdicate its societal responsibility.³

In keeping with the methodology we have employed so far, it is also necessary that we evoke the socio-historical ensemble of this period as a relevant and an integral backdrop to understand and interpret the reactions and responses of the bishops to the challenges and crises that characterized this period. In more concrete terms, the collective reflections and responses of the bishops to this crisis-ridden situation can be found in their pastoral letters and other statements. The growing complexities of the national situation directly and indirectly urged the bishops to make options and decisions, some of which have seemingly led to divisions and polarizations within the Catholic hierarchy along ethnic lines.⁴ This sad spectacle apparently seemed to threaten even the inner unity of the Catholic community of Sri Lanka.⁵ Amidst a population of over Sixteen million non-Christians, this growing

conflict of the church's leadership, representing a minority group of a little over one million Catholics, with its elements of division and disunity, stands out as a counter sign of Christian fellowship and ecclesial communion.⁶ It could be said therefore, that the present time is as much a time of grave crisis to the church as it is to the nation.

1. SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The socio-political landscape of Sri Lanka underwent traumatic changes following the general elections of 1977. The right wing United National Party (U.N.P.), was elected to power with an unprecedented majority. For the first time in the parliamentary history of Sri Lanka, the party that was previously in power (i.e. S.L.F.P.) was so decimated that it could not even lead the opposition in parliament. This political vacuum was filled by the Tamil United Liberation Front, and for the first time in Sri Lanka's post-independence history, a leader of a Tamil political party took the reins of official political opposition in parliament. This unforeseen development further aggravated the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic division and conflict to which we have made copious references in the second chapter of this study. Briefly, the parliamentary confrontation between the government in office and the opposition, came to be viewed and interpreted as an institutionalized conflict between a "Sinhala government" and a "Tamil opposition".⁷ In the communal riots of August 1977, this prejudiced perception received its crude and cruel expression.⁸

In August 1978, with its strength of over two thirds majority in parliament, the U.N.P. repealed the existing constitution of 1972 and promulgated a new one. Among other provisions, this constitution further reinforced the ethno-religious primacy of the Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion. The government avowed to establish a **Dharmista** (righteous) society, founded on and sustained by the philosophical and ethical teachings of Buddhism. These provisions with their entrenched constitutional guarantees in favour of the majority community further alienated the ethnic

and religious minorities. The expression of opposition to this constitution on the part of the Tamil-Hindu minority was very strong and articulate.⁹ However, the rank and file of Christian leadership maintained a conspicuous silence even though there were perceived constitutional discriminations to the non-Buddhist religious minorities. The bishops who advocated equal rights to religious and linguistic minorities at the National Synod a decade ago, now remained passive about the discriminatory legislation enacted through the new constitution.

With its characteristic capitalist orientation, the U.N.P. government abolished the existing restrictions on imports and encouraged foreign investment and free trade.¹⁰ The government ventured into massive development projects with the help of loans and aid from the World Bank and from several foreign governments.¹¹ In addition to this the defence budget grew by leaps and bounds largely accelerated by the Tamil militancy in the northern and eastern provinces of the country.¹² All this contributed to "galloping inflation (30% annually), and a soaring cost of living, increasing income inequality, poverty, degradation and a miserable existence for more than 40% who constitute the poorest people in the country."¹³ This harsh economic reality of the nation continues to fuel the growing discontent among the unemployed youth, the peasants and the labour class.

2. INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-ECCLESIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT

Political, social, ethnic and economic conflicts reached their climax within this period which has been described by the international media as the most critical phase of Sri Lanka's post-colonial history.¹⁴ In the modern history of this nation, this period has witnessed the most violent forms of ethno-linguistic conflicts leading to blood-spilling carnages of very cruel proportions. Though shrouded in an ethno-linguistic garb, the religious dimensions of these conflicts emerged to the forefront more than once.¹⁵ In spite of the popular label that is attributed to the current crisis as a Tamil-Hindu

radicalism waging war against a Sinhala-Buddhist extremism, the Catholic church inclusive of its leadership was also drawn into it, wittingly or unwittingly on several occasions.¹⁶ A previously unforeseen and a decisive phase opened up for the church with the dawn of the decade in 1980.

Since the year 1980, the ethnic conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil racial groups began to dominate the national scene with unprecedented force and ferocity. Compelled by the peculiar geographical distribution of the population,¹⁷ and the accompanying factor of ethno-religious identities of the two major ethnic communities the religious dimension of this conflict came to the surface. This situation caused serious difficulties for the Catholic church largely due to its precarious ethnic composition.

Analysts of the Sri Lanka polity who set about to investigate the interactions of the Sri Lankan socio-religious ensemble maintain that since the early part of the 1970s, the Sinhala Catholic communities together with their institutional leadership sought to assert their identity more on ethnic lines than on religious lines. In the same way a sizeable number of Catholics with the support of some of their priests joined hands with the Hindu-Tamils in voicing the discriminations suffered by their ethnic kith and kin. In his well documented article R.L. Stirrat has this to say about the present impasse of the Catholic church:

The Catholic community of Sri Lanka is in disarray. What was once a self-confident united body led by an aggressive hierarchy is today hopelessly split between the Sinhalese and the Tamil wings of the Church. Where once Catholics formed a unified entity in contrast to the Buddhists and the Hindus, today religion counts for much less and ethnicity for much more.¹⁸

Within the Catholic church, this consolidation of ethnic solidarity overriding ecclesial solidarity, reached its unhappy climax with the pre-dawn raid and arrest of four Tamil Catholic priests at the residence of the Oblates of Mary

Immaculate in Jaffna. Two of the priests were alleged to have been tortured¹⁹ and detained **incommunicado** under the newly enacted legislation called the "Prevention of Terrorism Act."²⁰ This incident which was glamourized by the media sparked off anti-Catholic and anti-Tamil feelings at national levels. The Sinhala bishops reacted hurriedly saying that the "Church does not dabble in politics",²¹ and that the priests who are arrested must take personal responsibility for the charges attributed to them. The bishops' statements indirectly amounted to disowning the two priests who were involved. The alleged involvement of the two Tamil priests inevitably caused a distrust in relationships²² between the Sinhala and Tamil Catholics in every level of the church's institutional structure. Subsequent to the prolonged detention of these two priests, the already precarious position of the church vis a vis the nation became more delicate. The Sinhala bishops felt that if they emphasized their ecclesial solidarity they ran the risk of inheriting the enmity of the Sinhala Buddhists.²³ On the other hand the official Catholic leadership of the Tamil section felt that the priests had every right to express their contextual concern for the Tamil people who are subjected to untold forms of organized brutality, humiliation, state oppression and discrimination.²⁴ This attitude is clearly discernible in the statements and counter statements made by the bishops from both sides of the ethnic divide.²⁵

For our purpose here, this particular incident offers an interesting point of reference for a theological assessment of the authenticity of the contextual orientation and ecclesial unity espoused by the Sri Lankan hierarchy. This particular event and the incidents that surround it not only dragged the relevance of the church into public scrutiny but they also compelled the church to take a definite and unswerving position in this labyrinthine national conflict.

For the politically oriented Buddhist clergy, the alleged political involvement of these Tamil Catholic priests provided a strong platform for a joint anti-Tamil and anti-Catholic campaign. The growing rift along religious lines can also be

evidenced at the onslaught that was directed against the institutional symbols in the Tamil-dominated areas. For example, Hindu temples and several Catholic institutions and churches were among the select targets of air-raids and artillery shellings.²⁶ Within the past ten years this on-going cycle of violence and organized brutality has claimed a toll of over 10,000 human lives. The victims were mostly unarmed defenceless men, women and children, from among the four major religious groups. Instead of seeking to resolve the conflict through peaceful means the government intensified its military action. The government enacted very repressive laws and reactionary policies. Several International human rights and humanitarian organizations such as the "The International Commission of Jurists and Justice,"²⁷ and "Amnesty International" have done painstaking documentation, studies and assessments of the situation that is brewing up in Sri Lanka. They have repeatedly condemned the atrocities inflicted upon many innocent civilians by the nation's armed forces and have reported numerous cases of tortures, murders and disappearances which include professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, university lecturers and also Protestant ministers, Catholic priests, catechists and a good number of civilians.²⁸

3. CHURCH'S RESPONSE: INVOLVEMENT OR INDIFFERENCE

In the face of this internecine communal warfare, fanned by ethnic, racial, religious, caste and class rivalries, what is the role and function of the church? Obviously, the church could not maintain a position of neutrality and indifference, while its own communitarian fabric was torn to shreds. The very texture of this situation demanded a decisive and an unequivocal response from the church. It threw an open challenge to the church's contextual presence and vailidity. At the same time it afforded the church with an opportunity to re-examine its context-centred missionary and pastoral involvements vis-a-vis the Sri Lankan nation and society.

An authentic and relevant approach to the process of contextualization demands that the church together with its leadership discerns its evangelizational and missionary presence amidst and within these struggles. In the light of the Gospel and of their faith in Jesus Christ the Christian community must seek incessantly to respond to this gruesome situation effectively and meaningfully. The church should re-formulate its missionary involvement without getting embroiled in this strife with a narrow-minded ethno-linguistic sentimentality.

In a more specific reference to our theme of study, from the part of the church of Sri Lanka and particularly from the angle of ecclesial contextualization, there are various urgent questions that arise from the rapid progression of events within Sri Lanka as well as from the church's official or indirect involvement in them. Some of the pertinent questions are: How did the rank and file of the Catholic hierarchy respond to this situation? Did they make the right choices and options? If so what are the social and political implications of their decisions? In a society where the poor peasants and labourers and other weaker sectors are mercilessly oppressed, on whose side did the church lean? Whose interest did the church defend? Did the Church hierarchy truly recognize the world outside of the church with its conflicts and complexities as having a theological value for the church? With what kind of theological worldview (*Theologische Weltanschauung*) did the church function? These are among some of the relevant questions that need to be faced squarely and answered wholly.

It should also be remarked that when compared to the previous years, there were many signs of remarkable openness from the part of the hierarchy. The ecclesiastical leadership began to express its concern and showed a greater sensitivity toward issues and problems at the national and global levels.²⁹ As an indispensable aspect of their new vision of mission, the bishops delineated the need of the Sri Lankan church to be at the service of the nation and of the society with all that it implies and with all that it demands.³⁰

But on the otherhand many non-Christians had publicly accused the Sri Lankan hierarchy of seeking to align itself with the powers that be as it responded to the current crisis. It had been openly charged that at least some members of the hierarchy had resorted to bartering away the inner unity of the church for the sake of some vested interests and institutional benefits.³¹ As pointed out by us already, it should also be admitted here that the Catholic hierarchy stood lamentably divided among themselves in their understanding of and approach to these crises.³² The growing disunity within the institutional church in Sri Lanka manifested itself in various ways. The open expression of this disunity complicated further this already complex situation by marring the relationships between priests, religious and laity of the two ethnic communities.

We have pointed out elsewhere that the church is among the few organized groups that had for centuries straddled the hazardous divisions affecting the Sri Lankan ethnic communities. Hence when the church allowed itself to be drowned by the tidal waves of ethno-cultural extremism, then its powerful potential as a bridge-builder collapsed to the ground.

It was rather unfortunate that this inner division fed itself on narrow forms, ethno-linguistic passions and sentiments. But it was more regrettable that this attitude of segregation was to some extent consciously permitted by the hierarchy at the cost of corrupting the inner unity of the church. The public denunciation levelled against the church from within and without³³ confirmed this sordid state of affairs.

The apparently insoluble paradox which is of direct concern to our theme is that the bishops and priests from the two ethnic communities had often resorted to justify their actions and positions as a sympathetic response to the conflict-prone context in which the church was called to exercise its ministry. While holding on to two opposing convictions the bishops and priests of both ethnic communities believed and acted with the assertion that they were rightly and justifiably responding to the needs and demands of the "context". A

valid question concerning the principle of "contextuality" may be raised here. It is necessary to examine whether the bishops employed any critical principle to determine the validity of their response. As an essential aspect of ecclesial contextualization, the principle of contextuality calls for a "critical assessment", "missiological discernment" and "conscientization of the contexts". In the succeeding pages we shall investigate the method and content of the bishops' responses to the Sri Lankan situation in order to determine the contextual authenticity and ecclesial validity of their responses.

B. CHURCH'S MISSION IN AN EMERGENT NATION

1. CONTEXTUAL INSERTION

The mounting conflicts within the nation and the unavoidable impact these had on the church at different levels, intensified the church's contextual involvement. The church leadership believed that "issues that are uppermost in the minds of most of the people"³⁴ must determine the content and character of their contextual response. Conscious of the forces of modernization that are at work in the national scene, the bishops sought to address the many problems that resulted from this process of transformation. These include, the growing gap between the rich and the poor,³⁵ the negative effects of free-trade and tourism,³⁶ the breakdown in family life³⁷ and the blatant exploitation of women and children.³⁸ In seeking to address these issues with a sense of Christian responsibility, the bishops indirectly acknowledged that it is by a committed missionary involvement in this situation that the church will be able to restore its authentic image and true identity.³⁹

Another major development that is discernible in the contextual concern developed by the bishops was their renewed sense of religiosity. The bishops who had so far placed the activities related to cult as the primary focus of Christian life, now considered social action and the promotion of human

values as an integral aspect of the historical expression of one's religiosity.⁴⁰

To understand this transition one should look carefully into the sense of religiosity that permeates social life in Sri Lanka. For centuries the four major religions of Sri Lanka have shaped and moulded the socio-cultural progress and manipulated its political and economic structures. The bishops came to the realization that religious isolationism is as detrimental to the progress of the nation as ethnic or linguistic extremism.⁴¹ Hence they emphasized the need for "social concern" as a common platform on which the different religions could bring in their best to forge a common front against the evils that affect the Sri Lankan nation and society.⁴² A sharper focus on the concept of Sri Lankan religiosity and its impact on social life would help to perceive the path of inter-faith dialogue proposed by the bishops.

2. RELIGIOSITY AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Religion in its institutionalized and personal aspects plays a dominant role in the social, political and cultural spheres of national life in Sri Lanka.⁴³ In many South Asian societies, religion penetrates and permeates every strata of life in all its vicissitudes. As a matter of fact there is no single word in the South Asian languages that can adequately render the meaning of the word "religion" as employed in the European languages. In South Asia, religion is referred to by terms like **marga** (path), **marai** (mystery), **veda** (scripture), **samaya neri** (ethos) etc. These terms signify either an aspect of religion or they point at religion as an integral and inseparable path of one's life on earth. It has been said even of the broader Asian context that in many of the Asian nations and societies religion is given a life-centred meaning. The underlying identity is so close that some would go to the extent of saying that "religion is life itself rather than a function of it".⁴⁴ Hence what has been pointed out in the previous chapters concerning the four major religions of Sri Lanka, namely, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam and their impact on the socio-political and cultural evolution⁴⁵

of Sri Lanka should be evaluated in this light. That's why in spite of many sustained efforts at secularization, the impact of religion is very strong and powerful among the masses. Hence many social analysts, whether they are indigenous or foreign see in this spirit of religiousness of Sri Lanka, a powerful potential for socio-cultural reform.⁴⁶ Whether the church has tapped this potential for a creative transformation remains a matter to be assessed.

It has also been shown that at times of ethno-cultural, linguistic or political collisions, the major religions of Sri Lanka have effectively played the role of a mollifying agent or of an effective peace-broker.⁴⁷ But in recent years these religions, Christianity included, have miserably failed to match their profession with practice.

Partly impelled by the post-colonial nationalist trends, at least certain sections of the Buddhist and Hindu religious leadership occasionally orchestrated an intolerant form of religious militancy. The excessive nationalistic consciousness presumed or projected by them was an excellent mirror for the church to see and re-adjust its own process of nativisation or indigenization.

3. FOCUS ON RE-EVANGELIZATION, INCULTURATION AND DIALOGUE

A systematic effort to revitalize and rejuvenate the social consciousness of the church and to re-evaluate its witnessing value and to re-examine its pastoral praxis at a national level was launched in the early part of the year 1979. This effort culminated in the organization of the "Mission Conscientization seminars"⁴⁸ held under the auspices of the "National Episcopal Commission for Missionary Activities", at inter-diocesan and national levels. In a statement⁴⁹ that was released conjointly at the end of this seminar by the bishops' conference and the major superiors of the Catholic religious congregations of men and women, the need for re-evangelization, inculturation and dialogue with living faiths⁵⁰ were delineated as indispensable for consolidating the missionary

presence of the church. The leadership expressed the need for a conscious re-evangelization of the entire local church of Sri Lanka. This approach was significantly different from the earlier notion of evangelization as a means of conversion directed toward non-Christians. Re-evangelization in its authentic sense was a reminder to all Christians of their constant need for conversion.

In this statement the bishops and the major superiors stressed the notion of mission as "proclaiming the good news of freedom, fellowship and justice to our people".⁵¹ They commented further that true discipleship demands that "we commit ourselves to serve our fellow men, and to work for their total liberation from every form of spiritual and social oppression."⁵² In order to pursue these objectives with practical effectiveness they emphasized the need for "re-evangelization, inculturation and dialogue. Re-evangelization was explained as follows:

Since the whole church is called to a mission which flows from her own intimate experience of Jesus, she must constantly renew this experience, ever ready to recognize anew, and to respond to Him actively as she encounters Him in the daily struggles of our people. This encounter will lead us to a new vision of the Church and enable us to opt for the essential values of the Kingdom.⁵³

In keeping with the title of the seminar, namely "Mission Conscientization", this description of re-evangelization brings out an ecclesiological vision that is deeply contextual. It has two important elements that are quite relevant to our theme of study. First of all, the statement emphasizes that it is the community's participation in the "daily struggles of our people" that can help to evolve a new vision of the church. It implies that a church is not a ready-made institutional monolith but that it should result from a living encounter with the context of its existence. Secondly, the statement affirms that such an involvement would enable the church to opt for the essential values of the kingdom. These two

elements reveal an authentic understanding of the church in relation to mission. In other words it is mission that precedes the church, and a church's origin, continuity, function and relevance should be constantly tested by its fidelity to mission.

Having emphasized the importance of re-evangelization, the bishops and major superiors chose the task of inculturation as a more concrete way of promoting and realizing this process. They articulated rather strongly, that **"inculturation is essential for the authentic incarnation of the Church in Sri Lanka"**.⁵⁴ This assertion points to an ecclesiological vision rooted in a dynamic Christological mystery. The final goal of the bishops is to arrive at an "authentic incarnation of the church in Sri Lanka" and in order to reach this aim they envision inculturation as an "essential" means. Even though the bishops do not spell out clearly as to what they really mean by "an authentic incarnation of the church", by the very fact of employing this Christological mystery of incarnation as a model and a principle the bishops bring out an essential aspect ecclesial contextualization.

They clarified further that as a task of the servant Church, "true inculturation must grow from deep within our people, and that it will find its most authentic expression in a genuinely indigenous liturgy, and in a life-style that truly reflects the basic values of our people."⁵⁵ The remarkable element here is that the bishops quite pertinently affirm that inculturation is not a process to be grafted into the church from outside, rather it should grow from within the very people who live, express and celebrate their faith within a given socio-cultural ensemble.

As we have pointed out in the previous chapter, here again, the bishops try to narrow down the meaning, spirit and horizon of inculturation within the realm of the church's cultic trend. On the one hand they maintain as imperative, that inculturation as an essential element to promote an authentic Sri Lankan church, "must grow from within the people"⁵⁶. The term "people" as used here does not mean

merely a "worshipping group" of human beings, but it embodies the totality of the local church, in all its richness and pluriformity. Every local church by virtue of its own communitarian structure possesses certain contextual components. In its visible form, the local church as a community is composed of persons who are members of a society, sharers of a common vision of life, users of a particular language and bearers of a specific cultural patrimony.

It is the sum total of all these elements that contribute to fashion a people as a human and Christian community. But the stark dichotomy that is traceable in the approach of the bishops is that while affirming all these aspects as helpful in producing an authentic Sri Lankan church, they display a tendency to narrow down all these elements to the centrality of cult and worship. It is this cult-centred approach that has over the years been a major obstacle to the promotion of the right spirit of ecclesial contextualization. By emphasizing the importance of ritualism this cultic trend has marred the need for action-oriented participation and communitarian involvement.

