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HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY: EXPLORING THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM IN INDIA IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MIND OF VATICAN II, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND CHRISTOLOGY OF HENRI DE LUBAC

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DEDICATED TO

His Grace, Archbishop Joseph Powathil, a Pioneer in Inter-religious Dialogue in India, who introduced me to the Documents of Vatican II, especially *Nostra Aetate*

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My late sister, Teresa Varghese, who was such an inspiration to me

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	:	*Apostolicam Actuositatem*
AAS	:	*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*
AASS	:	*Acta Apud Sanctam Sedem*
AF	:	*Ecclesia in Africa*
AG	:	*Ad Gentes*
ANF	:	Anti-Nicene Fathers
ASS	:	*Acta Sanctae Sedis*
CBCI	:	Catholic Bishops' Conference of India
CD	:	*Christus Dominus*
CD	:	*Cantate Domino*
CDV	:	Commentaries on the Documents of Vatican II
CM	:	*Corpus Mysticum*
DCE	:	*Deus Caritas Est*
DH	:	*Dignitatis Humanae*
DJ	:	*Dominus Jesus*
DR	:	*Divini Redemptoris*
DV	:	*Dei Verbum*
DzH		*Denzinger, Heinrich*
EN	:	*Evangeli Nuntiandi*
EA	:	*Ecclesia in Asia*
FABC	:	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference
GE	:	*Gravissimum Educationis*
GS	:	*Gaudium et Spes*
HE	:	*Historie et Esprit*
IMC	:	International Missionary Council
LG	:	*Lumen Gentium*
LS	:	*Laudato SI*
NA	:	*Nostra Aetate*
NMI	:	*Novo Millennio Ineunte*
OE	:	*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*
OT	:	*Optatam Totius*

PG	:	*Patrologia Graceca*
PL	:	*Patrologia Latina*
RD	:	*La Revelation Divine*
RH	:	*Redemptor Hominis*
RM	:	*Redemptor Missio*
SC	:	*Sacrosanctium Concilium*
SF	:	*Sensus Fidei* Summa
ST	:	*Summa Theologiae*
US	:	*Ubicumque et Semper*
WCC	:	World Council of Churches

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The 'Other' has always been a matter of concern from the beginning of humanity and Christians are not an exception to this. This is true at the personal, social and political level. How we treated the 'Other' in the history of religions gives us pause. Religious wars and the aggressive imposition of a particular religion should ensure that we find a different path, one that promotes mutual respect and understanding. The Catholic Church has had to re-evaluate her attitude to other religions.

The Second Vatican Council promoted a major shift in the relationship towards other faiths. Religious pluralism is part of the fabric of Indian society and culture. As an Indian National, while being neither complacent about our present situation nor in denial of conflicts in our history involving religion, it can be said that we have managed religious diversity somewhat better than have other parts of the world. It would be helpful if this study of efforts in India to further inter-religious dialogue and collaboration with Hinduism could contribute something to efforts in this area by Christians world-wide in their dealings with people of other Faiths.

This study emerges from personal, pastoral experience as a member of the Syro-Malabar Church,[1] with its pronounced Indian cultural identity and its expression through its liturgy. Besides the presence of the Syro-Malabar Church other Christian traditions, both Eastern and Western, including Latin-Anglican-Orthodox traditions are prevalent in India. This study is about seeking a model for positive encounter with Hinduism. Hopefully benefits might accrue to the Indian Church as a whole from such an encounter, in respect of its ongoing need for inculturation, so that Christ can be 'at home' in Indian culture.

[1] Christianity in India is composed of both Catholic and non-Catholic Churches, of Eastern and Western traditions. The most ancient Christianity in India is of Syrian tradition, and was known as Saint Thomas' Christians (*Mar Thoma Nazranikal*), whose origin, according to the tradition goes back to the apostle Thomas in A.D.52. Later, in the 4th, 8th, and 9th centuries, Christian immigrants from Persia formed one Church together with the already present Saint Thomas' Christians. The earliest Christian inculturation in relation to the predominantly Hindu Indian society could be found in this community, which in the early centuries adapted its community life-pattern in accordance with that of Indian culture; this Church was never considered as foreign until the time of Westernisation. The identity of Thomas' Christians was well-expressed by the axiom: "Indian (Hindu) in culture, Christian in religion and Oriental in worship." But unfortunately, in the course of history, as the result of colonisation and occidental domination, this Church lost its individuality, becoming "western" and alienated from Indian culture.
See Placid J. Podippara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship" in the St. *Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. II ed., George Menachery (Madras: BNK Press, 1973), 107-112.