Another significant feature expressed in the statement refers to the indispensability of dialogue with living faiths. In the past two decades several pastoral and practical issues related to inter-religious dialogue have been of central concern to the Asian bishops at several plenary sessions of the FABC.⁵⁷ It is unfortunate that in Sri Lanka, at the highest level of ecclesial leadership, the theme of inter-faith dialogue has received only a scant treatment for several years. One notes with astonishment that in the ten year period between the "National Synod" (1969) and the "Mission Conscientization Seminar" (1979), the bishops had completely omitted the topic of "inter-faith dialogue" about which they wrote eloquently in the Synodal declaration. It appears that the bishops did not even think it fit to establish a national episcopal commission for dialogue with non-Christian religions.

Hence after a decade of passive silence on the topic of dialogue, the bishops mention that "this need for dialogue is

felt by us not as a tactic but as a need which springs from our reflection of Scripture in the Asian context, and from the Church's own better understanding of herself and of her mission."⁵⁸ Without specifying the theological foundation for this assertion they stated further that "it (dialogue) necessarily leads to genuinely new attitudes towards these living faiths."⁵⁹ The obvious absence of a theological substantiation makes these positions weak and hollow.

4. THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Within the context of re-evangelization and dialogue, the seminar on "Mission Conscientization" provided an opportunity for the bishops to come to grips with some of the foremost national issues and problems. Referring to the contextual concern of the church, the bishops affirmed again that "the Church must incarnate herself in the mainstream of the life of the country and show effective concern for the social and political issues that affect it."⁶⁰ In this connection they mentioned that "the problem of National Harmony appears to us to be the most urgent problem in Sri Lanka today."⁶¹ In reality they made no effort to design a concrete plan of action nor did they attempt to implement any of their suggestions or recommendations.

In comparison to the past, the bishops did manifest a commendable spirit of openness to the Sri Lankan reality, and sought to reflect upon some of the serious problems related to women, children, family life etc. The declaration of the years 1979, 1980 and 1985 as International Year of Children, International Year of the Family, and International Year of Youth, respectively, by the United Nations, served as inspiring occasions for the bishops to present a pastoral reflection of those themes, in the form of messages and letters. In addition to this the General Synod of Bishops in Rome on "Catechetics" (1978) and the "Family in the Modern World" (1980) occasioned the release of statements and messages on similar or related themes.⁶²

These statements and messages helped to bring to the surface several contextual problems and concerns toward which the official church had turned a blind eye in the past. Issues relating to the unjust exploitation of women and children,⁶³ the denial of equal rights to women in employment and education, problems confronting the youth and the deprivations suffered by families due to the migration of one or both parents for employment abroad, are pointedly addressed in these statements.⁶⁴

In seeking to respond to these problems effectively and meaningfully, the bishops analysed the root causes that produce such problems. Having surveyed the causes that breed these problems the bishops emphasized that "poverty and illiteracy which result from the inequalities and injustices of our socio-economic system"⁶⁵ cannot be eradicated except through a rigorous implementation of a social order based on equality and justice. The bishops pointed out clearly that the exploited families and children "are the victims of the invisible exploitation entrenched in a system which favours those who have and oppresses still further the have-nots".⁶⁶ In this regard they questioned one of the fundamental aspects of the policy of development practised by the government in office. They cautioned that development should take an integral approach, by taking into account the whole person with all one's spiritual, moral and physical dimensions. The question they posed to the government was: "Can a Society be 'Dharmista' (righteous)⁶⁷ if it is not founded on moral and spiritual values, not just in words but in reality?"⁶⁸

In addressing these issues the bishops bemoaned the subordinate status given to women in the Sri Lankan society and they sought to shed light on the social and economic inequalities and injustices suffered by women. But the disturbing factor is that the bishops examine the problems related to women, only from an extra-ecclesial perspective. Little did they realize that without any exception in almost all the parishes more women take part in church-related activities than men and more women show interest in religion than men. Numerically there are more women religious in Sri Lanka

than the clergy and male religious added together. Beside, the nation wide socio-religious surveys conducted by Francois Houtart confirmed that Catholic women in Sri Lanka manifest a greater sense of religiosity than men and that women exert more religious influence on their families than men.⁶⁹ These contextual possibilities seemed to have had very little impact on the bishops. Women continue to be an untapped missionary and pastoral potential in the church and are being relegated to play a subservient role. This is true also of women religious. Buddhism and Hinduism also assign a secondary role to women in religious and social affairs, hence a prophetic change of attitude on the part of the leadership of the church would have stood out as a powerful example of human equality and Christian fellowship in the face of these religions.

Through their special pastoral letter on "the Christian Vision of Marriage and Family Life", the bishops extolled the virtues of an ideal Christian family. Here again they blamed the inefficiency of the social structure that prevents families from living up to these ideals. In spite of the serious pastoral concern that is expressed and underlined by the bishops concerning youth, family life and children, one finds here an important omission. There is a clear lack of exploration of the ecclesial dimension of the issues related to youth, family etc. within a wider frame of the role of laity. Lacking in this regard is also a clear illustration of the Christian concept of community. Examined from a contextual and ecclesial point of view, issues related to women, youth and family life bear a particular relevance to a local church that seeks to get itself authentically incarnated into the national stream.

A local church that recognizes in its members the stamp of equality as flowing forth from their faith and baptism should find ways and means of manifesting and strengthening this unity.⁷⁰ But the bishops fail to clarify the role and function of the laity at large in the pastoral mission and ministry of the church. In fact the indispensable role of the laity as partners and agents of evangelization remains an untapped and unexploited resource in the Sri Lankan church. The tone of the bishops' pastoral on the "Family"⁷¹ gives the

impression that they consider the laity as an appendix of the local church whose ecclesial participation is limited only to the realm of cult.

Coming as they were from the official leadership of the church one could rightly anticipate that the bishops would make at least some practical recommendations that would mobilise a change in the image of women prevailing within and without the church. It would not be an exaggeration to say that discounting some of the pious sentences incorporated into these two statements, these could have well been written by any social service agency.

In its present context the church of Sri Lanka would have benefitted more if the bishops had chosen to address themselves to such relevant and realistic pastoral issues as incorporation of women into the ministerial and pastoral structure of the church in a non-Christian nation. As concerned leaders they could have suggested ways by which the church can contribute toward eliminating the existing barriers that prevent the Sri Lankan women from exercising their full rights with equality and dignity. Nothing is said by the bishops of the avenues that are open to the youth and to the families in the on-going evangelizational mission of the church. In fact very little effort is made by the bishops to spell out the role and function of the laity. The common priesthood of the laity and its accompanying functions are not even mentioned by the bishops. All this seems to reveal a narrow perception of the mission and ministry of the church by the bishops.

C. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF ECCLESIAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

The contextual approach envisioned by the bishops reached a decisive phase with the timely publication of a joint pastoral letter entitled, "Towards the Rebuilding of the Sri Lankan Nation."⁷² In this letter the first collective effort was made by the bishops to spell out more clearly the official position of the Sri Lankan Catholic church on what was

considered then the crucial problem of the entire nation. Unlike the messages and letters that were published in the past, this letter was very pointed and forthright in its message and content. The chief characteristic trait of this letter was that the bishops sought to shed light on the present plight of the nation by resorting to the historical, social, political, economic, cultural and religious facets of the national mosaic.⁷³ The contextual strength of the letter lies in its critical perception of the past, an unbiased assessment of the present and the projection of a hopeful vision for the future.

This lengthy letter with its commendable method of approach to the national situation received laudable acclamation even outside of Sri Lanka.⁷⁴ Firstly, through the publication of this letter, the bishops illustrated very clearly that the church's contextual concern is constitutive of its mission of proclaiming the Gospel.⁷⁵ Secondly, by articulating this concern with a deep sense of realism the bishops resorted to a holistic method.⁷⁶ Thirdly, they made an effort to situate the current and pressing problems of the country in its proper historical perspective.⁷⁷ Fourthly, in proposing some viable solutions to the existential problems the bishops expressed their intention to resolve these problems not in triumphant isolation but in solidarity with other humanitarian and religious groups.⁷⁸ The intensification of the ethnic conflict since the very beginning of the present decade and the series of death and destruction that engulfed the nation and all other turmoils within and without the church became an integral part of this pastoral letter.

1. CONTEXTUAL INVOLVEMENT AND THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE-ABILITY

The bishops affirmed that the church's contextual involvement should be seen as constitutive of its missionary responsibility. This positive perception fittingly illustrates the theological strength and the ecclesiological relevance of this pastoral letter. Ordinarily, responsibility is understood in terms of liability, duty or accountability. But there is also another, more humanitarian or Christian way of understanding

one's responsibility. Here responsibility is understood in terms of ability or capability. It is in this sense that the bishops understand that the church has a responsibility toward the nation and its people, particularly at this "time of grave crisis".

The bishops did not consider the contextual involvement of the church as an act of arbitration undertaken in a condescending spirit of charity to resolve a conflict situation. Rather they viewed their participation in the "re-building of the nation" as a responsible collaboration. Their central question was "in this sad situation what is our **responsibility** and role as **Christians?**"⁷⁹ Their sincere acknowledgement that "we as a community of Christians must recognize that we too in some ways have contributed to bringing about this situation"⁸⁰ is also not without any foundation.⁸¹ Motivated by these factors the bishops sought to re-define and re-formulate the ecclesial "response-ability" in all its realistic dimensions, and to vivify the contextual concern of the church in more practical and plausible terms.

With a strong sense of urgency the bishops drew attention to the dehumanizing and the debilitating effects that the present situation has on the Sri Lankan society and lamented the moral degradation and spiritual degeneration that results from this sordid state of affairs,⁸² not to mention the hardening of attitudes among the parties involved. While delineating the adverse consequences this situation had had on the social, economic and cultural advancement of the nation they warned against the geo-political and international implications of this conflict.⁸³ The bishops also observed that in comparison to the past, the emerging sense of cordiality between the different religions is relatively conducive for a peaceful co-existence.⁸⁴

In seeking to respond creatively and critically to this context, the bishops forcefully stated their task was

to endeavour to evolve mentalities and relationships, a way of life and social and political institutions that ensure to each person and all communities a sense of

acceptance, security, human dignity, freedom and an equitable share of economic well-being. This has to be done with a due respect to the numbers, territorial distribution, historical consciousness, religious traditions, languages and cultures of our population.⁸⁵

It was the contention of the bishops that an effective and meaningful response from their part demands that they do not stop merely with investigating and listing the visible symptoms of this social malady but that they "attend well to the causes"⁸⁶ that produce this malaise. The bishops openly admitted that neither Christianity nor the Gospels could give them "ready-made answers"⁸⁷ to the contextual questions, issues and problems that confronted them at the time in their particular historical context. While maintaining that they could always look to the Gospel and the Christian tradition for enlightenment and guidance, the bishops observed that each situation demands a different form of response.

2. RELEVANT PRESENCE IN HISTORY

Another significant effort undertaken by the bishops was to highlight the historical roots of the present conflict and to identify the diverse causes that have over the years intensified this inter-ethnic hostility and hatred.⁸⁸ Referring to the contemporary Sri Lankan context in the second chapter of this study, we have already shown the dynamic role played by past history on the **psyche** of the people. In his critical study of the present conflict a well reputed Sri Lankan historian commented recently that in Sri Lanka memories of events related to ethnic rivalries "assume the immediacy of the previous weekend, and those of a thousand years, that of the last year. The country is haunted by a history which is agonizing to recall but hazardous to forget."⁸⁹

Understandably, the bishops, being aware of this vibrant sense of history whose positive and negative layers are deeply imprinted in the minds and hearts of the people of Sri Lanka today, resolved to invoke that same history to substantiate some of their reflections and recommendations.⁹⁰ They proceeded to interpret the colonial and post independence

years of the socio-political, cultural and religious evolution within the national, macro-historical frame.⁹¹ But a major lacuna in their approach is that they failed to identify or evaluate the role played by the church during those periods of history, especially in relation to some of the political events and decisions that have had very adverse effects on the poor masses.⁹² History can be reliably invoked to prove that these political events and decisions have over the years led the nation to the present impasse.⁹³

A critical ecclesiological examination of the church's social concern would unveil the truth that despite its influential position the church in the 1940s and 1950s,⁹⁴ at its official and institutional levels, maintained a passive silence in the face of these social evils. In the face of flagrant exploitation of the basic rights of the poor and the defenceless by the powers that ruled, the bishops recommended more novenas, prayers and pious pilgrimages.⁹⁵

It was only when the flood tide of turmoils began to flow into the ecclesial mansion that it began to pay attention. One such event was the nationalization of church owned schools and colleges. That time the church leadership mobilised public support⁹⁶ and complained of religious persecution. Otherwise the church leadership was content with the promotion of cult. Even the present leadership of the church considered only the moral and spiritual domain as their chief areas of concern.

The church maintained a deliberate aloofness in regard to matters pertaining to the social realm. When human life was made expendable by untold forms of violence and militancy, the church leadership peaceably recommended prayer and penance through various forms of lenten campaigns.⁹⁷ The church leadership offered suffrages for the victims of violence and eulogised on the virtues of suffering and sacrifice. Though important, this pietistic approach pointed to a sheer escapism from the existential and historical reality and attempted to substitute devotionism for action-oriented positive involvement.

As a collective body the church refused to launch into action for justice and peace. It resorted to spiritualizing action by inviting its members to multiply their pious practices as a means of solving problems. But this approach was short lived. When the flood tide of ethnic conflict entered the portals of the church, the bishops hurriedly began to underline the importance of human rights, equality, freedom and dignity of human persons.⁹⁸ Realizing their contextual and historical insensitivity, the bishops in this pastoral letter made copious references to the invaluable aspects of human life in all its socio-cultural dimensions.⁹⁹ For the first time they expounded the profundity of human dignity and the preciousness of every human person before God.

As a practical response to this critical phase of history, the official leadership of the church of Sri Lanka espoused the need to initiate dialogue as a means of peace and conciliation. The church leadership felt that this dialogue should be fostered at all levels, namely inter-religious, inter-ecclesial, inter-ethnic, inter-cultural and inter-regional.¹⁰⁰ The bishops emphasized that it is through dialogue that the existing historical misconceptions, prejudices, ill-feelings, racial hatreds and other narrow-minded ethno-religious sentiments can be overcome.¹⁰¹

3. AN INTER-RELIGIOUS VENTURE

Having presented a broad outline of the political, social, ethnic, economic, cultural, moral and religious problems that beset the nation, the bishops affirm that the four religions professed in Sri Lanka have a special responsibility toward the present crisis.¹⁰² The bishops emphasize that "there is an underlying togetherness in the message of our religions which propose **maithriya**, compassion, love, service and the genuine human community, as the path to human fulfilment and happiness."¹⁰³

It is remarkable to find that the existential and contextual approach to the national situation resorted to by the church leadership enabled them to reform some of the traditional

theological stands stubbornly held by them in the past. Quite prominent among these was the negative and even condemnatory forms of judgement pronounced by the hierarchy on the theological validity of other religions. But within two decades there is evidenced a striking theological reversal. The church leadership which officially rejected the salvific value of other religious traditions began not only to recognize their worth from a positive angle but claimed also a fraternal sense of spiritual solidarity with them in a common struggle for peace and harmony.¹⁰⁴ An attitude that was absolutely unthinkable a quarter century ago.¹⁰⁵

Another significant development was that the Catholic hierarchy even threw a positive challenge to other faiths by inviting them to a deeper **metanoia**.¹⁰⁶ The bishops urged other religious leaders that they too must look closely into their respective religious traditions to find new ways of contributing toward peace and national harmony. In this connection the bishops advised that "the present crisis is a deep spiritual challenge to all our peoples. Our religions too are challenged concerning their core values."¹⁰⁷ They observed that "the erosion of human values is a result of our being unfaithful to our religious traditions".¹⁰⁸ Hence they pointed out a common weakness in all religions and appealed with a sense of acute social concern saying that "unfortunately there has been a tendency for religion to be thought of individualistically, with the result that many religious persons shun their social responsibilities .."¹⁰⁹ With an unprecedented tone of inter-religious amity, the bishops advised all Christians to join hands with the followers of other religions in promoting peace and harmony.¹¹⁰ The bishops recommended,

while Christianity gives us the motivation for our commitment, action for the transformation of our society may most often have to be primarily with persons of other religions and all persons of good will. The common national crisis faced by all our religions can spur us to come together to the rebuilding of the Sri Lankan nation in our time. There is a general agreement on the purposes and principles of our religions with reference to

our moral and social life. The message of the religions and the linkage of persons on the basis of the values of the religions can be one of the best means for our moral, social and human development, specially in the context of our ethnic crisis. We encourage our faithful to join hands with persons and groups of other religions to bring harmony, justice and peace in our country.¹¹¹

The attitude of inter-religious co-operation espoused here, indicates the inauguration of an entirely new phase of relationship that the church sought to establish with the non-Christian religions of Sri Lanka. It is quite ironic, that exactly a century before these words were written, "in 1883 Buddhists and Catholics were fighting each other on the streets of Colombo."¹¹² At that time the church leadership over emphasized the areas that are supposedly "unique" to Catholicism. The teachings, catechetical instructions and other religious manuals¹¹³ published from the first quarter of the present century up until the 1960s played up the supremacy of Christianity over other religions. There were open efforts¹¹⁴ to condemn other religions as false religions and opposed to Christ.¹¹⁵ Seen against this backdrop of religious bitterness and enmity partly fuelled by the church, this approach and invitation for collaboration is a giant step forward. The church leadership which once stressed the divisive elements now emphasized those that unite religions. Today at least in theory the church has abandoned the claim of religious supremacy, and it desires to approach other religions as equal partners in a common national task, with an underlying conviction that any "action for transformation"¹¹⁶ must be initiated in collaboration with the followers of other religions. In other words, the Catholic hierarchy acknowledged that the witnessing function of the church and all its efforts toward a context-centred social involvement will become ineffectual without a significant inter-religious co-operation. The fraternal invitation extended by the church to other religions to join hands in the promotion of human welfare also suggests that the church recognizes the indispensable role of other faiths in this assiduous national task. In spite of this audacious attitude manifested by the bishops

among the Christians of Sri Lanka the old prejudices against other religions still run deep. Concretely the bishops had not taken any effort to instruct the Christians on the positive and worthy elements found in other faiths. The religious instructions given in Catholic schools and the catechetical books and manuals offer nothing on non-Christian religions. In sum the misconceptions about other religions instilled into the minds of the Catholics are yet to be corrected.

4. CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ECCLESIAL PRAXIS

While commending the positive and creative elements in other religious traditions, the bishops also reminded the Christian communities of the specific character of the Christian religious heritage¹¹⁷ and its concomitant missionary thrust. The bishops made an open invitation to the entire "local church in Sri Lanka"¹¹⁸ to deepen its own missionary spirit and commitment in light of their faith in the person and message of Christ. In this connection they also emphasized that faith must manifest itself in altruistic actions.¹¹⁹

A significant development that is discernible in this regard is the open ended approach to the context suggested by the bishops. They explained the importance of understanding the Sri Lankan context in the light of the communitarian Christian faith or "belief in God".¹²⁰ In seeking to explicate the realistic meaning of faith in reference to the local context the bishops not only affirmed the diverse constituent elements of a context as having a theological significance but they gave also a strong affirmation of the inner relationship between faith and existential action. As the underlying principle of Christian existence, faith is the invisible bond of Christian unity. Faith loses its valour and validity if it fails to animate every aspect of the religious life of a Christian. Hence the praxis of faith is inextricably interwoven into existential missionary commitment and contextual pastoral concern of the church. It is by faith that one would be able to perceive the presence and manifestation of God in a given human situation. For a Christian, faith is not an impersonal surrender to an abstract Absolute. Rather it is a personal response to

God. This response is concretely manifested through action and involvement in the milieu of one's daily life. The bishops therefore rightly expounded Christian faith as inseparably linked to action. In proper reference to a given context, the dialectics of faith is verified in contextually valid action while the same action clarifies and confirms the intrinsic dynamism of faith.

In light of their understanding of faith the bishops acknowledged that the existential situation with all its complexities has a theological relevance. They endeavoured to speak of God as one who is involved in the advancement of human history and stressed the need to recognize the manifestation of God in the evolving contexts of human life and growth.¹²¹ That's why, instead of affirming the special spiritual privileges of the church, the bishops spoke of the entire human race as having its origin and destiny in one Creator God¹²² who invites all persons to share the gift of "divine filiation".¹²³ In this manner the church leadership decisively proposed to renounce the triumphant or militant Christian attitude perpetuated in the past.