Although the Second Vatican Council profoundly altered the Church's position with respect to other religions, it is not to be assumed that previous attitudes do not still prevail, residually, within the Church; nor is it to be assumed that the possibilities that the Council created have been seized upon and find universal expression in active inter-faith dialogue and collaboration. This study aims to re-assert the position of Vatican II, that ecumenical praxis is at the heart of being Christian, and, that in the mission of the Church, the promotion of mutual understanding between people of different faiths is not just an option, but an obligation.

All religions are partially a product of human constructs, as far as the systems, structures and the cultural clothing in which they present themselves are concerned. They have been shaped by history and bear the legacy of that history. There are values within each that are 'of the essence' of religious belief and the cultures with which each religion is associated provide it with added values. However, some aspects of this culture might be more accurately designated as 'baggage'. Whether that baggage has been exported from Europe in the case of Christianity or is indigenous to the culture of the place in the case of Hinduism it is central to the problem that must be resolved. Beyond such socio-cultural and historical issues however are deeper theological issues of contention and a divergence of beliefs that may seem incompatible. This study will seek to identify these and offer a model for beginning to address them in accord with an inclusive Christology.

It is important to understand at the outset that expounding complex theological issues at the heart of Christology and Missiology are beyond the scope of this study. Reference to general themes within the area of theology will be considered when exploring issues of dialogue and mutual understanding, the main foci of the research.

Christianity and Hinduism are religious traditions with complex and apparently incompatible beliefs. Trying to appreciate these differences at an intellectual level with a view to promoting mutual understanding is challenging. The divergences between Christianity and Hinduism are of a kind that far exceed those for example between the Abrahamic Faiths. Hinduism's origin cannot be dated accurately since it does not have an individual founder. Neither does it have any particular divine revelation, or a specific text that can serve as a doctrinal point of reference. For Raimondo Panikkar "it is a bundle of

religious traditions."[2] It has no single prophet, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, and no single sacred book. Neither does it have a governing institutional structure capable of deciding questions of religious boundaries or formulating standards of doctrine and practice.[3] Christians believe in one God while Hindus have many gods; Christians have a linear concept of salvation history, while for Hindus there is a cyclical dimension to these, located in the notion of reincarnation. Given such multiple and radical divergences between these two religions, it is natural to ask if any points of convergence between them could be found.

Contact between the two religions is, for the most part, positive and fruitful from a social and political point of view, at least more so than that often prevailing between the major world religions in general. In addition, there have been numerous examples of Hindus (including many scholars) becoming attracted to the figure of Jesus. But there is no room for any complacency and much more work is needed at the levels of both theological and social encounter. Given the divergence between Hinduism and Christianity our challenge is to plum the depth of both religions in an attempt to find points of convergence to ensure a deeper dialogue between them.

There is a growing awareness in our time of the profound and far-reaching implications of the changes initiated by Vatican II in the Church's position with respect to other religions. We are challenged to see them as part of the plan of God for the salvation of humanity, with Christ at the centre of that plan. While Christ is the fullness of revelation (Dei Verbum, 2), other religions cannot be treated as mere appendices. Dialogue with other religions is now not optional; the centrality of Christ in the plan of salvation requires a new and different understanding and interpretation in light of the place of other religions in that plan. Christology is enriched by dialogue with other religions.

Approaches emanating from a European mindset have not been helpful. If anything, they have further alienated Hindus from their Christian 'brethren'. Another approach is warranted, one which explores commonalities in the affective approach to religious affiliation, belief and practice. The late French theologian, Henri de Lubac (1896-1991),

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[2] Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, *Towards an Ecumenical Christophany,* First published by Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1964. Revised and enlarged edition (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1981),39.

[3] See Donald S. Lopez (ed.)*, Religions of India in Practice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.

understood the problems associated with the approach of classical apologetics which hindered fruitful inter-religious dialogue from the time of the neo-Scholastics until the middle of the 20th Century.

I have been inspired by the theological method of Henri de Lubac, especially the two principles that can be gleaned from his inaugural theological lecture in 1929, viz. the Principle of Auscultation and the Principle of the Catholicity of Truth, the latter being the basis for the former. In his wide-ranging *corpus,* he used these principles to dialogue with other religions and also with philosophies opposed to Christianity. This ground-breaking work came to fruition in the seminal advisory role that he played in the Vatican Council's deliberations regarding other Faiths. Now, following the Council, the relevance of these principles to the ongoing work of inter-faith dialogue, is obvious. I have therefore sought to employ them in this study to explore the theological relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, while carrying out the intention of Vatican II, especially in its decree on other religions, *Nostra Aetate*. All this has prompted me to define as the hypothesise for this study:
How, using the theological method of Henri de Lubac, can dialogue be promoted between Christianity and Hinduism in India?