Invoking the biblical expressions of God's unceasing concern for the people, especially for those who are "weak and humiliated,"¹²⁴ the bishops sought to spell out in more concrete terms that the "God revealed in the Bible is interested in and involved in human history."¹²⁵ Developing this notion further, the bishops also offered a remarkable praxis-centred, missionary and theological reflection on the content and character of Christian faith. They did this by focusing attention on the different dimensions of the Christian understanding of community life. The bishops clearly felt that in the midst of a society that is divided and fragmented in many ways, the uniquely Christian and evangelical contribution that the church can make is to express by a living example the reality of Christian community life.¹²⁶ It is the quality of community life that makes a community into an *ekklesia* in the full sense of the term. While other religions consciously perpetuate the divisions of caste and creed, culture and language

it is the Christian community that can truly emerge as a living and a challenging symbol of unity and togetherness. It is the members of church who can by their life of unity bear witness to the fact that amidst all these divisions people can still rise above and live as a national community in full solidarity and fellowship.¹²⁷ The bishops sought to reinforce this notion of unity beyond the boundaries of the church by attributing it as an essential quality of the human family. They enunciated the common origin of all humanity saying that "God the Creator of the universe and of the entire human race is the loving Father and mother of all human beings ..."¹²⁸ Against the backdrop of the current conflict it can be said in hindsight that if the church is successful in realizing this singular effort it has already achieved a great deal of what is described by ecclesial contextualization.

5. TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

It is striking to read that the bishops chose "discipleship" as the fitting model to explain the missionary presence of the church in Sri Lanka. Prior to their description of the church as "community of disciples", the bishops dwelt on the exemplary human qualities of the person of Christ. Upholding the historical person of Jesus as a model and an excellent exemplar of love, reconciliation, forgiveness, humility, fidelity, justice, sharing etc. the bishops emphasized the duty of all Christians to follow the path shown by Jesus.¹²⁹

The bishops delineated that all these qualities are to be reflected within the church at least to some measure and the church as a community must constantly evoke these ideals. Assessing the present time as "a time of grave responsibility, spiritual crisis and moral challenge",¹³⁰ the bishops articulated the need for a meaningful rejuvenation and revitalization of the mission and pastorate of the church. They saw that a fitting missionary thrust must receive its impetus from the intensity of active participation and involvement in the context. In the understanding of the bishops it is the context that largely determines the priorities of missionary activity. Hence the bishops urged, "we have to activate our mission to serve

the nation in truth, peace and love.”¹³¹ They further explained that “in the present situation this includes the liberation of our selves and our people from fear, suspicion, hate and violence in order that we may all live in peace and harmony with justice and love.”¹³²

The bishops explained that the Christian communities would not be able to fulfil this mission if they were not appropriately integrated into the very texture of the social context within which they live, profess and celebrate their faith. Hence the bishops pointed out this need for contextual integration as a prerequisite for a meaningful praxis of discipleship. The bishops said:

The community of Christians must share in the building of society in such a way as to remove the causes of hatred, division and conflict, while also attending to those in immediate need. We must analyse the issues as objectively as possible, decide on our objectives and priorities, keeping in mind the guide-lines of our faith and endeavour to bring about desirable changes in the minds and hearts of the people and in the relationships among them. The discipleship of Jesus Christ calls us to be frank and prophetic in denouncing evil and announcing, in season and out of season, the Good News of God's Love of all and of human liberation for all through love¹³³.

In placing this advice before the Christians the bishops also welded together the twin notions of “community life” and “discipleship”. Though proposed primarily to the Christian communities, others are also invited to assimilate these qualities in the measure to which they are able.

Analysing these two practical recommendations of the bishops from the perspective of ecclesial contextualization it can be said that if practised in the true biblical sense these two elements are the ideal ways of entry into the fabric of the Sri Lankan social ensemble. While professing several laudable ideals such as renunciation of material wealth, loving

compassion toward all living beings and espousing virtues of voluntary poverty and simplicity of life, the two major religions of Sri Lanka, namely Buddhism and Hinduism openly advocate and even perpetuate factors that are socially harmful and divisive. For instance the Sri Lankan brand of Buddhism limits ultimate religious experience, i.e., **nibbana** or enlightenment only to a chosen religious elite. Buddhism and Hinduism openly profess and promote caste distinctions. Buddhist monasteries are founded and continue to function along caste identities¹³⁴ while Orthodox Hindu leaders insist on caste segregations even in places of worship.¹³⁵

In addition to these dehumanizing socio-religious practices, both Buddhism and Hinduism have no organized community prayer or worship. They have nothing parallel to the Christian parish networks or the diocesan administrative units. There is no organized mission or ordained ministry. Neither do they have priests ministering full-time or a trans-national ecclesiastical set up like that of the Catholic Church. The absence of all these partly contribute to the existing weaknesses in these religious systems. As for the Catholic church, despite a few short comings attached to the institutional apparatus, this very same institutional structure provides at least the frame work that is necessary to foster a closely knit community experience. It provides for a healthy inter-locking of its members and serves as an influential catalyst for a more organized form of social reform. The bishops' repeated insistence on community life and discipleship should be projected and interpreted within the confines of this understanding of the local church.

6. THE INNER DIALECTICS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

A holistic and critical appraisal of the efforts toward a contextual ecclesial reform inaugurated and implemented by the bishops unveils very striking elements about the inner dialectics of the process of contextualization. In the understanding of the bishops it is the "creative and response-able presence" of the church in the given social ensemble that

forms the kernel of ecclesial contextualization. But neither the church nor the social ensemble are "finished products". They are both subject to growth and development. In the actual realization of the process of contextualization, these two realities namely social and ecclesial, with their distinct but inter-related identities enter into a dialectical meeting and merging. In this meeting, the church's function is defined as an effort of "responding". A relevant response must meet the needs and demands of that situation. Such a response cannot be *apriori* or arbitrary. It should "correspond" to the demands of the concrete needs and situation as demonstrated in the parable of the good Samaritan.¹³⁶ In articulating the mission of the church as a task of responding to the nation the bishops neatly underline that the church's response is necessitated by its social and historical consciousness. In the very act of responding to the context the church also undergoes a process of transformation.

In other words, contextualization is not what the church seeks "to do" in a context but it is what the church seeks "to be" and what it seeks "to become" in a context. Applying this to the Sri Lankan bishops' view of contextualization we find that the more they entered into the context the more conscious they became of the mission of the local church. Even though the bishops resorted to a reform of the church in line with the context, we find ultimately it is the context that began to refashion the plans and priorities of the church and the decisions and deliberations of its leadership. Yet, the nearer the bishops came to the context the less they felt capable of responding. In a more significant way we discern that as their openness to the context increased their triumphalistic, hierarchical and authoritative attitudes decreased.

In other words, an authentic form of contextualization is not quantitatively measured by what the church was able to achieve but it is a quality of the church's sacramental, meaningful and challenging presence in a given context. In this manner contextualization becomes that ceaseless task by which the church undertakes the process of shedding its imported and inherited image in order to be moulded by the situational needs and demands of its given context.¹³⁷

To a limited extent it can be said of the church's contextual concern that the dialectical influence of the context on the church was so profound that it animated the mission, spirituality, pastorate, life and celebration of the church with new vigour and new vision. But a fundamental weakness in the method employed by the bishops in fostering and promoting this contextual ecclesial concern was the lack of preparation of the laity. No sustained effort was made to educate and train the laity or lay apostolate leaders of the necessity of involvement and participation in the social sphere as a task integral to Christian missionary responsibility.

7. A NON - CONTEXTUAL DICHOTOMY?

Seen from an analytical and critical perspective it should also be pointed out that in their attempt to understand some of the crucial areas of the troubled national context, the bishops sometimes manifested a tendency to be too theoretical and abstract. They tended to forget that they too had a personal share in the present struggle, as religious leaders, as members of the Sri Lankan society and as partners in a common human endeavour. Moreover the tone of the pastoral letter indicated that they were overtly careful not to offend the sensibilities of the members of the majority community.¹³⁸

A careful reading of the letter would also confirm that the bishops tried to please all parties involved in the conflict and avoided saying anything that in their view would challenge the status quo. Here we find traces of that same dichotomous tendency to which we have made allusions elsewhere. This attitude of the bishops raises the fundamental question of the church as a true "disciple" of Christ called to follow him as the Truth and the Way to the Truth. Certain obvious efforts by the hierarchy to dilute or deform truth, blatantly negated the very foundation of an authentic ecclesial contextualization and these had been the subject of open criticism by priests¹³⁹ and others.

Their pastoral approach as contained in this letter and in the subsequent statements brings to the surface certain bare facts. First of all, the bishops try to understand the context while apparently remaining outside of it. Instead of sifting and sorting out those causes that are intrinsic to the problem, the bishops try to make an impersonal inventory of the problems and issues. Rather than presenting an insightful interpretation and a critical introspection of the church's role in this turbulent situation, they try to escape the problem by blaming it on the political machinery. In this way the bishops contradict an integral principle of contextualization, namely participation and involvement. Apparently the bishops as a collective body¹⁴⁰ did not want to enter into the national struggle in full solidarity and participation. They failed to identify themselves with the people, especially with the poor and the oppressed whose problems and struggles they avowed to champion. They blamed the elite of both ethnic communities for not sharing the burden borne by the masses, but did not realize it themselves that they too stand far away from the actual reality. This form of marginal involvement has been pointed out by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.¹⁴¹

A glaring example of this dualistic and divided episcopal approach is evident in the "distorted" version of the Sinhala translation of this pastoral letter.¹⁴² Many have pointed an accusing finger at the hierarchy for the omissions and distortions found in the Sinhala text.¹⁴³ Besides, the English text of the pastoral was reportedly circulated only among a selected few.¹⁴⁴ Thirdly the official organ of the Catholic bishops, namely **The Catholic Messenger**,¹⁴⁵ which normally publishes a part or whole of the text of the official statements and pastoral letters of the bishops was conspicuously silent even about the existence of this "celebrated pastoral".

All this demonstrates that ecclesial contextualization is not an arbitrary undertaking of isolated events and incidents in a context. Neither can it be a non-committed, nor a non-involved concern for a "context" that is "up there and out

there". But contextualization in all its ecclesial dimensions demands a deeper and an on-going *metanoia* from the entire local church and a sincere effort to be "truly and fully present" in a given context where the church is called to carry out its missionary task trusting in the dynamism and guidance of the Spirit of Christ who alone is the chief and worthy evangelizer.¹⁴⁶

D. INTENSIFICATION OF CRISES AND THE RESURGENCE OF INTRA-ECCLESIAL SOLIDARITY

The second half of the decade spanning from 1980 to 1990 had been the most eventful period in terms of the intensification of the internal conflicts in Sri Lanka. The flood tide of political currents that began to gather momentum since the beginning of that fateful decade reached their boisterous climax specially in the last three years of that decade. A retrospective view of the various political posturings that characterized this sordid period would unfold the truth that the growing militarisation of the State helped only to accelerate the militancy both in the Tamil regions as well as in the South of Sri Lanka.

1. A DECADE OF TURBULENCE

This decade opened with the introduction of the District Development Councils Act (1980) and subsequently the elections for the abortive District Development Councils were held in 1981. This election which was boycotted by the Tamils, left indelible imprints in their collective historical memory — the burning of the Public Library in Jaffna on the 1st of June 1981 continues to be the sad and silent reminder of the irreversible strain in inter-ethnic relations between the two major communities in this nation. Jani de Silva's perceptive comments about this period provide the right frame-work to understand the twists and turns of the political behaviour of this brief period.

It is observed that "the UNP regime which came into power (1977) on a law-and-order platform in response to the industrial turbulence before, consistently took strong

and repressive action to contain all extra-parliamentary activity. The General Strike of 1980 was crushed with a heavy hand. A Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was enacted in response to militant activity in the North, but was increasingly used against dissenting social forces in the South. In the wake of the Presidential elections of 1982, the government decided to extend the life of parliament through a referendum."¹⁴⁷ Commenting on the December 1982 Referendum as one that set in motion "a trail of events which led to further violence", she adds that this "referendum moreover, for the first time saw the use of organized violence by factions within the regime against its political opponents, and was perhaps the most violent election to be held in all the post-independence years."¹⁴⁸

It is against this backdrop that one should understand the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983. As recorded by the Sinhala historian K. M. De Silva, "Historians of the future are likely to debate whether it was the referendum of December 1982 that marks the beginning of Sri Lanka's decade of troubles or the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983. He further contends that despite all the criticism that have been, deservedly, levelled against it, the referendum of 1982 was not as deeply disturbing in its effects on the polity as the riots of July 1983."¹⁴⁶ It is rightly said that once an event of this magnitude occurs its consequences develop a momentum of their own, and things get out of control as misjudgement follows misinformation.¹⁵⁰

The political situation was further compounded by the hasty introduction of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, in the wake of the July riots and this rendered void the moderate Tamil representation within a democratic framework. The government had therefore no other option except to negotiate with the militant groups and this was unsuccessfully facilitated by a third party outside of Sri Lanka and found its place in the contemporary political discourse as "Thimbu talks of July - August 1985." The next stage was the signing of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987. The unproductive consequences of these

political somersaults have been neatly documented and interpreted by both political analysts and historians. Of pertinence here is the remark made by Jayadeva Uyangoda. He maintains that "India's political, diplomatic and quasi - military intervention to force the UNP regime to accomodate devolutionary proposals, formulated largely by Indian intermediaries, was profoundly symptomatic of the inability of Sri Lankan polity to reform, on its own initiative, the political structures of ethnic relations. It may seem paradoxical, though, that the processes which were internal and autonomous to Sri Lanka were not adequate or effective enough to create a situation where an essentially domestic problem could have been resolved by resorting to a state - reformist project. What is still fundamental to the entire question was the unwillingness of the leading political forces of the majority Sinhalese society to come to terms with the democratic requirements of an ethnically pluralistic political order."¹⁵¹ Here one may add that in addition to ethnic pluralism, the State's professed patronage of the religion of the majority community has further supported the entrenchment of a "static political paradigm with an under - lying ethno-religious weightage.

2. A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE

Such a complex but centrally consolidated ethno-religious polity necessitates and requires an unbiased, critical, religious-theological evaluation. The forces of history have their own velocity and vigour. Like any other flood tide these forces too could have been immobilised, dammed or diverted. But if they are allowed to wend their way wildly, their effects can be debilitating and devastating. The question arises as to how the leadership of the Church who profess unity in diversity, faced this mono - centric, ethno - religious polity. As a matter of fact the response by the Catholic leadership as we shall illustrate now, had been cohesive, comprehensive and to some extent wholistic.

The turbulent national scene of the 1980s demanded a concerted and collective response of the Church. The progressive turn of events beginning from the introduction of

the District Development Councils Act of 1980 to the resumption of hostilities between the State's armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in June 1990 significantly affected the Church, its function and social consciousness at various levels. It was during this period that the social service agencies of the Church manifested greater flexibility to work with Non-governmental Organizations that are truly committed to the welfare of humanity and to humanitarian values.¹⁵² A tangible form of inter-religious cordiality began to emerge both at institutional and non-institutional levels within the Christian churches.¹⁵³

The Catholic leadership became convinced that a simplistic and pietistic response will be inadequate and irrelevant when one considers the whole gamut of political developments with an increasing tendency toward an authority-centred political paradigm.¹⁵⁴

The need for a wider consultation and a meaningful intra-ecclesial dialogue became an imperative, largely necessitated by the complexity of issues involved. The Church was led to the recognition that no religious community can live, thrive or even survive purely by faith. Like any other human communities they are equally conditioned by all other integral dimensions of social life. Political preferences, economic exigencies, cultural conditionings and linguistic loyalties have their own share in moulding and shaping the progress or regress of faith-communities irrespective of the particular religious community which provides them with a collective identity.

Perceiving the perilous national situation with its underlying challenges, the Bishops felt the need to address issues related to almost all dimensions of social life and they desired to address them not in isolation but together. Seizing the opportunity of the pre-election period, they published a declaration entitled, "A Christian Declaration to the Nation on the Forthcoming Elections". The significance of this declaration is manifold. It seeks to address some of the important ethno-political and economic issues besetting the

nation. For the first time the Bishops sought it fit to express their opinion on such issues not merely as the body of Catholic Bishops in Sri Lanka, but they joined hands with the Conference of Major Religious Superiors of the different Congregations and Societies of the Catholic Church, the Catholic Union (Laity) of Sri Lanka and above all in solidarity with the other Christian denominations that is represented by the National Christian Council.¹⁵⁵

We have referred earlier to the cordial relationship that prevailed between the Catholic Church and the UNP in the early years of the post-independence era. But the statement released in 1988 brought to the surface the Church's disapproval of the political systems that prevailed under the UNP in the 1980s. It is against this background that one should understand and Bishops' explicit statement, "our stance is non-partisan."¹⁵⁶ Commenting indirectly on the infamous "Referendum of 1982", they observed that the opportunity to elect a fresh parliament not experienced since 1982 will bring back democracy. Under the title of "General Principles of State Policy",¹⁵⁷ the Bishops even attempted at an unconvincing biblical justification of "democracy", paying little attention to the fact that the democratic principle of majority opinion need not necessarily be that of the numerical majority.

The need for the restoration of peace with justice was re-emphasized in their pastoral letter but what the bishops perhaps failed to understand was that peace can neither be reduced to the arena of politics nor to the realm of religion. Had they viewed peace as a multi-dimensional reality that should pervade the social, economic, communitarian, ethnic, linguistic and cultural dimensions of society, then they would have understood the peaceaccord and the condescending concessions inscribed in it as inadequate to respond to the crisis enveloping the nation.

From the contextual point of view what is of pertinence here is the fact that the gradual openness of the Church to the national situation and the sensitivity demonstrated by the

ecclesiastical leadership to the manifold issues facing the nation drew them perhaps unwittingly, closer to the human reality.¹⁵⁸ It confirmed to them that the Church cannot be a silent partner, if it is truly committed to the poor and the oppressed. If the Church takes to heart that it has to find its identity with the poor, then it cannot even consider its own strength as a minority community. In other words if the church truly finds its contextual identity with the poor and the oppressed in this nation, and if the people who belong to this human category are a majority, then the Church has no reason to fear that its voice for and from among the poor is one that represents a weaker section of humanity. A deeper and meaningful participation and a persistent involvement in the context with its challenging and transforming components that can redress this conviction. A church truly contextualized in Sri Lanka has to be a champion of the poor, the marginalized and oppressed, irrespective of any religious, ethnic or linguistic label that is there. A non-contextualized church in its very essence denies the possibility of being "Good News" to the poor (Luke 4:16-10).

NOTES

1. See K. Jayawardena, *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, Centre for Social Analysis, Dehiwala, 1985, pp. 98-106 and K. M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies . . .*, pp. 323ff. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "The Tamils and Their Future in Sri Lanka," *Tamil Times*, (London), 5 (1986), No. 12, p. 6.
2. TRSLN, p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 2 and 22-28.
4. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church . . .," pp. 202-205 also See for instance the editorial entitled, "The Church in Sri Lanka — More Sinhala, Less Christian" in *Tamil Times*, (London), 5 (1986), No. 10, p. 2.
5. *Id.* Many public statements made independently by the Sinhala and Tamil bishops, since the arrest and detention of two Tamil Catholic priests in November 1982 further illustrate this divisive attitude. See *The Catholic Messenger*, November 21, 1982, p. 1, *The Sun*, November 17, 1987, p. 1.