Henri de Lubac's great contribution to new thinking, or new theology, was to return to the sources of Christian belief, chiefly to the Fathers of the Church whose fundamental belief and practice had not been turned into a defensive strategy against non-believers. This new approach has been given the name *Ressourcement*[4] which has always been central to the Lubacian method. This theological approach will form the basis for this study. Our challenge is to present Jesus Christ in a way that resonates with the Indian mindset. Culturally, Jesus is often portrayed as European and not Asian, which has resulted in Christianity being viewed as Eurocentric.[5] As a result, and not least in India, many believe that following Christ would mean abandoning their culture and tradition.

[4] At the beginning of *Catholicism,* Henri de Lubac felt it necessary to explain to his readers why his text was saturated with quotations from the Fathers. See, Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1950), xiii. See also, John Webster, "*Ressourcement* Theology and Protestantism," in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 483-489.

[5] The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia acknowledges* that: "Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus, who was born on Asian soil, as a Western rather than an Asian figure." The Synod Fathers felt that this difficulty is further compounded by the fact that Jesus is often

From the Council of Nicaea (325) onwards, the Church has used the categories of Greek philosophy to articulate the ontology of Jesus. A characteristic of Greek thought is a dualism which seeks to explain all phenomena in terms of distinct entities. Thus, there is 'material' and there is 'spiritual': 'secular' and 'sacred.' The limitations of this mindset are evident in the attempt to express the relationship between Christ, the Father and the Spirit through the concept of the Trinity. It sought to convey an understanding of God as characterised by 'loving relationship'. But it has tended to be reduced in European thinking to a mathematical conundrum. Scripture scholars have become increasingly exercised about how much richness has been lost in the transition from Aramaic[6] and Hebrew thought and writing to the straight jacket of Greco/Roman and subsequent European thought patterns. Hebrew writing is akin to an Asiatic mindset which focuses on the oneness and interdependence of creation, on relationality rather than on separateness. All of this is expressed through poetry, mythology, and stories.[7] Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and Christian Scriptures (New Testament) make liberal use of these forms of expression. Positive encounters and collaboration with Hinduism can help Christianity in its recovery of its own treasures; this is an additional reason and motivation for Hindu-Christian dialogue. It is with pleasure that it can be noted that as a result of living with Hindu brethren and sharing the Indian culture, various 'Indian faces' of Jesus are being discovered by our theologians, and different Christologies have been formulated in recent years. The Church must express the Christian message in the concepts and language of contemporary cultures and clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophers.[8] Western philosophy has little currency in Asia. 'Hellenization' creates problems for Christian Faith in its world-wide journeying across the world. We may now speculate on how, if the Church's Hebraic tradition had not in its early centuries been overwhelmed by the Greco/Roman one, its dialogue with Eastern religions could now be more fruitful.

If we are to properly explore the theological basis for dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity, it is essential that prime consideration is given to the people involved. In

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perceived as foreign to Asia. See, Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* (November 6, 1999), no. 20.

[6] Syriac began as the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, with its own script, first attested in inscriptions of the first century A.D. It must have been adopted as the literary language of Aramaic-speaking Christianity at an early date. See, Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Baker Hill: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1997), 7

[7] Aidan Nicholas, *Ephiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism,* 2nd ed. (Michael Glazier Books,2016), htts://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8116914-epiphany, 47-49.

[8] Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium* et *Spes* (December 7, 1965), No.44.

the present scenario of India, taking into account contemporary trends in Indian Christology, it is necessary to consider the multi-religious context and the situation of poverty and discrimination in the name of caste and tribe.[9] These factors inhibit Indian understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Interpreting Christ in India is not the monopoly of Christians, since some Hindus, such as Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekanadha and Mahatma Gandhi, are credited with finding a variety of serious interpretations of Christ, especially in the 19th and 20th Centuries.[10] In this context, we ask: Is the Hindu understanding of Christology of benefit in the pursuit of inter-religious dialogue in India? Is the Christ perceived by the Hindus in line with the Christ presented by Christianity?

While Christianity is viewed as the religion of colonisers[11] the Church in India faces a massive challenge. It is the mission of our theologians to present the incarnated Christ in India in a manner that makes the gospel more appealing and meaningful to their cultural heritage. Pope John Paul II underscores this point in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*:

> The Synod Fathers were well aware of the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking. They pointed out that such an inculturation of the faith on their continent involves rediscovering the Asian countenance of Jesus and identifying ways in which the cultures of Asia can grasp the universal saving significance of the mystery of Jesus and his Church.[12]

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[9] Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology," in *Thomas Christian Heritage: Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre* Vol. I. (November 2008), 54-56.

[10] "Jesus as the Teacher" by Ram Mohan Roy, "Christ as the Manifestation of the Divine (Cit)" by Keshub Chunder Sen, "Christ as the Embodiment of Divine Love" by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, "Christ as the *Jeevanmukta*" by Swami Vivekanada , "Jesus as the Messenger of Peace" by Mahatma Gandhi are only some of them. For details see, M. Thomas Malekandathil, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, (Madras: CLS Press: 1969).

[11] There have been serious attempts by many Christians to present Christ in India, but so diverse is the Indian context, and so great the plurality of expression, that we are unable to glimpse the richness of the mystery of Christ in a single Christological description. Christian theologians of a Protestant background, such as Aiyadurai Appasamy (1891-1975); Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1929) and Vengal Chakkari (1880-58) followed a theology of *Bhakti Marga* in their attempts to introduce Christ to Hindus. Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, the father of Indian theology, observed a century ago: "It is the foreign clothes of the Catholic faith that have chiefly prevented our countrymen from perceiving its universal nature. Catholicism had donned the European garb in India." As a result of colonisation and occidental domination, the Church became Western and alienated from Indian culture. For details see, Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, "The Clothes of Catholic Faith", in *Sophia monthly*, August 1998, in Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauce, eds. *The writings of Brahmabandab Upadhyaya,* Vol.II (Bangalore :United Theological College, 2012), 206-207.

[12] *Ecclesia in Asia*, no, 20.

Theology is man's language about God; culture plays a vital role in how humans give expression to their understanding of God. Our thought patterns, images and symbols are affected by our cultural conditioning. Culture is central to any meaningful interpretation of faith. Indian theologians are convinced that the religious, philosophical and spiritual wealth of Indian culture would help to interpret Christian revelation more meaningfully to the people of India.[13] Theologians working within a different culture and engaged in mission stress that dialogue with 'the other' requires an exchange and the mutual recognition of theological and cultural heritages. Francis Clooney suggests that dialogue entails developing the skills to be able to share each other's theologies.[14] The more he reads and is ready to learn, the more the Christian theologian can discern these 'seeds of the word' in the scriptural texts and writings of other faiths. It is not merely recognizing similarities between faiths but rather understanding the differences.[15] All religions have developed in cultural contexts and appear to the world in cultural garb.

Before crossing boundaries, everyone needs to be sure where the boundaries are. If it is understood that Christianity and other religions are all versions of the 'same thing' or offering the same outcome then there is a danger of trying to see the 'common core' that all religions have and then reducing them all to a 'Procrustean bed of homogeneity'[16] (In the Greek myth Procrustes sought, whether by stretching or amputating the limbs of passers-by, to make each of them fit the dimensions of his bed)! The focus of inter-religious dialogue is not on uniformity but on unity in diversity. In looking at Hinduism we are seeking to understand inter-religious dimensions and to find a way of dialoguing with it. These writers echo de Lubac in their call to Christians to listen and take note of Hindu expressions of their faith. De Lubac's theological method will be pivotal in this undertaking, as we shall see throughout this work.

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[13] See, Thomas Manickam, "Theological Education in the Cultural, Philosophical Contexts of India Today" in Wilfred ed., *Theological Education in India Today* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication,1985), 55.

[14] He recommends first, the reading of the scriptural texts of the 'other'. Paul Ricoeur saw knowledge of the language of the other as important for reading of texts, listening, and speaking to enable this. See Francis X. Clooney S.J., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16.

[15] If the language and symbols used in texts are different from those found in Western Christianity, it is because they represent how concepts are understood in other cultures. Those symbols can be adopted by Christianity to carry similar meaning but adapted by Christianity to introduce the Christian understanding of the spiritual. See, Clooney S.J., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, 16-18.

[16] Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002),10.

The faith traditions of Hinduism and Christianity are juxtaposed on the subcontinent of India. While there is scant historical evidence of formal dialogue between the faith traditions, they can claim to have modelled harmony and 'inter-religious living together'. Dialogue between the religions emerged from a living together in a common lifestyle and influenced by cultural pattern and terminologies. Such harmony exists among Christians and Hindus in South India, where initiatives to promote a better understanding of Hindu-Christian relationships include the release of a "Hindu-Christian Dictionary: Essential Terms for Inter-religious Dialogue."[17] Such examples inspired this study and Indian theologians are convinced that Indian culture with all its religious, philosophical and spiritual wealth could help to interpret Christian revelation more meaningfully for the people of India.[18] The theological method developed by Henri de Lubac will enable us to access some of the complexities of these two religions. From a dogmatic point of view, we further contend that de Lubac's Christological insights, informed by his theological method, will help us to ventilate points of *rapprochement* between them.