6. See *Id.* also Swami Arulthasan, "Sri Lanka – the Heart of the Problem, in *Tamil Times*, 2 (1983), pp. 18-19; In recent years the division within the church has become more pronounced, see for instance the news item and comment entitled "Onward Christian Soldiers" in *The Saturday Review*, 1st Nov. 1986, p. 10.
7. See Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: The National Question . . .*, p. 194.
8. See *Ibid.*, pp. 194-196 also S. Sivanayagam, *Sri Lanka: Ten Years of Jayewardene Rule*, A TIRU Publication, London, 1986, p. 4.
9. As observed by Jayadeva Uyangoda, a Sri Lankan Political scientist, the 1972 and 1978 constitutions helped only to consolidate the political process of "centralization" which partly led to the marginalization of ethnic minorities — particularly the Tamil community - from the social foundations of the state. Consequently the term 'nation-state' came to signify an ethnically exclusivist Sinhala State. See Jayadeva Uyangoda, "The State and the Process of Devolution in Sri Lanka", art. in *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka*, Sunil Bastian, (Ed) ICES, Colombo. 1994, p, 83. Also See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "Sri Lanka and its Future . . ." p. 297.
10. See Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis . . .*, pp. 144-145
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-157.
12. See Michael Robello, "Sri Lanka: Towards Civil War" in *Afric Asia*, July, 1985, No. 19, pp. 14-17 also *Far Eastern Economic Review: Asia Year Book*, 1983, pp. 252-254; 1984, pp. 264-267; 1985, pp. 245-249.
13. Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism . . .*, p. 172.
14. For a well-documented analysis of the articles, editorials and comments published in various international journals, see S. Sivanayagam, *Sri Lanka: Ten Years . . .*, pp. 6-39 also T. Valluvan, *The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Economic Aspects*, Tamil Information Centre, London, 1987, pp. 7-19.
15. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholics . . .," pp. 197 - 211 also by the same author "Some Preliminary Remarks on Religious and Ethnic Identity in Sri Lanka" (unpublished essay), pp. 3-9.
16. *Ibid.* See also "Bishop Protests Against Deplorable Action," in *Tamil Times*, (London), 2 (1982), No. 2, p. 2 and "The Church in Sri Lanka . . .," p. 2.
17. The Sinhalese majority of whom are Buddhists have been living in the central, southern and western provinces of the nation, while the north and east are inhabited by the Tamils.

18. R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholics . . .," p. 211.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-205.
20. For more on this see Paul Sieghart, *Sri Lanka: A Mounting . . .*, pp. 29-52.
21. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic . . .," p. 204.
22. See *Ibid.*, pp. 204-206.
23. See *Ibid.*, pp. 201-203.
23. See *Ibid.*, pp. 201-203.
24. See *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.
25. Several statements made independently by Msgr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando, Metropolitan Archbishop of Colombo, Msgr. Frank Marcus Fernando, president of the CBCSL and Msgr. Jacob Deogupillai, Bishop of Jaffna clearly point toward the underlying differences in their perception of the ethnic issue. See *The Ceylln Daily News*, 20th Nov. 1982 p. 1, 3; 24th March 1983, p. 1, 6th August 1983, p. 1, 12 August 1983, p. 1; *The Sun*, 20th Nov. 1982, p. 1; 19th Sept. 1983, p. 1.
26. See *Tamil Times*, (London), 3 (1984), No. 6, p. 6 and No. 7, p. 10.
27. See V. A. Leary, *Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka . . .*, pp. 6-85 and Paul Sieghart, *Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors*, International Commission of Jurists and Justice, London, 1984, pp. 29-39; 65-67.
28. The *Annual Reports* of Amnesty International from the year 1981-1990 have documented several cases of tortures, deaths and disappearances. Noteworthy among these are the killing of a Catholic priest and a Methodist minister by the nations armed forces. See "Troops Kill Priest and "Methodist Minister Burnt to Death" in *Tamil Times*, (London) 4 (1985), No. 2, p. 3; No. 3, pp. 3-4 also "Bishop Protest Against Deplorable Action," "Arrest of Catholic Priests" and "More and More Detentions" in *Tamil Times*, 2 (1982), pp. 1-2 & 16.
29. During this period the CBCSL reflected upon such timely topics as Children, Youth, Family Life etc. They sought to address these issues from a national and international point of view. See for instance, SBMS, p. 285; CM, p. 1; IYY, pp. 1-2.
30. See SBMS, pp. 284-285 TRSLN, esp. pp. 26-39.
31. "The Church in Sri Lanka . . .," p. 2.

32. See Tissa Balasuriya, *Communal Tensions and the Role of the Church*, CSR, Colombo, 1983 pp. 12-14 and 21.
33. See Swami Arulthasan, "Sri Lanka: The Heart of the Problem . . ." p. 18-19 also "A Comment on the Statement of Bishops" in *The Torch* 1 (1985), No. 3, pp. 2-3 "The Church in Sri Lanka: More Sinhala . . . no p. 2 and R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic . . .," p. 201
34. TRSLN, p. 1.
35. CM, p. 1; TRSLN, pp. 16-17; CMCB, p. 1.
36. CM, p. 1; TRSLN, p. 19.
37. CM, p. 1; CVMFL, p. 2;
38. CM, p. 1; TRSLN, p. 18;
39. TRSLN, pp. 20, 23-25, 33-37.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-37.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 36-39.
43. See J. R. Carter, "Introduction," in *Religiousness in Sri Lanka*, Id. (ed.) Marga Institute, Colombo, 1979, pp. v-vii.
44. Aloysius Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *Irruption of the Third A Challenge to Theology*, Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, (eds.), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1983, p. 117.
45. See J. R. Carter, "Introduction" . . . , pp. iiv-v.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. iv-v; R. L. Stirrat, "Some Preliminary Remarks. . . .," pp. 2-7
47. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, "Introduction to the Second Edition" in *Politics in Sri Lanka* . . . , p. xv.
48. Almost a decade after the historical national Synod, the bishops of Sri Lanka, invited the staff of the Missiological Centre in Pune, India to conduct week-long sessions on "Mission Conscientization" at inter-diocesan levels. Accordingly three such seminars were held in Colombo Kandy and Jaffna at which a large number of priests, religious men and women and the laity participated. A fourth session was held in Colombo for the Bishops and major superiors. The present writer

gave lectures on "Inculturation" at these seminars in 1979 and emphasized that inculturation should encompass the whole gamut of Christian life and it should respond to the Socio-political, cultural and economic spheres as well. See A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, "Some Thoughts on Inculturation" in *The friend of the Priest*, Vol. 12, 1979, pp. 3-11.

49. This statement released at the end of the seminar embodied the vision for conscientization proposed by the bishops together with the major superiors of religious congregation of men and women. See SBMS, pp. 284-286.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

52. *Id.*

53. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

54. *Id.* (underlining mine).

55. *Id.*

56. *Id.*

57. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia* . . . , pp. 30-31, 60-61.

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*

60. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

61. *Id.*

62. WOC, pp. 1-8; CVMFL, pp. 1-3; IYY, pp. 1-3.

63. WOC, pp. 1-3; CVMFL, p. 2;

64. WOC, p. 5; CVMFL, p. 2.

65. WOC, p. 1.

66. *Id.*

67. Based on the principles of Buddhist religious ethos, the UNP government promised to abide by the Buddhist concept of a just or righteous society. For more see J. R. Jayewardene, *A New Path*, State Printing Corporation, Colombo, 1978, pp. 1-3.

68. WOC, p. 3.
69. See F. Houtart, *Catholics in Ceylon: Summary of the Survey made in 1969-1970*, Centre de Recherches socio-religieuses, Louvain, 1971, p. 2.
70. See "Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia," in *AAS*, 57 (1965), art. 7, p. 9 and art. 26 pp. 31-32 also *TRSLN*, pp. 19-20.
71. See *CVMFL*, pp. 2-3.
72. This pastoral letter released on the feast of Pentecost in 1984, contains the first systematic effort made by the bishops to study, analyse and critique the conflict-prone situation that obtains in contemporary Sri Lanka. See *TRSLN*, pp. 1-39.
73. See *Ibid.*, pp. 2-17, 35-37.
74. The letter received wide acclamation outside of Sri Lanka, for instance the German Episcopal Conference had the letter translated into German and published it. See S. J. Emmanuel, "Church's Role Grows More Difficult in Sri Lanka" in *Voice of Love*, (Jaffna), Jan.-Mar. 1987, p. 11. Its French version is published in *La Documentation Catholique*, 4 Aout. 1985, No. 1901, pp. 824-839.
75. *TRSLN*, pp. 20-23.
76. By holistic method we mean that the bishops did not merely make an effort to study the ethnic problem in isolation but sought to understand this problem within the frame of socio-national evolution in the pre-independent and post-colonial periods of Sri Lankan history. See *TRSLN*, pp. 3-19, 33-37.
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-10.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-21.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
81. Even though the bishops avoid to mention explicitly the church's direct involvement this broad statement can be attributed to the alleged involvement of some Tamil priests in the political movement for separate Tamil State and the active participation of some Sinhalese Catholics in anti-Tamil riots leading to the death and destruction of Tamils' lives and properties, see for instance, R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholics . . .," p. 197.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 19, 32-34.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
88. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-20.
89. K. M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies . . .*, p. 362.
90. TRSLN, pp. 2-9.
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-17.
92. For example when a large number of domiciled Indian labourers and their natural increase were deprived of civic rights and citizenship in the nation where they had toiled for over a century, the church leadership never made any protest, even though, at that time the church was influential with the government that effected this legislation. After almost 35 years the Catholic hierarchy laments the present plight of these labourers who eke out an existence in sub-human conditions. While mentioning their plight no concrete effort is made by the church leaders to rectify the oppressive state of affairs. See TRSLN, p. 9.
93. See K. Jayawardena, *Ethnic and Class . . .*, pp. 38-58.
94. See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka . . .*, pp. 14-16.
95. See Claude Lawrence, *Work and Working of the Archdiocese of Colombo-in-Ceylon 1947-1970*, Catholic Press, Colombo, 1980, pp. 93-96.
96. See A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: the Ceylon General Election of May 1970*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1975, p. 24.
97. See S. J. Emmanuel, "Church's Role Grows more Difficult in Sri Lanka . . .," p. 11.
98. Since the time Sri Lanka gained its political independence there had been several instances of the violation of basic human rights by the

government, but the church did not see it fit to challenge the State on the issue of respect for fundamental human rights.

99. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4, 9-11, 26-27, 35-38.
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-39.
101. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4, 26-37.
102. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
104. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 37.
105. F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology . . .* p. 256.
106. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
108. *Id.*
109. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
111. *Id.*
112. K. Jayawardena, *Ethnic and Class . . .*, p. 1.
113. See William Jesuthasan, *Eternal Life: A Catholic Catechism with A New Orientation And Emphasis*, St. Joseph's Catholic Press, Jaffna, 1960, pp. 182ff.
114. Of the many apologetic religious tracts published by the scholar-missionary Swami Gnana Pragasar the following are noteworthy, *Hinduism and Animal Sacrifice*, 1924, pp. 2-31; *Neo Saivism*, 1924, pp. 6-16; *Answers to Saivites*, 1925, pp. 1-40; *Idolatry and Image Worship*, 1923, pp. 2-12; *The True way of Salvation*, 1927, pp. 5-24 all published by the Catholic Press, Jaffna.
115. The catechetical instructions and religious teachings imparted until the 1960s defended Christianity as the only TRUE way of salvation. See for instance William Jesuthassn, *A New Cathechism in Tamil*, St. Joseph's Catholic Press, Jaffna, 1958, pp. 173-175 Swami Gnana Pragasar, *The True Way of Salvation*, St. Joseph's Catholic Press, Jaffna, 1927, pp. 1-24.

116. See TRSLN, p. 33ff.
117. TRSLN, p. 20.
118. *Id.*
119. *Id.*
120. *Id.*
121. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
122. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 22-23, 25-27.
127. *Id.*
128. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 22-24.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
131. *Id.*
132. *Id.*
133. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
134. Despite Buddha's objection to the caste system the Buddhist monastic institutions of Sri Lanka are based on the caste hierarchy. See Jerrold Schecter, *The New Face of Buddha: Buddhism and Political Power in Southeast Asia*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1967, p. 135.
135. For a detailed account of the caste discriminations among the Hindus in Sri Lanka, see, Michael Banks, "Caste in Jaffna," in E. R. Leach, (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 61-67.
136. *Luke*, 10: 29-37.
137. See "Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis" in *AAS*, 58 (1966), art. 1, p. 1025.

138. Several examples of this can be found in the pastoral, see **TRSLN**, pp. 9, 11-13, 16-17.
139. See "A Comment on the Statement of Bishops" , p. 2.
140. It should be said in fairness to the Tamil Catholic bishops that in spite of the risks involved they were very forthright in expressing their contextual concerns in public. See **B. Deogupillai**, "Some Positive Proposals for a Suitable Solution to the Problems of the Tamils in Sri Lanka" in *Cinta Journal*, (University of Jaffna), 1 (1983). No. 1, pp. 4-8 **K. Swami-pillai**, "An Onslaught on Human Dignity" in *The Torch*, (Jaffna), 1 (1985), No. 3, p. 4 , **T. Savundranayagam**, "Don't Beam False News" in *The Catholic Messenger*, Jan. 14, 1985, p. 1.
141. See **Tissa Balasuriya**, *Communal Tensions and the Role of the Church*, CSR Pamphlet, No. 14, CSR, Colombo, 1983, pp. 10-12, **S. J. Emmanuel** "Church's Role Grows more Difficult . . .," p. 11 and **Lakshman Gunasekara**, "The 'Cross' Questions" in *The Saturday Review*, Sept. 27, 1986, p. 5.
142. Commenting on the Sinhala translation of the joint pastoral letter, **TRSLN**, **Lakshman Gunasekara** writes, "buried amidst the religious rhetoric of the original (English) statement is at least a brief call for justice and equality for Sinhala and Tamil as State languages. However the Sinhala language statement issued simultaneously, has no such call and is quite different in content being merely full of some pietistic "prayer" rituals mechanically mouthing the need for "peace" and "repentence . . .," "The 'Cross' Questions" in *The Saturday Review*, Sept. 27, 1986, p. 5.
143. *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 11 also **S. J. Emmanuel**, "Church's Role Grows more Difficult . . .," p. 11.
144. *Ibid.*
145. *The Catholic Messenger* is the only Ecclesiastical English weekly in Sri Lanka, published with the official approval of the Catholic hierarchy of Sri Lanka.
146. See Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome, 1975, art. 6, 75.
147. **Jani de Silva**, "Centripetal Pressures and Regime Change in the Post-Colonial Sri Lanka State. in *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka*, **Sunil Bastian**, (Ed.) ICES, Colombo, 1994, p. 68.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

149. K. M. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, (Ed. id.), CES, Kandy, pp. 59 - 60.
150. *Ibid.*
151. Jayadeva Uyangoda, "The State and the Process of Devolution.....", pp. 86 - 87.
152. See *A Journey Toward Peace*, SEDEC Publication, 1993, and the Annual Reports of SEDEC from 1982-1994 clearly reflect this concern.
153. See, *CDNFE*, pp. 2-14, *TNC*, 16-27 and *QUEST*, March, 1989, No. 100, pp. 1-37.
154. See Jani de Silva "Centripetal Pressures.....", pp. 35-40.
155. *QUEST*, March, 1989, No. 100, p. 15.
156. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
157. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5
158. *TNIC*, pp. 1-8 This theme is also taken up again by the bishops' in *CDNFE* and in the Declaration entitled, "In the face of the Growing Poverty of our People" Colombo 25th October 1988. These documents are published as a collection on the 100th issue of *Quest*, Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, March 1989.

Chapter 5

A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE EFFORTS TOWARD ECCLESIAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

In the preceding pages we endeavoured to examine and analyse the methods employed, approaches adopted and the vision projected by the official Catholic leadership of Sri Lanka as part of its effort to reform and revitalize the church along the programme of renewal proposed by Vatican II. Drawing examples from the pastoral letters and other statements collectively made by the bishops we demonstrated that the post-Vatican II orientation for ecclesial reform envisaged by the Sri Lankan bishops contains several components that are conducive to a fruitful promotion of the process of contextualization. We also indicated that this process of change is an inescapable historical exigency to be encountered by the Church due to various sociological reasons.

In this chapter we shall re-examine some of the essential ingredients of the process of ecclesial contextualization as stipulated by the bishops and try to identify the strengths and weaknesses implied in their approach. As an integral part of our critique we shall also make a few suggestions and recommendations which we hope would help the Sri Lankan church in future to intensify its contextual presence and historical involvements.

The all-embracing notion of contextualization as described by us in the first chapter and its specific ecclesial character will be invoked to examine and evaluate the path of contextual ecclesial reform chosen by the bishops. In order to situate our critique in proper perspective, we shall begin by enumerating some of the general, pastoral and missio-theological strengths and weaknesses traceable in the bishops' official documents.

A. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. CONTEXTUAL ORIENTATION: PROGRESSION AND REGRESSION

The three decades i.e. from 1960-90 were times of serious self-searching for the church of Sri Lanka. It has been shown by us already that during this period the bishops sought to re-organize the pastoral priorities and re-formulate the missionary enterprises of the church by evaluating the church's presence and activities in light of the socio-historical ensemble of the nation.

In the decade immediately following the Council, the bishops embarked upon the task of adaptation. Quite fittingly they convoked a "National Pastoral Council"¹ and paid attention to the suggestions, proposals, opinions and recommendations presented by the laity and clergy². These enabled them to deepen the vision and to widen the horizon of the National Synod,³ held subsequently. But the pastoral and missionary pursuits of the Sri Lankan church and the observation of some who have made an analysis of these efforts, seem to confirm that the enthusiasm for reform that characterized the post-conciliar years was a short lived phenomenon.⁴ In fact the church's leadership was accused of being too slow to change or even of retreating in its pledges of contextual reform.⁵ It is therefore necessary that we examine critically those factors that had caused this regression.

The failure to realize the communitarian spirit within the church as an essential expression of the Christian faith seemed to have been a major obstacle to the process of ecclesial contextualization, during this period. In spite of the nice words found in their letters and statements about the communitarian dimensions of the church, in practice the hierarchy nurtured a rigidly institutional model of the church.⁶ Secondly, the reform sought by the bishops manifested a narrow sense of ecclesio-centrism with an overwhelming spirit of hierachialism and a condescending form of paternalism.⁷ As a result the church could not enter effectively into the heart

of the Sri Lankan context or the inner layers of the Sri Lankan social fabric.⁸ Thirdly, even though the bishops sought to draw inspiration from the various components that constitute the Sri Lankan context, their continued adherence to European cultural traits as universally valid Christian cultural expressions prevented the church from realizing a meaningful contextual integration.⁹

During the first phase (1965-1977) of reform, the bishops sought to view all the changes within the frame work of adaptation. They acted with the conviction that theology, liturgy, spirituality, and all other forms of the church's ministry and pastorate are ready-made realities that can be adjusted to suit different social, cultural and historical situations.¹⁰ It did not occur to them that Christian theology and liturgy, spirituality and ministry can be affected, challenged and enriched by way of a creative encounter with different religions and cultures. While allowing for a few adjustments at the surface level, the bishops wanted to keep the church's Roman Catholic identity intact.¹¹

At the same time the bishops set about with the explicit intention of restoring the image of the church by way of a contextual integration. Compelled strongly by the hostile inter-religious situation and the inherited cultural alienation the bishops articulated the need for actualizing a meaningful contextual insertion of the church into the Sri Lankan situation. The consequences of this twofold loyalty manifested itself at various levels.¹² It is in fact difficult to pin point whether the bishops themselves found a satisfactory answer to the question they raised two decades ago, namely, "Where does the so called **aggiornamento** or adaptation come into play?"¹³ Added to this dichotomous adventure was the lack of clarity on the theological principles and motivations for adaptation or contextualization. The bishops at this stage did not realize the serious ecclesial implications of the type of changes they sought to bring into effect.

A critical assessment of the first phase (1965-1977) of the bishops' efforts at contextual reform reveals that the

method and approach employed by the bishops showed a rather callous disregard for the very basic norm of ecclesial contextualization. The bishops failed to nurture the conviction that a valid and an authentic ecclesial contextualization evolves out of an intrinsic dialectic between the faith of a believing Christian community and the constituent elements of the given context in which that community is called to live out its faith. In this sense contextualization is not an implantation of pre-fabricated and predetermined models of the church or ecclesial structures and pastoral practices into a new situation. Rather in a more relevant sense ecclesial contextualization is a way of facilitating an on-going and dynamic inter-action, between faith as proclamation and praxis, between Christian life as celebration and struggle, and between church and the context, in which the church is called to manifest its unique religious experience and communitarian character.

All these show that a Christian community that desires to be authentically contextual must be prepared to plunge into the very heart of that context. It must be willing to penetrate all the inner layers of that context in order to inherit a new and transformed image of itself. In order to achieve this in full the church must also be prepared to go through that same incarnational *kenosis*, (*Phil.*, 2:6-11) i.e. a process of self-emptying and rise up to a new and meaningful life.

2. A CONFLICT OF TWO ECCLESIOLOGIES

The second phase of the bishops' attempt to contextualize began with the year 1977 and was rapidly accelerated by contextual problems and conflicts. The bishops made serious and sustained efforts to understand the mission and pastorate of the church within that crisis-ridden national context. They swiftly embarked upon the task of responding to the national situation and considered it an integral part of their pastoral and "Christian responsibility". But a critical reading of the statements made by the bishops since the year 1977 from the angle of a dynamic contextual perspective and pastoral practicability would uncover some of the hidden divisions and dichotomies in the method and approach to the national context.

These dichotomies point to a conflict of two opposing ecclesiological trends. One trend emphasizes the need to be faithful to the context with an expressed desire to promote corresponsibility in all dimensions of ecclesial life and ministry.¹⁴ As such this trend portrays a church that is open and out reaching, prophetic and communitarian.¹⁵ But with the same breath one can also find traces of an opposing trend that promotes ecclesial parochialism and sectarianism with a strong inclination toward the pre-Vatican II attitude of ecclesial ghettoism, with an emphasis on power and prestige,¹⁶ partly reminiscent of the colonial era.

A probable reason for this conflict can be attributed to the fact that due to excessive pastoral and cultic preoccupations the bishops and priests paid little or no attention to the socio-cultural and religious under currents that shaped the political philosophy of this period. Added to this was a clear lack of substantial and adequate theological knowledge.¹⁷ The bishops did concede that the lack of dynamism within the church was "due considerably to theological emphasis and attitudes prevailing at large in the preconciliar church".¹⁸ But they made very little effort to rectify this situation.

"Re-building the Sri Lankan Nation"¹⁹ became the chief concern of the bishops in the 1980s. They described this effort as a responsibility incumbent upon the local church of Sri Lanka. In relation to this effort the bishops also espoused the need to revitalize the witnessing dimension of the church of Sri Lanka.²⁰ But little effort was made to spell out in concrete the theological and pastoral dimensions of the local church. The bishops did not also pay adequate attention to spell out the local church as a full and valid realization of the mystery of the church in a particular place and history.

The attitudes expressed by the bishops toward the laity in their actual pastoral practice reveal another glaring dimension of this ecclesiological dualism. Even three decades after Vatican II, the church of Sri Lanka perpetuates an image of itself as an institutional, hierarchical and clerical apparatus.²¹ Without the authority, approval and interference

of the bishops and clergy nothing decisive can take place within the Christian communities. To the non-Christians the church continues to appear as a powerful institution designed to foster its own self interests. The fact that the entire ministerial responsibility lies in the hands of the few, leaves little room for the charisms of the laity to develop or blossom. For the past twenty years there had been very limited practical steps taken by the Sri Lankan bishops to involve the laity in the mainstream of ecclesial life. In the pastoral programmes, parish councils and diocesan councils, the opinion of the laity does not count for much.

On the one hand the bishops want to preserve their Roman Catholic identity in its western models and expressions.²² In that they see their function as ecclesial relay stations with the task of faithfully transmitting to their flock the directives and instructions received from the centre. Even in such pointedly contextual matters as inter-religious dialogue and co-ordination, social involvement and action for peace and justice the bishops expect the Vatican to give them guidelines.²³ The bishops did not seem to understand that such a kind of dependence stifles creativity and inventiveness and denies the fundamental right of the local churches to face their own problems with a sense of freedom and hope. Their unilateral dependence on such matters that require a genuinely situational and socio-historical response betrays the bishops' fidelity to the context. In a more general way this attitude of the bishops negates also the spirit of openness to the different cultural and social contexts advocated and promoted by the second Vatican Council and in some of the subsequent Synodal declarations and other Social encyclicals.

There is also a gulf between the ideals of contextual reform professed by the bishops and their practical validity. The bishops' way of addressing such problems as poverty, and social or economic justice,²⁴ clearly reveals that the bishops are not in touch with the stark realities of suffering and misery that is caused by these problems.²⁵ While expressing their intention to eradicate the root causes of poverty and

oppression the bishops did not mention any concrete plan to deal with the socio-political and cultural structures that promote and perpetuate these evils. There is no sustained effort made by them to draw inspiration from the liberating thrust of the Gospel message to challenge this sinful context. As leaders and shepherds the bishops are called to carry out with the help of the church the redeeming mission of Christ. This task of "witnessing" cannot be understood narrowly as giving of an oral and impersonal "information about" Christ, rather it is an invitation for a personal and committed involvement. It is only when the *Word* and *Action* merge together that the church's witnessing function becomes effective and transforming.

The same word-action dialectics should permeate the arena of inter-religious encounters. Pronouncing pious platitudes about the presence of Christ in other religions and cultures alone will not be enough to build a solid and lasting inter-religious unity. Rather the church as a community must manifest a new sense of ecumenical communion with non-Christians in an attitude of mutual enrichment, learning and respect.

The bishops have yet to realize that a dynamic and an open-ended contextual approach in a non-Christian environment poses many relevant and pertinent questions regarding the existing functions and practices of the church. One of the fundamental questions is: are there many ways of being "church" or is there one universally applicable ecclesiological "essence" that should be repeated in every situation? Directly related to this is the problem of whether the mode of expressing, living, manifesting and celebrating Christian faith is uniform or pluriform? Overlooking these basic issues will cripple the contextual progress of the church. It was the failure of the bishops to resolve these basic issues that caused the dichotomy referred to above. It is by responding faithfully to some of these basic questions that the bishops would be able to bridge the gulf between the church's proclamation and praxis.

3. NATIONAL OUTLOOK AND ETHNIC POLARISATION

It has been observed by us earlier that the Catholic church of Sri Lanka, by virtue of its multi-ethnic membership, is one of the few social groups that has for a long period managed to straddle the ethnic divide. A remarkable aspect of the National Synod (1968-1969) was that it strongly upheld that the church as a community must transcend the ethnic barriers. It projected the image of the church as an unified community with common national interests and concerns. When references and recommendations were made concerning the promotion of cultures and languages, they were done so with a broad national vision.²⁶

But this national outlook seemed to be a short-lived phenomenon. Within a period of two decades the ecclesial leadership was publicly accused of promoting narrow-minded regionalism and sectarianism by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.²⁷ Hence a pertinent question arises about the credibility of the church. That is, if the bishops had commenced the post-conciliar ecclesial reform with a "national outlook", how was it possible that within a period of two decades that process of reform could degenerate into a narrow form of sectarianism? An examination of this contrariety will reveal some of the possible dangers embedded in the process of ecclesial indigenisation. It should be recalled here that while analysing the conceptual content of those terms that preceded contextualization, we pointed out that "indigenization" which placed a strong emphasis on the resuscitation of native cultural elements can easily become a susceptible tool of sectarianism if it is not checked in a right spirit of discernment. As a matter of fact it is an uncritical ethno-cultural alliance and a covert form of nationalism embraced by the bishops that eventually led them into a situation of an apparent division and dissention among them and within the church.²⁸

It has been shown by us already that in Sri Lanka the trends of post-colonial nationalism served as a strong catalyst for the church to expedite the process of post-conciliar

adaptation.²⁹ But the bishops in their enthusiasm to promote the local culture and languages paid very little attention to the socio-political implications of this process. Since the time of political independence, nationalism in Sri Lanka evolved with ethno-religious overtones. It gained momentum with a militant form of Sinhala-Buddhist extremism.

Since majority of the Sri Lankan bishops are from that same ethno-cultural group, they gave recognition to this sectarian form of nationalism as an effective ingredient of ecclesial adaptation at the surface level. In the course of time this unassimilated form of adaptation brought in reactions from within the church as well as from the Buddhists.

4. BIBLICAL IMPOVERISHMENT AND THEOLOGICAL INADEQUACIES

A general weakness that is traceable in many of the documents published by the bishops may be attributed to an obvious lack of a strong biblical base. In spite of the Council's pointed advice that "preaching of the Gospel should occupy an eminent place among the principal duties of the bishops,"³⁰ one finds with dismay that the bishops rarely evoked the Word of God to illumine or substantiate their statements. This biblical bankruptcy weakens their affirmations concerning such rich and resourceful Christian values as "discipleship", "service", "mission", "community", "unity", "peace"³¹ etc. Beside having a strong biblical foundation, these notions have also a very profound significance for the crisis-ridden society of Sri Lanka. But these biblical realities have not been creatively and meaningfully exploited even to educate their own flock.

In spite of their efforts to ground their approach to reform on the model of the mystery of Christ's incarnation deeply permeated by the notion of the church as servant,³² the bishops failed to explore the insightful scriptural concepts underlying these expressions. The glaring absence of a sound biblical base renders their statements weak and unconvincing. Added to this is the feebleness of their theological base. A

clear case in point is the manner in which they have applied the mystery of Christ's incarnation as a model for the mission and ministry of the church in Sri Lanka. To explain the diverse functions of the church and to illustrate the church's mission as service, they invoked the example of the mystery of Christ's incarnation. But in over-stressing the physical body of Christ as a model for the church,³³ the bishops missed the glowing and dynamic aspect of the risen "body of Christ" as used in the letters of Paul.³⁴ The bishops did not focus attention on the fact that it is by the power of his resurrection that Christ transcended the earthly and physical limitations of his body which was freed from all spatial and temporal limitations. Had the bishops endeavoured to understand the presence, function and mission of the church in the dazzling light of this "spiritual body" **somapneumatikon** of the risen Christ, they would have found deeper insights for more meaningful forms of intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial relationships. As a matter of fact the arguments deduced by the bishops based on the mystery of the incarnation serve only as a vanguard to reinforce their own power and authority.³⁵ Little attention is paid to the fact that the church always and everywhere is gathered by the Spirit of the Risen Lord.

It was in the brilliant light of the resurrection of Christ that Paul, John and the author of the letter to the Hebrews recognized Jesus as the Cosmic Christ, the Lord of creation itself. The acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ and the biblical thrust that the entire reality since creation bears the mark and the presence of Christ has endless opportunities for very cordial forms of inter-religious ecumenism and co-operation. The promised presence of Christ in the poor, his professed identity with the sick and the suffering are strong indicators and invitations to the church of Sri Lanka to see and recognize its Lord and Master even outside its well-defined wall. Even though the bishops made very definite efforts to bridge the widening gap between the different religions professed in Sri Lanka, their theological basis for inter-religious co-operation is yet to be reformulated.

The bishops of Sri Lanka, quite confidently began the massive task of implementing in Sri Lanka, the vision of the Council. But a pointed reading of their synodal declaration would raise the question whether the bishops themselves had read and reflected with a contextual vision such important Council documents as **Lumen Gentium**, **Gaudium et Spes**, **Sacrosanctum Concilium**, **Apostolicam Actuositatem** and **Nostra Aetate**.³⁶ If they had truly done so, have they made a personal and a collective effort to interpret these documents in the context of the land and people for whom they were appointed to serve?³⁷ As a matter of fact, the essence and kernel of the teaching as expressed in these resourceful documents are visibly absent in the letters and instructions as well as in the final product of the National Synod.

It could be argued that the bishops' statements are primarily pastoral in their origin, purpose and focus. But without proper biblical and theological rootedness their vision for pastoral renewal appears shallow and at times even unfounded in reality.³⁸ A clear lack of a biblical and theological finesse could be traced in many of their statements. For instance while announcing the National Synod, the bishops wrote that assemblies such as the National Synod "must be formed and conducted in accordance with what Christ Himself prescribed to His Church".³⁹ In the same letter they mention that "according to the Constitution of the Church, as established by Christ, only they (bishops) have been divinely appointed with legislative power in the Church."⁴⁰ There are also several other presuppositions that are theologically inconsistent and even untenable.⁴¹ From a missio-theological perspective these assertions further confirm their theological inadequacies.

5. METHOD AND LANGUAGE

A critical reading of the pastoral letters and other statements published by the bishops to enkindle the process of reform along the direction of contextualization reveals a lack of clarity in the method employed by them. Immediately after the Council they announced the need to up date the church

of Sri Lanka according to the vision of Vatican II.⁴² Later in the National Synod they emphasized the need for adaptation⁴³ through a creative process of socio-cultural integration. Activated by the social reforms and development projects in the mid 1970s they enunciated the importance of the church's social commitment.⁴⁴ Drawn by the ethnic conflict in the 1980s the bishops endeavoured to champion human rights, equality and freedom for all.⁴⁵ In all this they appeared to be chasing the events rather than shaping the growth of the nation and the people by offering a creative and concerned Christian vision of life and society.

While appreciating the efforts made by the bishops to integrate the mission and pastorate of the church into the mainstream of Sri Lanka's society and history, it should also be pointed out that the bishops attempted to respond to the situation single-handedly. Except for the consultation hurriedly made prior to the National Synod, the bishops did not consider it worthwhile to seek the advice of competent lay persons and priests who could have helped them in many ways in deepening their understanding of the context and in widening the horizon of their response. The themes and issues addressed by the bishops ranged from economics to international politics and from inter-religious relationships to ethno-cultural contestations. Some of their statements did have clear implications for christology, soteriology and theological anthropology but there is no evidence that the bishops sought the advice of the Sri Lankan experts on these fields of knowledge before releasing their statements. It appears that the bishops acted with an audacious presumption that they have the required resources to handle these complex issues. The result was that they could remain only at the level of the surface. It did not occur to them that ecclesial corresponsibility and collegiality can also be practised through an inter-personal openness and mutual enlightenment.

In this regard it may also be pointed out that some of the problems and issues addressed by the Sri Lankan bishops were common to the wider Asian scene and had been the subject of discussion at the Plenary Assemblies of the

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), the Asian Theological Conference (ATC - 1979) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). But the bishops do not make any references to these. It is surprising to note that they completely ignored the ATC which had its first meeting in Sri Lanka in 1979 with a specific theological focus on issues related to Sri Lanka and its peoples.⁴⁶ These three groups have made very significant theological contributions to understand the Asian reality but the wealth of their insights is left untouched by the Sri Lankan hierarchy. Despite having a permanent membership in FABC, very little of the productive resources of the FABC reached the faithful through the bishops.

The deplorable disregard shown toward the vernacular languages further illustrates the hierarchy's unresolved division between word and action. For instance, in Sri Lanka, as in several other Asian nations, religiosity and cultural sentiments meet and merge in the arena of language. Language is cherished here not merely as a vehicle of communication but as a bridge of manifold relationships and personal communion. In fact a sacred character is attributed to language and it is used as a medium that expresses one's relationship to God and with one another.

The Tamil brand of Saivism is replete with epics and legends that glorify the Tamil language as a sacred tongue said to be used even by the gods and goddesses. In the same way the Sinhala culture and language have over the years established a symbiotic union with Buddhism. The fact that Sinhala is spoken only in Sri Lanka confers an additional uniqueness to that language and culture.

In spite of the laudable declaration that the church must uphold the values of the native cultures and languages the bishops did very little in practice. Even though the Catholic church has been ministering in Sri Lanka for over 450 years, it is yet to shed its European linguistic identity. All the official publications released from the CBCSL are in English, despite the fact that not even 5% of the 1.4 million Catholics in Sri

Lanka are able to read or understand English. Very few of them are translated on time into the vernacular languages. These raise more important questions as to the seriousness the bishops have in disseminating their message to the entire Christian communities. The use of English as the official language at the CBCSL further reinforces the European cultural identity of the church particularly in the face of the non-Christians.

B. THE INTRA-ECCLESIAL DIMENSIONS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

1. THE CHURCH AS MISSION: DISCIPLESHIP AND COMMUNITY

Re-discovering and restoring the true image of the church was the central theme of the post-conciliar programme of reform initiated by the Sri Lankan bishops.⁴⁷ This concern which was foremost in their minds in the late 1960s received special attention at the National Synod. Now almost after two decades a question may be posed as to how far the hierarchy had succeeded in restoring the "true-image" of the church in Sri Lanka.

In contrast to the functional concepts of "model" or "sign", the notion of an "image" is rather an unwelcome analogy for the presence and activity of the church. The analogy of image, as applied to the church evokes a static, well-defined or even a pre-determined mould of existence. It describes the external appearance of the church and smacks of an understanding of the church as an institutional monolith with an adjustable external framework.

The bishops resolved to "re-discover the true image" of the church by re-installing the indispensable function of the church as a "SIGN". In stating this the bishops laid great emphasis on the need for an intrinsic transformation in the very nature and function of the church. They convincingly

maintained that it is the church's sense of mission that should serve as the very ground for the existence and continuity of the church.⁴⁸

The approach to mission that prevailed during pre-Vatican II times in Sri Lanka gave the impression that the church as an institutional organization "had" a commitment for mission as one among the several ecclesial responsibilities. It is as if the church had to be established first with its structures and ministries so that it may take upon itself certain missionary responsibilities. But the shift in perspective that is characteristic of the post-Vatican II vision was that the bishops espoused the primacy of mission as fundamental to the very existence of the church. This vision has also a very strong biblical support. Scripture scholars and theologians hold the view today that it was the urgency and the necessity of mission as lived and witnessed to by the disciples of Christ and the early Christian communities that gradually paved the way for the birth and growth of the Church.⁴⁹ In this sense it can be maintained that a Christian community that loses its missionary dimension forfeits its right to call itself a "church".⁵⁰

The bishops are mindful of both the vertical as well as the horizontal dimension of the Christian understanding of mission. Mission in its original biblical sense of **apostello** (to send) is not of human origin. It is initiated by the Father, mediated in Christ and is accomplished by His Spirit. The mission initiated by God the Father is a saving activity centred on gratuitous love. In a unique way this mission of God was revealed and made explicit in the person of Jesus who through his obedience, service and self-sacrifice made this mission of God a reality that can be lived, experienced and passed on to generations. Just as Christ was sent by the Father, in turn Christ sent his apostles and disciples. The mission of the church today is an on-going and dynamic continuation of that same mission bequeathed by Christ to the community of his disciples. Essentially this mission is a faithful continuation of the saving action of Jesus Christ

through word and deed in the concrete context of the life of the church.

Compelled by the growing conflicts within the nation, the bishops in the early 1980s felt that in Sri Lanka this mission must be expressed and actualized through an effective promotion of the Gospel values of peace, unity and forgiveness. The bishops felt that these evangelical values are to be given priority in a national situation that is increasingly fragmented by divisions and dissensions. The very process of promoting these values and the struggle to genuinely live them out is itself a challenging missionary task.

The bishops' desire to understand the presence of the church in terms of "community" and "discipleship",⁵¹ should be interpreted against the backdrop of this contextual notion of mission. The bishops sought to illustrate the basic model of the church as a "community of disciples".⁵² Through the notion of community they endeavoured to circumscribe the unlimited spirit of openness and acceptance that the church should have toward peoples of different languages, races, cultures and colours. They described this openness as a characteristic trait of the universality of the church. Their understanding of the notion of Christian discipleship is also expressed in relation to the communitarian basis of the church. The intentional use of these two pregnant theological notions has very profound biblical significance as well as realistic relevance for the national situation.

The conception of the church as a "community of disciples" has a wealth of pastoral possibilities. In fact this model has been used by Pope John Paul II in his very first encyclical.⁵³ Drawing inspiration from the encyclical of the Pope, Avery Dulles wrote that the conception of the church as a community of disciples not only has a firm biblical basis but is also a relevant model for the peoples of this period of history.⁵⁴ In the context of the unresolved disputes about whether Jesus did or did not found a church, Dulles argues that "'Community of disciples' is precisely what Jesus undoubtedly did found ..."⁵⁵ Reflecting on this theme of

discipleship Dulles illustrates that the more a Christian community seeks to live out its discipleship the stronger it will become in its witnessing function.

Applying the model of the church as a "community of disciples" to the Christian community of Sri Lanka in its present context has immense potential for the missionary and pastoral effectiveness of the church. When lived with its challenges and demands, discipleship will help to bring forth a very dynamic and meaningful symbol of the church's missionary presence in a non-Christian milieu. A sincere search to experience the call to discipleship is bound to strengthen the bond of fellowship and communion within the Christian communities. A sustained effort by the church of Sri Lanka in future to discover its identity along these lines will certainly help to deepen the self-understanding of the church. It will also enable the church to re-discover its function as a living sign and an inspirational sacrament in this non-Christian nation.