We need to consider in depth the maxim: '*extra ecclesia nulla salus*' – 'outside the Church there is no salvation.'[19] Literally interpreted, this means that only Christians, and indeed perhaps only members of the Catholic Church can be saved. But the context from which it originated needs to be acknowledged. It emerged primarily from the writings of Cyprian of Carthage in the Patristic Church to serve as a warning for Christians facing an increasing amount of heresies so that it would prevent them from being beguiled by them into apostasy. In 1442, the Council of Florence even proclaimed, 'No one can be saved even if shedding one's blood for the name of Christ, unless one remains within the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church'.[20] It gained a new credibility after the two World Wars, at a time of growing secularism, pluralism and diversity. Such dogmatic prescription renders inter-faith dialogue fruitless and pointless since the increasing religious diversity requires inter faith engagement and conversations that take place between people of different faiths and beliefs.

[17] This is a joint project of K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham. The Peetham has been to the forefront in promoting Hindu-Christian Dialogue in India and have produced the Hindu-Christian Dictionary: Essential Terms for Inter-religious Dialogue, edited by Benedict Kanakappally, Kala Acharya, Gaetano Sabetta and Mariano Iturbe, Somaiya Publications, 2017).
[18] See, T. Manickam, "Theological Education in the Cultural, Philosophical Contexts of India Today", 56-58.
[19] Francis A. Sullivan, S. J., *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 224.
[20] Pope Eugene IV, the Bull *Cantate Domino,* 1441: The Council of Florence (A.D. 1438-1445).

In October 1965 Pope Paul VI promulgated *Nostra Aetate* which promoted inter-religious dialogue and mutual understanding between Christian and non-Christian religions. Of particular interest is the reference to the great religions of Asia, viz., Hinduism and Buddhism:

> Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus, in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical enquiry … the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which…often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people.[21]

The insights of this theology inspire a way of life by which people can, with confidence and trust, engage in dialogue and mutual understanding.

In 2000, *Dominus Jesus*, the declaration by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith was written in response to the work of Asian Bishops struggling with pluralism and fidelity in non-Christian contexts.[22] The fact that this document was ratified by Pope John Paul II is an indication of how seriously this issue was taken in assessing the truth value and theological status of non-Christian Religions. Joseph Ratzinger stated "even the three basic lines of response in the present discussions about Christendom and world religions - exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism - are all determined by the way of putting the question: the other religions are always treated as being ultimately of more or less equal value, always looked at from the point of view of their value for salvation."[23] *Nostra Aetate* and the other relevant Conciliar documents[24] challenge us to reflect on our religious understanding while at the same time promoting unity and love among those whose religious traditions and beliefs differ from ours**.**

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[21] Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (October 28,1965), no. 2.
[22] Eugene F. Gorski, *Theology of Religions: A Sourcebook for Inter-religious Study* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2008),vi.
[23] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and world Religions*, trans. Henri Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 17.
[24] *Redemptor Hominis* (Pope John Paull II, Encyclical Letter, 4th March 1979), provides clear guidelines when stating dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but as an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity.

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has taken some positive steps to encourage better inter-religious relationships, both at official level in the activities of the Pontifical Council for inter-religious dialogue, and at grassroots level.[25] In 1974, The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) spoke of triple dialogue with people, culture and religions.[26] While there are continued attempts being made to promote a better understanding of Hindu-Christian relationships, our own experience in India is that there would need to be a much greater emphasis placed on theological reflection. There are authors like Raymond Panikkar who have pointed out that there is an inadequacy of cultural synthesis and insufficient doctrinal parallelism.[27] According to Panikkar, the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity is inevitable, but certain points of encounter are not adequate for dialogue. For him, the doctrinal domain is insufficient,[28] as is that of cultural synthesis.[29] He proposes seeing Christ as an actual meeting place for both Christians and Hindus, involving both the Divine and the Human.

There are many fundamental differences between the beliefs of Hinduism and those of Christianity, such as the declaration of *Vedas* as revealed truth, the belief in *karma* and in re-birth. It is not enough to mention or discuss these issues at irregular inter-faith meetings, or occasionally to arrange conferences to address the issue, or even worse, to allow it to be "restricted to a few experts or those who are supposed to be the members of the Magisterium"[30] to plot a way forward. Although inter-religious encounters are vitally

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[25] Pope Paul VI instituted the Secretariat for non-Christians on May17th 1964, and it subsequently was renamed "the Pontifical Congregation for Inter-religious Dialogue" in 1988. He had continued in the spirit of Vatican II when issuing his encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, in 1964 which devoted more than half the document to discussing "dialogue." See Paul F. Knitter, "Bridge or Boundary? Vatican II and Other Religions," in William Madges, ed., *Vatican II: Forty Years Later* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 266.

[26] The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC), in its document, *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia* "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly," no. 12-15 (Taipei: 27 April 1974).

[27] The first name of Panikkar is written as Raymond in some writings, in some others as Raimundo or Raimon. Raymond Panikkar (1918-2010), contributed much in the field of inter-religious dialogue and contextual Christology. Since he wasborn and brought up in a pluralistic cultural context, he has been striving for a harmony of pluralism. His intellectual development, between East and West, allowed him to reflect a continuing philosophical dialogue between different traditions and beliefs. His substantial knowledge of the Western philosophical tradition and his exceptional knowledge of Oriental philosophical and spiritual traditions granted him a quite uncommon ability for intercultural-inter-religious and inter-philosophical dialogue at the traditional level. Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, *Towards an Ecumenical Christophany,* First published by Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1964. Revised and enlarged edition (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1981), 38-42. See also L. Antony SavaraiRaj, "Raimon Panikkar: A Worthy Son of a Multicultural Family", *Satyanilayam*, 18 (October 2010), 4.

[28] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism,* 38-39.

[29] Ibid., 40-41.

[30] Joseph Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu, Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions*,210.

important in the promotion of peace, justice, harmony and understanding, there remains a distinct lack of serious theological thinking in this area. Our proposed research and reflection on inter-religious dialogue on Hindu-Christian relationships constitutes a way of dealing with this lacuna; Christology offers the most fruitful arena for this exploration. De Lubac's Christological insights ascertain that every human being has an organic link to Christ. That link precedes the Incarnation; it has its origins in creation; it cannot therefore be lost. It belongs to people who subscribe to non-Christian religions or to no religion, people who have or have not heard about Christ; all of humanity is connected to Christ.[31]

Panikkar cites examples from the *Bhagavad Gita* [32] - here too we learn that God has great love for those who worship him and give him loving surrender ('bhakti'). Johnston Largen invites us to seek a deeper appreciation of the Christian doctrine of salvation through an exploration of the different images of salvation to be found in other religions.[33] In this context we will rely especially on de Lubac's Christological thinking to shed light on our study of Hinduism. Heather Elgood, in her book, *Hinduism and the Religious Arts* states: "Religious rituals in Hinduism revolve around the devotion and ultimate identification of the worshipper with God."[34] In Hinduism the concept of salvation is most closely linked to the idea of *moksha* which denotes liberation from the endless cycles of death and re-birth, known as *Samsara*, by overcoming ignorance.[35] Salvation in Christianity is associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will concentrate on both the similarities and differences of these two aspects of religious interpretation in our research.

Christianity has long seen the importance of recognizing 'signs of the Spirit' present in the contemporary cultures in which they find themselves. Religious pluralism is a reality in our globalised world. Different religions are no longer seen, as in the past, as confined to specific geographical locations. Living in India today as Christians demands a sincere commitment to adaptation and dialogue. The relevance and necessity of dialogue is more

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[31] Noel O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Understanding the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 438.

[32] One of three authoritative Hindu texts of the *Vedanta* to have influenced philosophical and theological thought about the 'idea of God'. In this text we learn that the Lord (called many names such as *Isvara, Prabhu* etc), reveals himself as Krishna, a 'personal being' who is both transcendent and immanent and who is active in creation and salvation. See, Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1964), 150.

[33] Christian Johnston Largen, "An Exercise in Comparative Soteriology," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology,* no. 3 (2006), 45.

[34] Heather Elgood, *Hinduism and the Religious Arts* (London:Cassell,1999), 14.

[35] Christian Johnston Largen, "An Exercise in Comparative Soteriology," 246.

explicit here.[36] In as much as God is one, the world is one and humanity is one; how then is it possible for Hindus and Christians to meet and cooperate at these vantage points and reinforce the religious life of humanity?

In his first work *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, 1988,[37] de Lubac addresses the pertinent question of the necessity of Christ and the Church for salvation while at the same time acknowledging his conviction that many people who have never heard of Christ can be saved.[38] He dealt impressively with this issue when he addressed the challenge confronting Christianity at a time when Christians were regarded as interested only in their own individual salvation. It is to be hoped that this wider, theological method will offer significant insights into the current issues in the Hindu-Christian relationships in India, which is known as the cradle of world religions.

Karl Rahner saw de Lubac as one of the theologians who read the works of the Fathers in a manner that enabled him to reflect on contemporary issues in a 'new way'. He asks:

> What is it that makes the properly historical in studies like those of de Lubac or de la Taille so stimulating and to the point? Surely it is the art of reading historical texts in such a way that says … something to us which we, in our time, have not considered at all or not closely enough about reality itself.[39]

Von Balthazar credits de Lubac's *Catholicism*e with "affecting the breakthrough from the straitjacket of neo-scholasticism"[40] and facilitating a return to the patristic traditions. These affirmations of the works of Henri de Lubac are a source of confidence that the research we are undertaking can have a positive outcome.