On the part of the church, the desire for discipleship will help to express its willingness to learn and to be faithful to its Lord and Master. To be a disciple means to be open for growth and receptive to correction. In this regard, the understanding of the church as a community of disciples invites the members of the church, both from the laity and the hierarchy to be open for mutual correction in a spirit of Christian unity. Discipleship as lived by the disciples and apostles of Christ and by early church is not a passive following of Christ. Rather in a dynamic sense, it is the relentless search for a relevant Christian presence and witnessing in the context of one's life and history where the church is called to live and proclaim the Gospel. Thus, discipleship involves "the adventure of following Jesus in new and ever changing situations."⁵⁶ As an ideal religious pursuit, "discipleship" evokes very familiar imageries even in the minds of Buddhists and Hindus, whose religious writings and expressions are filled with the manifold dispositions, qualities and attitudes of an ideal disciple. These religions consider the Master-

disciple relationship as the example par excellence of the relationship between God and a devotee.

2. RE-VITALIZING THE LOCAL CHURCH

Referring to the inner dialectics of the process of contextualization we emphasized that the on-going dynamism and realistic relevance of the process of ecclesial contextualization depends to a great extent on the spirit of openness and the desire for change that is found in the Christian communities. But within the Sri Lankan church any form of change can take effect only with the direct intervention and approval of the hierarchy. Many factors contribute toward this reverential fear and obedience that the laity express toward those who hold religious authority. Not least among these are: the diverse dimensions of popular religiosity, the customary sacredness attributed to priests and bishops, their dominance over the cultic functions and the multi-faceted leadership roles assumed by them. As a result the hierarchy is very slow to effect any significant change. In order to maintain the status quo, and to legitimise their slowness to change, the bishops often present the "pastoral argument" that people are not ready for change or that the people would be scandalized or disturbed in their faith. Such an approach confirms the condescending attitude of the hierarchy and consolidates a sense of paternalism and protectionism. In practice this attitude defies the very communitarian foundation of the local church. As a result the laity lose their ecclesial identity and consider themselves an appendix of the church.

As leaders of Christian communities the bishops of Sri Lanka are yet to realize that before charting out in theory the contours of the church's missionary activities and programmes of evangelization, the church must re-discover its own communitarian and missionary identity. It must ask itself the most basic question whether it is truly qualified to call itself a "church", a genuine sign of unity and a living symbol of salvation promised and realized in Christ. The same question must also be directed toward evaluating the existing relationship between the Catholic church and the

protestant churches. The ecumenical fervour that was evident in the post-conciliar years in Sri Lanka⁵⁷ seem to have lost all its fire and enthusiasm over the years. Very little effort has been made by the bishops in the recent past to initiate ecumenical unity at a deeper level. Ecumenism received a passing mention at the National Synod and had never been taken up as a subject worthy of the pastoral attention of the bishops.⁵⁸ Against the backdrop of the church's minority status, the disunity between the many Christian denominations can in future be a major obstacle to the church's missionary efforts and particularly to the process of ecclesial contextualization. A divided church cannot be an authentic and living sign of Christian unity and fellowship.

3. CULTIC-ORIENTATION

On popular as well as on organized levels of religious expression, cult plays a dominant role in the life of the church in Sri Lanka. This fact had been confirmed further by the socio-religious survey conducted by Francois Houtart and his team.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact for many members of the Catholic laity, liturgical and devotional practices constitute the "sum total of Christian life". Bishops and priests spend a good portion of their time in the preparation and organization of activities and events related to cult. In this way the liturgical communities provided a strong forum, both qualitatively and quantitatively for the church leadership to initiate a context-oriented reform. But the hierarchy missed the opportunity. While they did make provisions for a few changes at the surface level,⁶⁰ these did not touch the quality and the realistic and life-centred relevance of liturgy. All cultic functions were performed by priests and bishops with little or no relevance to day-to-day life. This was further widened by emphasising the distinction between the sacred and secular, holy and profane, temporal and spiritual, and by relegating a secondary role to anything that is related to the temporal order.⁶¹

When the bishops initiated the post-conciliar reform under the programme of adaptation, the main focus was on liturgy. They expressed confidence that liturgical reform would help

bring about changes in every aspect of life.⁶² The bishops in fact were right in doing this because it is around the altar that the priests could meet a vast majority of the faithful.⁶³ But this opportunity had not been positively seized to impart the right knowledge of contextual reform. The priests were complacent in the introduction of a few elements of adaptation into liturgy. Their efforts at adaptation hardly touched the complex facets of life.⁶⁴ A few native cultural elements slowly but cautiously found their place in the liturgy. But no creative effort was made to contextualize liturgy by taking into consideration the spiritual wealth of the non-Christian religious heritage. Very little, if any, effort was made to merge liturgical celebrations with the realities of one's daily life both at individual and communitarian levels.

It was in the late 1970s that efforts were undertaken to initiate a more durable process of change under the banner of inculturation. The principle of incarnation was presented as the guiding norm.⁶⁵ But it can be proved from existing practices that very little has been done in the past twenty years toward a context-centred liturgical renewal. The bishops have yet to ask themselves of their own conviction about promoting a process of liturgical contextualization by creatively integrating elements from native religio-cultural heritage. As an expression of fidelity to Rome, the church of Sri Lanka imitates the Latin rite in the vernacular languages. The historical and spiritual roots of its own environment which is so densely enshrined in the religious writings of the native religions have no place in the church's ritual or worship. It may be asked, who could judge better than the Sri Lankan Christians whether or not some non-Biblical readings of native origin can help them to enter more deeply into the celebration of the Eucharist. Is it not too far-fetched to assume that Rome knows better than the local church of Sri Lanka what is helpful and inspiring to this church. An imported liturgy, as celebrated by the church today, may serve only to solidify the church's foreignness. Motivated by the traditional spirit of religiosity a vast majority of the Christians in Sri Lanka consider the liturgical worship as the core and centre of their spiritual or religious life. But the hundreds and

thousands of Eucharists celebrated over the years seemed not to have touched or transformed the lives of Christians.⁶⁶ This will continue to be so unless creative efforts are undertaken to contextualize the church's liturgy.

C. CONTEXTUALIZATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

1. FROM INDIFFERENCE TO INVOLVEMENT

Within the past two decades the social concern of the church has moved from an attitude of indifference to active involvement. Prior to the nationalization of denominational schools, (1960-61), the church's social service was confined only to the field of education. To the envy of the non-Christian groups, Catholic communities were the chief beneficiaries of the educational system administered by the church. The charitable service of the church was extended also to such areas as caring for the sick, the aged and the orphans. But the church leadership had no official policy regarding its social involvement. The bishops sought to accommodate the charitable works of the church within the frame of evangelization.⁶⁷ Very little effort was made at the official level to spell out the necessity of the church's social or humanitarian concern as an integral and constitutive part of the missionary presence of the church. The bishops did not see fit to enter into any form of social analysis. Matters concerning the socio-political or economic fields were treated by the bishops as unrelated to the mission and ministry of the church.

In the mid 1970s the church leadership encouraged social development programmes through the establishment of the SEDEC⁶⁸ with a net-work of diocesan bodies. These efforts brought in very fruitful results especially in promoting socio-economic development programmes in the rural villages.⁶⁹

From the early 1980s the national crises catapulted by the ethnic conflict reached a very decisive phase. To respond more effectively to this sordid situation, the bishops officially

established the "National Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka".⁷⁰ They framed a constitution as a guideline to promote issues related to justice, peace and development and sought to "carry out an action directed study"⁷¹ of these issues with a pastoral and theological perspective.⁷² The efforts undertaken by the bishops indicated a significant development in their concern for issues related to human rights, social justice and economic justice. SEDEC was officially entrusted with the task of promoting issues related to justice and peace at regional and national levels. An assessment of their endeavours will be referred to in the next chapter.

This development culminated in the publication of a joint pastoral letter⁷³ two months after the establishment of the National Justice and Peace Commission. Here the bishops not only underlined the indispensability of the social involvement of the church, but emphasized the need for a co-ordinated action. They expressly stated that efforts to restore social or economic justice bereft of an inter-religious solidarity and cooperation would be meaningless. Thanks to the foresight and vision of those who held the directorship of SEDEC in recent times a remarkable progress has been made in this direction with a visible inter-religious co-ordination.

The reasons and explanations given by the bishops to substantiate their decision to promote issues related to social justice signify a remarkable breakthrough in their theological perception. Three important theological factors are worthy of consideration here. First of all the bishops circumscribed the values of justice, truth and freedom as characteristics of the kingdom proclaimed by Christ and inaugurated in his person.⁷⁴ In articulating these values as those pointing to God's kingdom, the bishops allowed the notion of the church to recede to the background and enabled the notion of the kingdom to emerge to the forefront.

Secondly, in drawing attention to the many issues related to human rights, social and economic justice, the bishops stressed the fact that the church's basic task is to be at the

service of the poor of Sri Lanka who are humiliated and oppressed and deprived of their basic human dignity. Describing the model of the church as a community of disciples the bishops delineated the essential mission of the church as proclaiming the good news to the poor by word and by deed.⁷⁵ Here again the bishops' portrayal of the mission of the church clearly brings out their conviction that the church's duty is not to guard and protect its own self-interest but to defend and stand by the poor. In simple terms illustrative of the fact that it is Sri Lanka's poor who can authentically determine the contours of the church's missionary priorities.

Thirdly, by stating the indispensability of inter-religious dialogue and co-ordination as an essential element of this mission of restoring justice, the bishops uncovered the power of dialogue not merely as an aspect of evangelization but as a constitutive dimension of the church's missionary existence.

2. CHURCH AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The desire for active social involvement manifested by the Catholic hierarchy needs to be nurtured by a sound theological reflection on the importance of social action as an integral part of the church's mission of evangelization. The liberative thrust enshrined in the Gospels and the desire for total emancipation projected by the scriptures of other religions must be invoked to intensify the church's social involvement. What Aloysius Pieris had pointed out concerning the "Third World", namely a "vast majority of God's poor perceive their ultimate concern and symbolize their struggle for liberation in the idiom of non-Christian religions and cultures"⁷⁶ is powerfully applicable to the Sri Lankan socio-religious context. This potential has not been creatively explored by the church.

A major defect that is traceable in the desired social involvement and contextual integration proposed by the bishops is their lack of a coherent vision of society. In seeking to respond to the social situation the bishops made a rather hurried analysis of the various factors that contribute to the social upheavals experienced in Sri Lanka. The bishops

wanted to view the contextual involvement of the church in terms of an authentic response to the Sri Lankan society. But the authenticity of the response was impeded by an unclear assessment of the social structures that are operative in Sri Lanka. In order to be more relevant to the context it is necessary in future to undertake a critical social analysis of the Sri Lankan context. Unless the Catholic leadership has a certain knowledge of the way in which the different social functions operate in Sri Lanka they will not be able to determine the causes that produce the social evils which they seek to eradicate. This also requires that in order to be effective and productive in their approach the bishops must pay heed to the results and conclusions derived by social scientists. The disregard shown by the bishops to the socio-religious surveys conducted by Francois Houtart was a clear case in point where such negligence affected the credibility of the bishops themselves.⁷⁷

3. THE CHURCH IN THE NATION: A SIGN OF GOD'S KINGDOM

The deeper sense of contextual concern permeating the Asian churches has in recent years led the theologians and biblical scholars of Asia to pay serious attention to the loaded biblical symbol: "the kingdom of God".⁷⁸ Partly motivated by the overwhelming phenomenon of poverty and the need to restore true justice as a means of eradicating poverty and other social evils, the Asian ecclesiastical leadership also made significant efforts to interpret the mission and ministry of the church in the light of the biblical notion of the kingdom. A sustained effort in this regard was done by the Asian bishops through the instrumentality of the FABC.⁷⁹ Taking into consideration the non-Christian masses of the Asian population it had been fittingly suggested that the dynamic symbol of the kingdom and its values are more acceptable to the non-Christian world than the narrow notion "church". The values and qualities of the kingdom such as justice and truth, freedom and fellowship are basic ideals promoted and fostered also by other religions. The Kingdom of God has been the theme

of study and reflection in the major Assemblies of the World Council of Churches especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

Even though the CBCSL is a founder-member of the FABC, the prophetic vision of the FABC regarding many aspects of the church's mission in Asia has not been sufficiently appropriated by the Sri Lankan bishops. As an open-ended reality, an understanding of the mission of the church as being at the service of the kingdom has very promising pastoral possibilities. It not only helps to expand the narrow limits of ecclesio-centrism, but it illumines the existential situation and enables the Christians to develop a positive and caring attitude toward the non-ecclesial aspects of life. It strengthens the conviction that God's kingdom is not realized within the narrow limits of the church but in the open world. It invites the church to be less self-conscious and more other-directed.

The visible manifestation of the church as an institution and more specifically its western characteristics have been objects of adverse criticism by non-Christians almost to the present time.⁸⁰ In a nation with over 92% non-Christians, any effort to emphasize the distinctive characteristics of the church is bound to create hostile reactions. But if the church truly seeks to become a community of disciples who endeavour to proclaim, live and bear witness to the values of the kingdom, it would enable the church to identify itself easily with those who opt for the same values. It is therefore necessary that as part of their effort to restore the relevance of the church in the Sri Lankan society, the bishops must learn to give up every form of ecclesial militancy. They must enter through the threshold of social action in an attitude of service. Instead of pursuing to retrieve the image of the church the bishops must seek to restore the values of the kingdom both within and without the church. As pastors and leaders they should take the lead to re-fashion the church as an effective sign and symbol of the kingdom. In reality, the kingdom is far beyond our vision and understanding. It is a magnificent enterprise initiated by God and the church is only a minister and not a master-builder of this Divine venture. Such an

understanding invites the church to carry out its task in humility and in solidarity with every one who believes in the Action of God in our midst.

It should not take too long for the bishops to realize that building up the kingdom is not simply building up the church nor is the kingdom a sole property of the church. Inaugurated and identified in Christ in an unique way the flowering of the kingdom is the work of God and his spirit. Even though the church is called to be a sign of that kingdom, God is not bound by the church to limit the richness of his kingdom within the cloisters of the church. God's kingdom spreads, grows and realizes itself in ways unknown to us. Hence wherever and whenever the church encounters values and attributes of the kingdom it must not hesitate to recognize the presence of God's Spirit there.

The Sri Lankan church must also be conscious of the note of caution suggested by Emerito Nacpil, an Asian theologian concerning the healthy tension that should prevail between the church's function as a sacrament of the kingdom and its actual involvement in the existential reality. He said:

as the Church in mission moves toward the Kingdom of God and anticipates it in its faith and hope and life, it cannot become obsessed with God to the exclusion of man and his world, nor with man and his world to the exclusion of God. Rather it must embody - in worship, proclamation and demonstration - the communion of God and man and of man and man with God.⁸¹

D. CONTEXTUALIZATION AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The intense sense of religiosity that pervades the Asian nations and peoples continues to intrigue theologians and sociologists alike. As a multi-religious nation, Sri Lanka could be taken as a valid microcosmic, multi-religious specimen of the Asian continent. The four major Asian religions

represented here play a pivotal role in the daily activities, social relationships and political life of the people. We have remarked already that in the realm of daily living religion is considered a way of life rather than a function of it. This conception of religion is further reinforced by the inseparable link that binds religion with culture. While adding richness to the Sri Lankan social mosaic this religio-cultural symbiosis makes the social-ensemble more complex.⁸² But at the same time it is an essential national phenomenon to reckon with. In the following pages we shall examine the ways by which the Sri Lankan hierarchy had dealt with issues and problems related to inter-religious dialogue.

1. INTER-RELIGIOUS DISCORD

Motivated by the zealous conviction that the church is the sole vehicle of salvation and induced by the desire for increasing its numerical growth through conversions, the mission of the church in Sri Lanka from its very inception had a hostile approach toward other faiths and religions. Supported in its endeavours by the colonial-political patronage and instigated by a sense of religious superiority, the Catholic church in Sri Lanka, in theory and practice upheld the view of a "Christ-against-religions" theology.⁸³ It considered other religions as opposed to the person and message of Christ and as obstacles to the church's mission of "saving souls".

Even as late as the 1960s Sri Lankan bishops acted with the conviction that an ordinary thing as teaching the non-Christian religions to non-Christian students in Catholic schools⁸⁴ was an abhorrent act of apostasy. Catholic priests and missionaries studied other religions only to rebut and refute the latter's beliefs, doctrines and practices.⁸⁵ The church's catechetical manuals firmly taught that visiting the places of worship, or taking part in any religious activities, prayers or any other forms of worship with the non-Christians would amount to a serious sin.⁸⁶ Among the hierarchy and laity this attitude toward the followers of other religions not only consolidated a triumphant feeling about the superiority of the church but it promoted an unidentified sense of disaffection toward other religions. Such feeling has been a

serious obstacle on the path of contextualization. On the part of other religions the attitudes maintained within the church helped only to aggravate further the existing inter-religious misgivings and hostilities. Due to the symbiotic relationship between the native cultures and religions, this attitude of opposition to other religions created a cleavage in the cultural realm.

Other religions directed their hostility toward the church largely to condemn its western socio-cultural and political affinities. But over the years other religions have shown a greater sense of accommodation and tolerance toward Christianity and the leadership of the church has also manifested at least a few signs of openness.⁸⁷ Past experience has taught the Catholic leadership to realize that efforts at ecclesial contextualization will bear no fruit at the exclusion of inter-religious collaboration and concord.⁸⁸

In the Asian scene, "inter-religious dialogue" has been one of the chief objectives of the FABC. Since its inception in 1970, the FABC had reflected on issues related to religious dialogue within the general context of the mission of the church in Asia. It is even correct to say that the bishops of Asia sought to foster the spirit of dialogue not as an independent undertaking in isolation but as an extension of the wider process of inculturation.⁸⁹ In other words the bishops of Asia viewed inter-religious dialogue as an extension of the dialogue that the Asian churches sought to establish at the socio-cultural realms. By deepening its desire for inter-religious dialogue the FABC and the Asian church at large endeavoured to understand the salvific love of God in new light and from a renewed theological perspective.⁹⁰ The spirit of openness manifested by the Sri Lankan ecclesiastical leadership must be therefore seen in light of this new awareness that is prevailing in Asia.

2. INTER-RELIGIOUS CONCORD

An analysis of the Sri Lankan bishops' official position with regard to other religions would confirm that the second Vatican Council's audacious openness toward other religions

is yet to bring its intended fruits and results in Sri Lanka. In the period that is covered in our study the bishops have made only three⁹¹ explicit references to other religions and have spoken in favour of fostering inter-religious concord and co-operation. An interesting phenomenon that is unfolding itself in recent years and had seemingly found the approbation of the bishops is that their appreciation for other religions has come not through study and dialogue but from an existential or contextual necessity. The Sinhala bishops have expressed stronger desire to work with the Buddhist religious leadership while the Tamil bishops seemed to have established better rapport with the Hindu religious leadership. Noteworthy is also the fact that the inter-religious cordiality that is experienced today, between the different religions has come into being as a result of an ethno-cultural identity rather than through any objective effort. This form of a contextually-inspired, inter-religious cordiality is an excellent opportunity for the leaders of the four major religions to work out ways and means of overcoming the crippling divisions and to forge a common front to fight against all the socially oppressive elements that keep the nation and the people from attaining the fulness of human life the, prosperity, freedom and peace preached and promoted by these religions as integral to their doctrinal teachings.

Even though the bishops of Sri Lanka have taken a bold initiative by articulating their intention to collaborate with other religious leaders, the misconceptions preached and taught about other religions remains to be revoked. The advice of the bishops to the laity to join hand in hand with followers of other religions will bear no fruit unless the atmosphere is provided to the laity to appreciate the spiritual wealth and richness of other faiths. It is true that efforts have been undertaken by a few Sri Lankan priests and theologians to foster a positive approach to other religions. But the advice of theologians is rarely heeded by the laity who for centuries have been made to depend on the hierarchical church for their religious knowledge and growth. Given these and other institutional rigidities of the Sri Lankan church the advice

and instructions of the bishops to the laity concerning inter-religious friendship and co-ordination is bound to bear much fruit.