We intend using the methodology of de Lubac, which has not, to our knowledge, been employed previously in Christian-Hindu research, but which was used successfully in

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[36] Each religion has its own ideals and ideas: each community has its own traditions and beliefs. Seeing Christ with other eyes is not because the Christian faith is limited. It is when seeing Christ with 'other eyes' that Christians discern 'signs of the Spirit' working in the 'other'. This raises the possibility for Christians to believe that the Holy Spirit is, in some form, present and working in non-Christian religions. See, Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders,* 106.

[37] Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 193. French original: *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

[38] De Lubac clearly showed that faith dogmas are social, since God created humanity as a whole and not as isolated individuals. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*: *Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 217-45.

[39] Karl Rahner, 'The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology', in *Theological Investigations* vol. I. trans. Karl-H Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London, Darton, Longman &Todd,1961,1969), 9.

[40] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press,1992), 335.

relation to Buddhist traditions.[41] De Lubac's Christological perspectives are more concerned with soteriology than ontology. This chimes with the objectives of this research. His main interest is in the human relationship with God. It is through this that he enters into the debate on the supernatural.[42] De Lubac's three books on Buddhism reveal an extensive engagement with this non-Christian thought; as was his wont he only expressed a view on a religion or a philosophy after he had made a profound study of it. I hope to take a similar approach in this study of Hinduism. Our dialogue with Indian theologians, and Hindu visionaries, with their unique awareness of the Indian situation, will be vital to reaching a satisfactory outcome in our journey of mutual understanding.

As indicated in the title the problematic is: *How using the theological method of Henri de Lubac, can dialogue be promoted between Christianity and Hinduism in India?*

In Applying this hypothesis requires an engagement in dialogue between the two traditions. However, dialogue takes many forms and I have enlisted numerous perspectives in that area especially in chapter one. After considering relevant literature with regard to the traditions, present understandings or positions, and existing practices of both religions, I established the context in which I would undertake my study.

This leads me to propose the need for the deep listening which is implicit in de Lubac's idea of Auscultation. The theological method developed by de Lubac in his study of Buddhism inspired me to apply the same methodology to my consideration of Hinduism. De Lubac's methodology enabled him to speak to the particular period in history in which he was writing. He sought to address the limitations of defensive apologetics and of the

[41] Henri de Lubac produced three separate books on the study of Buddhism ; *Aspects du bouddhisme* (1951*), La Rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (1952) and *Amida* (1955). See, Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 33. De Lubac's time of greatest trial, when he was effectively silenced during the 1950's.- this turned out to be a particularly fruitful time as he embarked on an intense study of Buddhism that inspired me to apply the same methodology to my consideration of Hinduism. One of his trilogy of books on Buddhism, Aspects of Buddhism, was translated into English. We consequently, carried out an in-depth study of it which enhanced our research. In his article de Lubac, Christ and the Buddha, David Grumett highlights the fact that this method was supremely successful in dealing with Christian-Buddhist understanding. For details see, David Grumett, "De Lubac, Christ and the Buddha," New *Blackfriars Vol*. 89, no. 1020 (March 2008):217-18, accessed May 14, 2008.

[42] The term *'surnaturel'* used by de Lubac is inadequately rendered in English by the term 'supernatural' but it is used here as being equivalent to supernatural. He has also developed an extensive theology of creation which will prove helpful in our deliberations. De Lubac's anthropology and his concept of the unity of mankind are heavily influenced by biblical and patristic sources. For details see, Noel O'Sullivan, "An *Emerging Christology, In Search of the Christology of Henri de Lubac"* in Jordan Hilbert, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac* (Bloomsbury: London, 2017), 328.

inadequacy of neo-scholasticism to respond to the needs of his time through recourse to the original writings of the Early Church Fathers.

In terms of deep listening and dialogue the rich traditions of Hinduism and Christianity, surrounding core believes is a large and complex area. Hence, I have outlined the fundamental features of Hinduism with particular reference to the titles which relate to the Hindu concepts of God, man, the world and human liberation. There is already a precedence for trying to associate Hindu concepts of divinity with the person of Jesus. Among the Hindu scholars of the Renaissance movement were strongly attracted to the person of Christ and who tried to comprehend and present Jesus within the context of their religious background. It is very important within the context of inter-faith dialogue to uphold the centrality of Christ in our traditions and to avoid the danger of syncretism.

Dialogue can bring to light points of divergence and points of convergence. However, in the final analysis it is the centrality of Christ and his mission that has to be proclaimed while at the same time inviting our Hindu brethren to inform us how such a central figure can echo with their religious beliefs. In this way de Lubac's Christocentric approach provides a bridge for promoting fruitful and respectful dialogue.