In this context, the leadership of the church must make a concerted effort to put into practice the valuable insights and recommendations regarding the promotion of religious dialogue suggested by the FABC, the Christian Council of Asia and other international inter-religious bodies as the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

Another important aspect of religious dialogue is to instruct the Christian communities on some of the significant spiritual and human dimensions of other religions. This can be done effectively by incorporating relevant aspects of the doctrines and teachings of other religions into the catechetical programme that is designed for Christians. It is admirable that only now the vernacular catechetical books published with the approval of the hierarchy or published by the national episcopal commission on catechetics, deal with at least an introductory exposition of the beliefs and practices of other religions and their theological and spiritual values. But in private schools run by the Catholic church the Catholic students are made to form a religious ghetto and are never given the opportunity to learn the wealth that is found in other faiths. Even two decades after Vatican II, the pattern of religious education imparted in Catholic schools has hardly been modified to meet new situations and needs.

3. INTER-RELIGIOUS CO-ORDINATION IN THE FUTURE

It has been pointed out by us already that since its inception in Sri Lanka, Christianity had been critical of other religions, their beliefs and claims. We also observed that this role was reversed in the post-colonial period. Today almost after four decades of political independence and religio-cultural resurgence a better spirit of inter-religious accommodation prevails in Sri Lanka. At least some sections of the three non-Christian religions of Sri Lanka, namely

Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam show an increasing concern for fellow human beings and expound the virtues of unity, service and charity. The current crisis and its violent expressions have also led to a serious self-questioning among the leaders concerning the practical and humanitarian qualities of these religions. In a more radical way the current situation had posed the fundamental question about the relevance and meaningfulness of religion itself.

It is this critical situation that prompted the Catholic hierarchy to invite the leaders and followers of other religions to join them in the common struggle to restore the inner richness of these religions by making them champion the cause of peace and justice. This is indeed a good contextual start and the spirit of inter-religious cordiality undergirding this invitation must be nurtured by a ceaseless effort for inter-religious collaboration. If the Catholic church encounters other religions in an attitude of openness and receptivity it has a great deal to learn from these religions which will help to re-fashion its presence in the national arena.

It is surprising that to date the bishops have not realized the need to establish an episcopal commission on inter-religious dialogue. There are a few informal dialogue sessions organized with the initiative of the bishops but the impact these sessions have had on the dialogue partners is very minimal. These are ceremonial social meetings with a surface level discussion⁹² on certain elements that are believed to be common to all religions.

The bishops have not made any concerted effort to bring out an official statement that unambiguously illustrates the attitude that Christians should cultivate toward non-Christian faiths, beliefs, doctrines and practices. When Buddhists, Hindus and Moslems celebrate their respective "holy days" or festivals, the Catholic church quietly goes on with its own affairs. Even the fact that the Holy See has begun the habit of sending official messages of felicitation to different religious groups wishing them on their special days of religious importance seemed to have had little impact on the leadership of the church in Sri Lanka.

Catholic scholars and intellectuals in Sri Lanka have made religious dialogue into more of a scholarly pursuit limited to a tiny minority. But the natural dialogue that has been going on for centuries when Christians and followers of other religions meet in their social life, in various circumstances as, schools, universities, work-places, offices, neighbourhoods etc. remains an unexploited area. If properly approached and fostered this natural arena of dialogue will enable a better inter-religious spirit to prevail in the nation.

Today there is a vital and healthy realization in the church that it is only through dialogue that Christians can bridge the conflict between the ethnic groups. In order to attain this goal certain definite steps must be undertaken otherwise it would remain only at the level of theory. As a practical measure the episcopal commission for catechetics must take serious efforts to educate the laity, priests and religious on the positive values and other spiritual and inspirational contributions made by other religions for centuries toward the promotion of society and human life.⁹³ Efforts must also be undertaken to ensure that other religious leaders do not misinterpret the church's contextual approach as a bait of proselytization. The laity must be instructed and encouraged to show respect for the followers of other religions. Even the semblance of inter-religious contestations at doctrinal or other levels must be completely avoided to provide a friendly platform for dialogue and collaboration. All this requires a serious theological reflection and re-formulation of the place and function of other religions in the plan of God's salvation revealed in Christ and celebrated in the Church.

In the realm of inter-religious dialogue and cordiality the church of Sri Lanka has much to learn from the neighbouring churches in the Indian sub-continent and from other Asian and South Asian nations. The Sri Lankan leadership must open itself to receive insights and inspiration from the Asian theologians, from the Christian Council of Asia (CCA) and from the FABC. It is not the church of Rome but the churches of Asia that share the same struggle and confront the same issues and problems that affect the church of Sri Lanka,

particularly in matters related to other religions. In seeking this fraternal assistance the church of Sri Lanka will best experience the sense of the universal church.

The church leadership must also realize that inter-religious dialogue and co-operation cannot be sought by pronouncing theories and promulgating pious words. It is through concrete action that inter-religious dialogue can be cemented. In a country that has a vast majority of non-Christians the Catholic church cannot be content and complacent with unilateral decisions on inter-religious dialogue. It must emerge from lived experience coupled with action. In recent years the Catholic hierarchy has actively engaged itself in the promotion of several social development projects with the help of Catholic funding agencies from the west. In spite of the good results that the church is able to achieve through these programmes, the overall image projected by the Sri Lankan church goes only to conform its western affinities and trans-national strength. This leaves much room for misconceptions on the part of other religions. However a joint inter-religious undertaking of social development projects will not only strengthen the bonds of inter-religious unity but will also serve as an antidote to alleviate the mutual mistrust and suspicions. Thus in the long run it would help to create an atmosphere that is conducive for a better rapprochement between the religions.

The bishops may also consider that as a means of fostering better understanding and acceptance among the religions, they invite non-Christian religious leaders and representatives for major religious events in the church not merely as ceremonial invitees but as participants and collaborators in a common task. Their voice and opinion about the church, its mission and other endeavours must be carefully listened to by the bishops and others who share the leadership of the Christian communities. Even such national events as synods and provincial councils non-Christian religious leaders must be invited at least as observers. It is only through such concrete gestures of reciprocal openness that the existing mistrust and

suspicions between the different religions can be overcome in order to forge a constructive bond of fellowship.

All religions professed in Sri Lanka recognize the presence of the divine in the human persons. They meet with God in the poor and in the needy. Their religious scriptures and teachings promote the values of peace and freedom, human dignity and justice. They all underline the importance of service and selflessness. There is a remarkable unity in the soteriological goal proclaimed by these religions. Their path and emphasis may vary but they all promise an ultimate liberation from misery and pain, hopelessness and destitution. Unless the church is willing to recognize these liberative dimensions so clearly entwined in these religions, and seek to develop this forum of liberation as a common platform of religious action for the emancipation of the whole person and of every person, its critique of other religions from the angle of social consciousness will not be effective and credible.⁹⁴ The church must unequivocally show its willingness to be at the service and support of truth no matter who utters it.

The church has much to learn from other religions not only in terms of spirituality and cult but more on the level of social integration and cultural assimilation. It is customary for scholars to refer to Buddhism and Hinduism as indigenous religions even though all religions practised in Sri Lanka were brought from outside. Buddhism for instance manifested an extraordinary flexibility in accommodating itself to the social and political climes. The church has much to learn from Buddhism as the latter once learned from Christianity, to contextualize its message, mission and ministry.

In the last three decades (1960-1990) the Catholic leadership and the church as a whole have come a long way on the path of national integration. Through various ways of active involvement and participation the bishops together with the Christian communities have realized the need to intensify and develop this spirit of contextual solidarity. But there is still much more to be done. It requires a prophetic vision, a

hopeful and courageous leadership, and above all a genuine sense of openness and receptivity to the Spirit and the readiness for change according to the movements of the Spirit.

E. THE CHURCH AS PEACE-MAKER: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

With the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki slowly fading away at the backdrop of this blood-stained century, the World-Church is gently entering the threshold of the third millenium of the Christian era. Even in this last decade of this agony-filled century, we find our human family engaging itself in internecine warfares and interminable battles. From Beirut to Belfast, Somalia to Sri Lanka, Bosnia to Burma, Rwanda to El Salvador - one may go on expanding the list, we still hear the groaning cries of people crushed under the weight and weariness of war.

The most astounding phenomenon that haunts an ordinary human mind is that at the heart of many a blood-letting conflict is the sacred reality called "religion" soaked in human blood. Indeed, behind every national or civil strife that we hear about, there is one or many of the world's leading religions directly or indirectly fuelling this wretchedness. This is equally true of the Asian continent that takes pride of being the cradle of some of the most ancient religions of the world.

All religions that were born and cradled in Asia are ideologically committed to non-violence and uphold the virtues of compassion and love toward all human beings and the entirety of creation. They emphasize the importance of promoting justice, peace and truth as integral to the core and content of their scriptures. But in actual practice religious sentimentality sometimes bordering on fanaticism has made religions to play the role of **agent provocateur** and had led to extremist forms of violence and hatred between communities. Individually and collectively some of the major religions practised in Asia have often failed to be an emollient

of violence and destruction. In situations of ethnic, communal, racial and religious riots or mayhem, even the official religious leadership of many nations have either been silent spectators or have responded with pious platitudes on penance and prayer. A major truth that emanates from these conflicts is that religions despite their claim of sacredness have shamefully failed to restore some of the most fundamental human values that were torn to shreds in recent decades.

1. CHURCH: A SIGN AND SACRAMENT OF PEACE

Announcing and making peace through its prophetic ministry of proclamation; celebrating and sharing it through the medium of liturgical action and living it in religious, charismatic and basic Christian communities as an eschatological anticipation has been an integral part of the ecclesial tradition going back to the early centuries of Christianity.

The Church's commitment for peace flows from its very essence. If peace is threatened in a place where the church is called to exercise its ministry, the church has an obligation and a missionary responsibility to seek and restore the value of peace. As an announcer and promoter of peace the Church, has been entrusted with the task of being a sign and a sacrament of peace. The inner life of the members of the Church, their shared-life and celebration must embody the most sacred and salient aspects of peace.

Enamelled by the political exigencies of recent times, the pursuit of peace has confined itself within the political arena, but peace and national reconciliation cannot become lasting realities unless they pervade the social, cultural, economic and religious spheres with the same fervour and intensity. Peace cannot be nurtured and protected exclusively as a political product within the domain of statecraft and politics, it should be allowed to exude into the whole terrain of social institutions and relationships.

As a community entrusted with the mandate to proclaim and make peace, the Church has a moral duty to challenge

the existing socio-political and economic conditions that have domesticated the potential for peace. Even religions have been manipulated and used to whip up communal and other divisive feelings with ulterior political motives. Religions have been used to serve political creeds some of which are harmful and hurtful to humanity and to the very core and content of religion itself.

Religious revivalism has become a very visible and articulate phenomenon in the post colonial states of South Asia. However productive these may be, the Church as a collective body of persons transcending the boundaries of ethnic and racial narrowness has a duty to proclaim the fact that no religious revival in the coming decades will be worth its value without giving a concrete and firm commitment for peace.

In this context the Sri Lankan Catholic leadership's appeal for peace as contained in their letter entitled "The Nation in Crisis" is a fitting and timely contribution in the direction of peace.⁹⁵ The belated but positive efforts made by the Catholic hierarchy to promote peace across the ethnic divide should be viewed and interpreted in light of the Church's perennial ministry of "shalomization" demanded by its founder. In this context it is also necessary to underline the commitment for peace as enshrined in other religions that are practised in Sri Lanka for several centuries.

2. RELIGIONS AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE IN SRI LANKA

At the surface as well as in deeper levels the four religions professed by Sri Lankans differ in doctrines and dogmas, in cult and rituals, forms of prayer and humanitarian concerns. They may even differ in their belief systems and in what they teach or hold about the origin and destiny of human life or of creation. But all four religions repeatedly refer to their sacred scriptures as sign-posts of justice, truth and peace. These holy books teach about peace as the essential ingredient of religious faith. Expanding our horizon, we may say that the various religions professed and practised in Sri Lanka

may have very few doctrinal points for any theological consensus, compromise or even comparison. But that is not the need of the hour. The need of the hour is peace with dignity and justice. And when we look back at the four major religions practised here with this view in mind we find extremely relevant points of convergence.

All four religions rightly uphold the value of peace and strive to attain peace in all its purity and perfection through the practice of meditation and the offering of sacrifices. The mushrooming of Ashrams and meditation centres and the traditional respect for monks and mystics, gurus and risis are yet another indirect proof of this thirst and quest for peace in all its exterior and interior dimensions. No wonder that the search for peace has become a common bridge that had made many religious persons to look beyond and search beyond the boundaries of their specific religious traditions. We are living in an era when we find a common quest for Truth and peace articulated by many sincere persons.

People seek peace through prayer and penance and in silence and solitude. No Christian Eucharist is complete without an actual experience and symbolic sharing of peace. Rooted as it is in the ancient Jewish custom of greeting with wish of "Shalom", or Peace is the parting gift that Jesus gave to his disciples, He said, "my peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you". Moslems always greet each other with the words "Salaam Aleicum" meaning Peace be with you brother. In this greeting, reaching back to olden days peace is wished in all its beauty, fulness and richness. Peace is wished as the prime gift of the day and of every day, as perfection, happiness and prosperity. The silent and serene sage Gautama Buddha was himself a personification of peace in all its life giving dimensions. His method of Dhyan (Chen in Chinese and Zen in Japanese) stands for the vibrant stillness of tranquility and peace. The eight fold path and the four noble truths are prescribed from Buddha's own lived experience of the depth of peace that his followers may also reach the profundity of the everlasting peace of nibbana and the samadhi of Shanthi.

If Buddhism fails to generate the kind of energy that is required to sustain and nurture peace in Sri Lanka, then peace will never be a permanent reality. It should flow from a genuine love for the precepts and prescriptions of that noble religion as pronounced by its sacred founder-father, Lord Buddha.

For a Hindu devotee, no prayer is valid unless it is stamped by the desire to live in peace within oneself, with the whole of creation and with the creator. Om Shanthi is sung thrice at the end of prayer and meditation sessions, thus indicating that every encounter with the Divine results in an ineffable experience of peace. Despite this rich and realistic concept of peace that is enshrined in almost all religions in Sri Lanka, one often hears the groans of the weight and weariness of war. One hears the agonising cries of innocent children crushed by inhuman conditions created by conflicts and hostilities. Is this state of affairs not an indictment on our religious professions and practice? As a perennial human quest peace cannot be confined within cult and ritual or as sacred symbol or ideal devoid of life, praxis and vitality. Sailing through the turbulent seas of South Asia it is in the port of peace that the leadership and agents of all religions can come to anchor and begin their ministry of renewal and reconciliation.

Against this backdrop any religious legitimization of war on any grounds by any religion renders that religion irrelevant to the progress and full development of humanity and even of the whole of created realities.

For the Sri Lankan Church, living in a context of disastrous turmoils and devastating human miseries, inter-religious dialogue should not be confined to the comfortable precincts of sacred places and religious mansions. With several thousand homeless, with thousands groaning under the weight of poverty, wanton blood-shed and death, dialogue cannot seek a mere enhancement of academic scholarship or inter-elite cordiality. Dialogue cannot be narrowly understood as spiritually edifying pietistic conversations between religious people. Rather, inter-religious dialogue so enthusiastically

initiated by the Church should help to discern the prospects for peace found in other religions and must ceaselessly promote them in a spirit of mutual respect and reverence to each others' spiritual heritage.

Religions have a collective responsibility of sensitising the political powers to the needs of the people, that these powers may respond adequately and with a sense of social and distributive justice. Inter-ethnic conflict partly fuelled by religion has become a sordid reality in Sri Lanka. It is therefore necessary that religions should re-examine their societal and cultural responsibility vis-a-vis their socio-spiritual and humanitarian claims.⁹⁶

3. MULTI-CULTURALISM AND PEACE THROUGH RELIGIONS

In a pluralist society, when religions combined with culture seek to become hegemonic, it invariably becomes a source of conflict. In multi-cultural societies, when one particular culture seeks ascendancy over others, it inescapably tends to sow the seeds of division and provokes competition. Promotion of cultures can wittingly or unwittingly degenerate into cultural chauvinism. In such circumstances, religion which survives on cultural heritage should take the initiative to harmonize cultures and should endeavour to bring concord between, tradition and modernity, past and present, individualism and community.

The Church's commitment to social justice can never be replaced with liturgy. Through its active and assertive participation with persons and groups that work for peace with justice, the Church should champion a new form of value-education by re-enlivening the creative potentials enshrined in other religions. The Church in this respect should function with the conviction that in multi-cultural societies peace can be brought more tangibly by "religious people" than by religious systems. By its own witness the Church must denounce the contemporary culture of consumerism and

materialism and emphasize the need for spiritual abundance through austere living.

By its own willingness to respect and celebrate cultural diversity, the Church must help to re-discover the richness of multiculturalism as manifestive of human creativity and inventiveness. It is in this sense that the Church's efforts at inculturation should be lived, promoted and fostered. Inculturation should become the prophetic means of harmonising cultures as a way of facilitating peace between and among religions without violating their specific cultural palimpsests.

NOTES

1. For more details on the National Pastoral Council, see DDPNS, pp. 138 - 250.
2. See, Bishop Frank Marcus Fernando, "Introduction", in ASPSGC, pp. 4 - 5.
3. *Ibid*, pp. 5 - 7.
4. See Tissa Balasuriya, *Creative Tensions in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka* . . . , pp. 4 - 7 also Nihal Abeyasingha, *The Radical Tradition* . . . , p. 97.
5. See Tissa Balasuriya, *Creative Tensions in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka* . . . , p. 6.
6. PS, p. 3; ASPSCC, pp. 13, 18, 21 - 24, 29, 107 - 109. Compare these to the remarks of Tissa Balasuriya, *Creative Tensions in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, pp. 8 - 10 and also Asian Report Group, "Theology in Sri Lanka" in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology* . . . , pp. 74 - 75.
7. In many instances when the bishops explained the diversity of functions for the laity and the hierarchy in the church, they tended to over emphasize the position of the hierarchy in terms of power and authority. See for example, PS, pp. 2 - 3, also ASPSCC, pp. 68 - 69, 71 - 72.
8. See A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, "Evangelization in the Multi-Cultural and Pluri-religious Context of Sri Lanka" in *Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft ZMR*, Vol. 75, No. 2, 1991, pp. 137 - 140.

9. See F. Houtart and G. Lemercurier, *The Social Action of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka*, CSR, Colombo, (no date given), pp. 144 - 147; R. D. Tano, Jose M. De Mesa and Richard P. Hardy who made a critical study of the Philippine Church from the perspective of its efforts toward contextualization record similar observation. See R. D. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine . . .*, pp. 1 - 3, Jose M. De Mesa, *And God Said . . .*, pp. 3 - 5 and Richard P. Hardy, *Ating Mga Kapatid . . .*, pp. 78 - 81.
10. ASPSCC, pp. 62 - 63, The guide-lines on "Liturgical Matters" give by the bishops deal only with a few elements of cultural adaptation and did not touch the heart of liturgy as a means of expressing, celebrating and strengthening one's relationship with God and with another. See GLM, p. 1.
11. The bishops did speak about the need for promoting the local languages and cultures. They emphasized the need for religious dialogue but no where did they mention that these realities can have a constructive influence on Christian life or that these factors can influence the various aspects of the church's mission and ministry. See ASPSCC, p. 14, 26.
12. On the one hand the bishops stressed that Christians must identify themselves with the masses of the people and with the local cultures and languages but on the other hand they affirmed that the sound tradition of the church must be retained and that "regulation of liturgy depends solely on the Holy See". See and compare ASPSCC, p. 14 with p. 62.
13. PS, p. 3.
14. TRSLN, pp. 33 - 35.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 23 - 26, 33 - 35.
16. This attitude is reflected on the frequent use of "we" and "our" as applied to the hierarchy or to the Catholic communities and the excessively church-centred approach to dialogue and social transformation envisaged by the bishops.
17. Majority of the bishops and priests had their theological training in pre-Vatican II period and in the Latin language and except for a few seminars no concerted effort was made to up-date their knowledge and to keep abreast with the new developments in the fields of biblical, liturgical and theological research.
18. ASPSCC, p. 23.

19. This was the title given to the joint pastoral letter published on the 10th of June 1984.
20. TRSLN, pp. 23 - 24, 35 - 39.
21. See Nihal Abeyasingha, *The Radical Tradition* . . . , pp. 56 - 57, 97.
22. This is very evident from the theological expressions used by the bishops and the rigid control they exercise over liturgy, catechetics and spirituality. See for instance, GLM, p. 1.
23. See for instance the "Draft Constitution of the National Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka" (typed-script), Colombo, 1984, pp. 2 - 4.
24. TRSLN, pp. 16 - 17.
25. The language used by the bishops to express and explain problems related to poverty and economic injustices smacks of a theoretical understanding with very limited practical insights.
26. ASPSCC, pp. 14 - 15, 27 - 29.
27. See Tissa Balasuriya, *Communal Tensions and the Role of the Church* . . . , pp. 15 - 17 "Editorial: The Church in Sri Lanka - More Sinhala, Less Christian" . . . , p. 1.
28. See R. L. Stirrat, "The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church . . .", p. 201. For more concrete examples see *The Torch*, 1 (1985), No. 3, pp. 1 - 14. (In the March issue of this monthly published by the priests of the diocese of Jaffna an effort is made to compare the attitude of the bishops toward the Sinhalese and Tamils respectively.
29. 32 ASPSCC, pp. 13 - 15, 27 - 28.
30. See "Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia" in *AAS*, 57 (1965), art. 26 - 27, pp. 31 - 33.
31. These values are repeatedly affirmed by the bishops. See TRSLN, pp. 20, 23, 26, 28, 34 - 38.
32. ASPSCC, pp. 13, 21.
33. PS, p. 2, PSM, p. 77.
34. *Rom.* 12:5; 1 *Cor.* 12:12; 12:20; 14:44. *Col.* 1:18.

35. The arguments advanced by the bishops to reinstate their position of authority is very evident in PS, pp. 2 - 3.
36. See AAS 57 (1965), pp. 1ff., and 58 (1965), pp. 1025ff; 864ff; 740ff.
37. In the pastoral letters and statements published by the bishops in the years following the Council, one finds a very few references to the Council's documents.
38. For instance most of the positive recommendations presented about the laity in the Synodal declarations are impractical ideals. See ASPSCC, pp. 67 - 81.
39. PS, p. 1.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
41. The bishops refer to themselves as having received their authority directly from God and consider the relationship between the laity and themselves as a form of Master-subject relationship. See PS, pp. 2, 3.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 1 - 3.
43. ASPSCC, pp. 62 - 63.
44. CRCP, pp. 1 - 2; TRSLN, pp. 2 - 17, 33 - 37.
45. See TRSLN, pp. 3, 35 - 39.
46. For more details see Virginia Fabella, (ed.), *Asian Theological Conference: Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity - Towards a Relevant Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1980, 192p. This book contains the papers presented at this Conference and the reports of the workshops held.
47. PSM, p. 81.
48. ASPSCC, pp. 20 - 23; ECNE, pp. 1 - 3; TRSLN, pp. 1 - 2, 22 - 37.
49. See Roger D. Haight, "The 'Established' Church as Mission"..., pp. 6 - 7.
50. See *Ibid.*, pp. 10 - 11.
51. See TRSLN, pp. 23, 26.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

53. See **John Paul II**, *Encyclical: Redemptor Hominis*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Vatican City, 1979, p. 90, No. 21.
54. See **Avery Dulles**, *A Church to Believe in . . .*, pp. 7 - 11.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
57. **ASPSCC**, pp. 24, 33.
58. The issue of Ecumenism was not addressed by the bishops in any of their joint pastoral letters or statements.
59. See **F. Houtart**, *Summary of the Survey Made in 1969 - 1970 . . .*, p. 2 - 8 and *Id. Sunday Mass Attendance in Ceylon . . .*, pp. 2 - 6.
60. Under the programme of adaptation a few changes were introduced in certain matters related to the ritual of the Eucharist. See **GLM**, p. 1.
61. **ASPSCC**, pp. 50 - 66, 103.
62. **ASPSCC**, p. 51.
63. The fact confirmed by the statistical survey of **Francois Houtart** that in many dioceses over 50% of the Catholics are present for the Sunday liturgy holds good even now.
64. **ASPSCC**, p. 62; **GLM**, p. 1.
65. See **SBMS**, pp. 284 - 285.
66. **Tissa Balasuriya**, *Eucharist and Human Liberation . . .*, pp. 3 - 4 and his *Planaetary Theology . . .*, p. 1.
67. **ASPSCC**, pp. 32 - 33.
68. **SEDEC** stands for "Socio Economic Development Centre" which was started by the **CBCSL**. For more see the pamphlet entitled, *Socio Economic Development Centre*, Colombo, pp. 1 - 3.
69. See *Annual Reports* of **SEDEC** especially since 1977.
70. Established by the **CBCSL** on the 25th of April 1984.
71. See "Constitution of the **NJPC**", p. 1.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

73. See TRSLN, pp. 1 - 39.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 26.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 23 - 26.
76. Aloysius Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures ..", in *Irruption of the Third World* . . . , p. 113.
77. See N. Abeyasingha, *The Radical Tradition* . . . , p. 97.
78. See Patrick D' Souza, *Church and Mission in Relation to the Kingdom of God*, *FABC Papers*, No. 22 also Tissa Balasuriya, "The Secular Society and the Kingdom of God", in *Missions in Dialogue* . . . , pp. 113 - 119 and *Toward a New Age in Mission: the Good News of God's Kingdom to the Peoples of Asia*, International Congress on Mission, IMC, Manila, 1981, esp. pp. 46 - 52 and G. M. Soares-Prabhu, *The Kingdom of God Jesus' Vision* . . . , pp. 1 - 31.
79. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia* . . . , pp. 99 - 100, 116 - 117, 236 - 242.
80. See W. L. A. Don Peter, "The Catholic Presence in Sri Lanka through History, Belief and Faith" in *Religiousness in Sri Lanka* . . . , p. 250.
81. Emerito p. Nacpil, "Mission and Modernization" in *What Asian Christians are Thinking: a Theological Source Book*, D. J. Elwood, (ed.), New Day Publishers, Quezon City, 1978, p. 287.
82. See J. R. Carter, "Introduction", in *Religiousness in Sri Lanka* . . . , p. vii.
83. See Wm. Jesu Thasan, *Eternal Life: A Catholic Catechism with A New Orientation and Emphasis*, St. Joseph's Catholic Press, Jaffna, 1960, p. 183.
84. See F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology* . . . , p. 256.
85. The numerous booklets published by S. Gnana Pragasar are clear examples to this effect.
86. See B. Wm. Jesu Thasan, *Eternal Life* . . . , p. 182.
87. See TRSLN, pp. 36 - 37.
88. See *Ibid.*, pp. 37 - 39.
89. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia* . . . , pp. 29, 50 - 55, 60.

90. For instance the FABC delineated the need to promote Christian spirituality that draws nourishment from Asian religiosity and heritage. See C. G. Arevalo, (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia . . .*, esp. pp. 49 - 82 and Arnulf Camps, *Partners in Dialogue . . .*, pp. 174 - 180, 193 - 209.
91. ASPSCC, p. 30, SBMS, p. 285, TRSLN, p. 36, 37.
92. See "The Annual Reports of the Mission Animation Team" of the CBCSL, 1979 - 1985, Archbishop's House, Colombo. (typed scripts)
93. It is surprising to note that catechetical books published in Europe give brief descriptions of the different non-Christian religions whereas the bishops of Sri Lanka are yet to bring out catechetical instructions that deal with the positive values found in other religions and their scriptures.
94. See Aloysius Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation . . ." in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity . . .*, V. Fabella, (ed.), pp. 75 - 95.
95. See TNIC in QUEST, March 1989, No. 100, pp. 22-23.
96. For the past five years the Social and Economic Development Centre (SEDEC) has made concerted efforts to link issues related to Social Justice and Peace as a fundamental commitment of all religions and has made several inter-religious efforts to promote peace as an integral aspect of human development. See *Journeying Together for Peace*, APHD-SEDEC, Colombo, 1993, 85p.

CONCLUSION

This study has been undertaken with the contention that any theology which claims to be authentically contextual must emerge from a contextualized church. In order to establish the basic ingredients of the process of contextualization, we examined this concept against the dense background of its theological origin and historical development.

We then proceeded to investigate the Sri Lankan context from the angles of its political history, socio-religious composition and cultural ethos. Having clarified the concept of contextualization and the proper locus of contextualization, we examined the method and pattern of ecclesial contextualization envisaged by the bishops in the three decades beginning with the Second Vatican Council. We set about on our analysis stating that the official documents published by the Catholic hierarchy within this thirty year period (1960-1990) contain the programs visualized, the methods adopted and the approaches embarked upon by them toward realizing this goal. Our final chapter which is a critique of the attempts at contextualization undertaken by the bishops illustrates further our conviction that it is only a contextualized church that can truly be the matrix of any theology that claims to be contextual.

In the course of our analysis we also stated that our effort to understand the Sri Lankan church and its search for a contextual theology should be seen in the light of the creative theological quest that has received conscious articulation in the Asian continent as well as in Africa and Latin America. This quest requires that theologising must not only follow a different method but it must also have a different character. The two are determined by the context. In the third world, theologians are less inclined today to define theology as a purely speculative undertaking. To some extent this attitude is also true of Europe and North America. For example the theologians who gathered in Belgium in 1972, at a World Congress on Theology, described theology in the

following words: "it is a reflection of Christians upon their faith and their Christian experience in a particular time and culture. Hence only Christian communities, involved in the life of the contemporary world, taking active responsibility within their society can fashion the theology of the future".¹

In order to be relevant and meaningful to the context theology must seek to articulate the contours of ecclesial life in all its vicissitudes. It must facilitate the process of dialogue between every aspect of the socio-cultural, political and religious traditions at work in a given social ensemble. Describing the function of theology Rene Laurentin said:

the function of theology should be to elucidate the meaning of charity at work in economic, political and cultural structures and the significance of earthly values and their import on man's destiny. And that process of elucidation has to occur at the very centre and of the gestation and birth pangs that contemporary world is suffering today. It implies a renovation and in a certain sense a reconversion of ecclesiology, from a closed to an open society, from the static to the dynamic, from the ecclesiastical to the Cosmic.²

Seen from this perspective it is the concrete historical reality with all its religio-cultural diversities and social ramifications that becomes the locus of theology. It has been demonstrated by us already that the Sri Lankan Catholic hierarchy did undertake a pastoral program of reform and revival with the view to be responsive to the Sri Lankan national context. Their very act of responding to this multifaceted context unfolds a particular theological method and orientation. To some measure the bishops were successful in their efforts and enterprises. But much remains to be done.

The bishops must make every possible effort to revive the local church. They must aim at making this church self-ministering, self-governing and self-supporting. Its liturgy and prayer, proclamation and celebration must embody the

struggles and aspirations of the people to whom this church is called to be a sign of salvation and a light of illumination.

Authentic ecclesial contextualization demands a radical change in the existing patterns of pastoral ministry, diocesan and parish structures. The present structure of ministries and parish-system are not only foreign to the local clime but have also their roots in the post-medieval period. With such worn-out structures the church in Sri Lanka will not be able to give adequate response to the needs and problems of contemporary societies. The growing sense of individualism evidenced in the Christian communities is a clear sign of the failures of the existing parish-system. A creative re-structuring of the parish system is essential to promote the fundamental evangelical ideals of **koinonia** and **diakonia**.

In its practical sense ecclesial contextualization should be seen as integral to the process of self-evangelization and re-evangelization. It should continue to remind the Christian communities that unless a community is deeply rooted in the culture and has a sense of solidarity with the socio-cultural milieu, with all its miseries and failures, triumphs and achievements that community will not be able to integrate itself in that society. Unless these communities speak a language that is understandable to the listeners it would only make ineffectual sounds.

Contextualization requires an active openness to the Spirit of God who is the source of movement and change. The Spirit blows wherever it wills. Contextualization in that sense is not a mere human endeavour. It is an expression of radical openness in hope and faith to the Spirit of Christ. This docility to the Spirit calls for originality, creativity, imagination and inventiveness. If the church believes in the Spirit as the source of goodness and the author of new life, then it must manifest a deep sense of reverence for all that is good and valuable in other religions and cultures. The church must learn to discern the presence of the Spirit in them. Contextualization proposes a true *metanoia*, a radical change of heart and mind, attitudes and assumptions. It calls for a

positive and hopeful approach to life and reality and all that promotes the quality of human life on earth, in a spirit of deep solidarity with the whole of creation.

A frame-work of contextualization that is realistic would unveil the fact that mission in the future cannot concern itself with numerical conversions and territorial expansions. That period of conversion is over. Followers of other religions will encounter the Church, in their normal, ordinary day to day affairs. This encounter can be a transforming and challenging experience only when they see in the Church the presence of Christ realized and experienced in the meaningful forms and life-witness expressed in an understandable language, symbols, signs and gestures.

A contextual approach demands and requires a radical rupture with the past and a genuine insertion into the present with a clear vision for the future. A creative recognition of pluralism in all its richness and the desire to seek unity in diversity not only within one single religious tradition but amidst a plurality of religions, theologies and spiritualities will become imperative. Politics and philosophy, marketing and management, commerce and cultural studies must be blended harmoniously in the intuitive process of developing a theological content in a manner that is relevant to the times, climes and needs.

Seminary formation, priestly training and function will demand a more innovative form of change and reformation. Social, environmental and humanitarian sciences will have to replace gradually the medieval scholastic jargons as the basis of theological sciences, thereby providing an environment conducive for the birth and emergence of a meaningful contextual theology. A creative insertion of the Christian faith in the socio-cultural and religio-political situation will provide a fertile ground for an authentic contextual theology.

A genuine desire for an authentic contextualization will uncover the fact that mission or evangelization is not primarily an affair of men, women or even of the church or Christian

communities. It is primarily the mission of God. God is the revealer and giver of the Word. It is his WORD announced by the Church that has the saving power and the redeeming rigour. The Church is only a committed partner. The mission of God is certainly deeper, wider and greater than the mission of the Church.

The centre and pivotal point of the Church is Christ himself. As a community united in Christ and gathered by His Spirit, the Church is called to represent humanity in its "redeemed" existence. It is for this reason that in the Second Vatican Council the functional role of the Church has been described as a "universal Sacrament of salvation." The Church is thus entrusted with the mission of heralding God's kingdom and summoning all peoples irrespective of the divisions of race class, colour and creed to share the unity and fellowship lived and proclaimed by Christ.

The understanding of the Church as a visible "sign" and a "sacrament" has far-reaching theological implications and consequences for the mission of the Church, especially in the context of inculturation and inter-faith dialogue, and to the entirety of contextualization.

The universal Church which does not and cannot exist as a visible and perceptible reality in time and space, cannot also be a "visible sign and sacrament of salvation", but the local churches can and must. This conviction should summon the local church of Sri Lanka to become a real event, by truly incarnating itself in the soil and by entering into the mainstream of social life and expressing its faith and worship from elements drawn from its religio-cultural heritage. Only in this manner can the church offer a genuine and self-effacing service in full solidarity and responsible participation.

The "SIGN" aspect of the local churches unveil an important dimension of Christian life. A sign is something that points to a reality other than itself and often out-side of itself. Spelt out more concretely, a sign becomes functional and relevant by not being self-oriented or self-centred. The

sign aspect of the church therefore places the local church of Sri Lanka in a very precarious position. It constantly invites the church for a *kenotic* or emptying experience and calls for an undoing of all forms of triumphalism and self-seeking.

On the other hand, on a more positive note, a sign has an instructional, directive and orientational function. In order to perform these functions powerfully, the church must ceaselessly seek to be a genuine representative of humanity in all its religio-cultural pluriformities and ethno-social diversities. If Christianity confines itself only to a single culture, nation or people, the Church will fail to manifest its true nature as a "universal sacrament of salvation". It would lack what may be termed as "semiological catholicity", i.e. universality in its function as a sign.

The universality of Christian faith becomes recognized as a living and functional reality only when it is able to manifest its inexhaustible openness and receptivity among all peoples and cultures. In other words the task of evangelization is not to Christianize Sri Lanka, but to Sri Lankanize the Christian faith, in order that we may cheerfully offer back to the Father, with praise and thanks-giving, the gifts we have received from him as Sri Lankans. That is we wish to adorn the universality of the Church by offering the pluriformity of our ethno-cultural and religious gifts that God himself has bestowed upon this nation and our ancestors.³

Such a process invites the church to a soul-searching reflection on the beliefs and practices in a society and to "discern what is life-giving from what is life-destroying".⁴ As an ongoing process contextualization should not be allowed to degenerate into provincialism and sectarianism, rather the process of contextualization should nurture and uphold the universality and catholicity of the Church by bringing the riches of Christ from all corners and from all directions - from among the peoples of all continents and countries. Contextualization determines both continuity and discontinuity with the past. It liberates the community that is

bogged down and engrossed by worn-out forms and structures and enables the Spirit of Christ to act freely and gloriously.

Finally it is only through an effective and authentic process of contextualization that the entire church of Sri Lanka would be able to bear credible witness to the saving love of God revealed in Christ. For, in its mission the church must convincingly express that Christ the Son of God who comes to be with his people in Sri Lanka comes not from Europe but from the Father - bringing always the GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION.

NOTES

1. As quoted by D. S. Amalorpavadass, in "Theology of Evangelization ..", p. 32.
2. Rene Laurentin, *Liberation, Development and Salvation*, trans. C. Underhill Quinn, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1972, p. 212.
3. See A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, "Evangelization in the Multi-cultural and Pluri-religious Context of Sri Lanka", in *ZMR*, Munster, 75(1991), No. 2, pp. 144-146.
4. P. Drego, "Inculturation" a talk delivered at the Bima II meeting of the FABC (Trivandrum, India, Dec. 1980), (mimeographed), p. 6.

APPENDIX I

TABLE I

POPULATION BY ETHNIC GROUPS 1946 - 1981

(THOUSANDS)

	1946	%	1953	%	1963	%	1971	%	1981	%
All Ethnic Groups	6,657	100.0	8,098	100.0	10,582	100.0	12,711	100.0	14,847	100.0
Low-Country Sinhalese	2,903	43.6	3,470	42.9	4,470	42.2	5,446	42.8	10,980	73.95
Kandyan Sinhalese	1,718	26.0	2,147	26.5	3,043	28.8	3,701	29.1		
Sri Lanka Tamils	734	11.0	885	10.9	1,165	11.0	1,416	11.0	1,887	12.70
Indian Tamils	781	11.7	974	12.0	1,123	10.6	1,195	9.4	819	5.52
Sri Lanka Moors	374	5.6	464	5.7	627	5.9	824	6.5	1,047	7.05
Indian Moors	36	0.5	47	0.6	55	0.5	29	0.2	-	-
Burghers and Eurasians	42	0.6	46	0.6	46	0.5	44	0.3	39	0.26
Malays	23	0.4	25	0.3	33	0.3	42	0.3	47	0.32
Others	49	0.6	40	0.5	20	0.2	14	0.1	28	0.19

Source: Department of Census and Statistics

APPENDIX II

TABLE 2

POPULATION BY RELIGION 1946 - 1981

(THOUSANDS)

	1946	%	1958	%	1963	%	1971	%	1981	%
All Religions	6,657	100.0	8,098	100.0	10,582	100.0	12,711	100.0	14,846	100.0
Buddhists	4,295	64.5	5,209	64.3	7,003	66.3	8,568	67.4	10,288	69.30
Hindus	1,320	19.8	1,611	19.9	1,958	18.5	2,239	17.6	2,297	15.48
Christians	603	9.1	724	8.9	885	8.4	987	7.7	1,121	7.55
Muslims	437	6.6	542	6.8	724	6.7	910	7.1	1,130	7.61
Others	2	-	12	0.1	12	0.1	8	0.1	8	0.06

Source: Department of Census and Statistics

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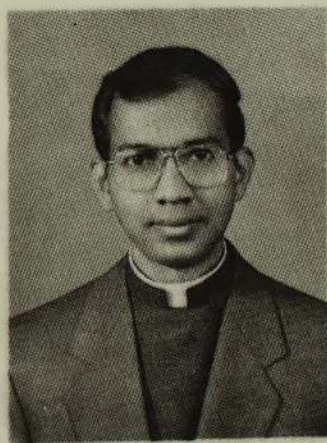
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