At a practical level there are a number of possibilities for an uncontracted dialogue where both traditions share much in terms of respect for divinity, the practice of prayer and rituals, the striving for perfection and the acknowledgment of the need for a saviour. This level of convergence here could be seen as a time of preparation to allow both traditions to cherish common beliefs and practices in the hope of building a stronger bond which could lead to ever greater sharing. According to de Lubac the persons of other religious traditions "can be saved because they are an integral part of that humanity which is to be saved".[43]

When we have considered relevant literature with regard to traditions, present understandings or positions and existing practices of both religions we will establish the context in which this study will develop. The literature will be vital in helping to clarify the problem and breaking it down into its various elements and dimensions. On the basis of de Lubac's theological method, through dialogue and mutual exchange of theological concepts, it is hoped that a greater understanding and *rapprochement* will ensue between Hinduism and

[43] *Catholicism*, 232-33.

Christianity. An exploration of the concealed presence of Christ in Hinduism brings clarity to our understanding of the Omnipresent God. Whatever is shared between Hinduism and Christianity can benefit both. In an attempt to elucidate this, we are working on a thesis which will extend to six chapters. Throughout these chapters we will systematically and progressively investigate each aspect of our problematic with a view to resolving difficulties and developing a new understanding and *rapprochement* between the two religions.

Chapter One will analyse inter-religious dialogue in an Indian context. An objective here will be to identify the current state of inter-religious understanding and dialogue in order to signal a way forward in the light of the insights provided by Henri de Lubac and the deliberations of Vatican II documents. Indian theologians have tried to interpret the mysteries of Christian faith using concepts from the rich religious heritage of India. Not surprisingly their interpretations vary. It is therefore a difficult task to present these Christologies in a coherent structure. Basing our approach on the directions of the Indian Theological Association,[44] we will also examine the contribution of the Indian Church, and theological developments world-wide, that pertain to our study.

Chapter Two will investigate de Lubac's theological research method as a means of establishing dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity. Here the reader will be introduced to Henri de Lubac's theological method which should further mutual understanding between Hinduism and Christianity in India. This Chapter will provide an outline of his theological method, with particular attention to its relevance to inter-faith dialogue. The combination of his inclusive vision and research methodology seems to offer a path to devising a way of promoting mutual understanding and acceptance in a dialogue between the two traditions.

In Chapter Three we will explore the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism, highlighting some of its salient features and attempt to establish its origin and meaning. This should enable us to understand the richness of Hindu thinking, and how it emphasises the absolute reality of the divine with particular attention to the Hindu titles which are central to our deliberations. We will concentrate on its sacred scriptures, their importance and how they

[44] Indian Theological Association, Society and Church: Challenges to Theologising in India Today. Statement of the Indian Theological Association 26th Annual Meeting, Bangalore, 2003, 1-4: hereafter cited as ITS, Society and Church. By the term 'Indian Theologians' in this thesis we mean not only those theologians who are born and brought up in India, but all those who have theologized taking into account the particular context of India, though not Indians by birth. For details, see, Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology,"54-56.

are divided and classified. There is no intention here to provide a comprehensive description of the fundamentals of Hinduism but only to outline what relates to our purpose, namely the advancement of Hindu-Christian dialogue. That does require a substantial knowledge of Hinduism and not least of its important titles.

In Chapter Four we establish that, since Hinduism is a religion inextricably linked to the Indian culture, and this is the context in which our study is set, it is essential that we have an understanding of the late 19th Century Hindu Renaissance movement in India. Through presenting Christ in an Indian garb, we are better able to explore areas of convergence and divergence between Hinduism and Indian Christology. The scholars already mentioned, made connection with Christian theology and in particular the person of Christ, as revealed in the New Testament. The main figures of these renaissance movements who were attracted by Christ, tried to comprehend and present Christ within the framework of their Hindu religious background. They became the pioneers of Indian theology in the sense that their thoughts became the seeds for later Indian Christology. At face value it might seem that the Hindu titles of various aspects of divinity, and especially those that appear to resonate with the person of Christ should lend themselves easily to straightforward comparisons and might seem unproblematic in their implications with respect to Christian theology. As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, such a process is neither straightforward nor unproblematic. In addition to identifying points of relatedness and differences, Christian scholars of Hinduism frequently suggest that Christ surpasses, fulfils, completes or corrects these Hindu concepts. Towards the end of this chapter there will be an attempt to assemble these 'surpassing' elements, alongside elements of relatedness and difference, and offer some comment on each.

In chapter five, with the guidance of Henri de Lubac, we will try to reach conclusions and determinations regarding those elements. Any discussion about similarities between Hinduism and Christianity needs to explain at the outset theological concepts that have a shared currency in both. This is particularly important when following the path mapped out by Henri de Lubac, who, as a Christological inclusivist, tried to show that salvation is possible for all people. De Lubac contributed greatly to opening up a new way of looking at other religions.[45] He saw salvation as a different dimension than simple human progress: "We know too well that all progress of the world will not obtain the least beginning

[45]Henri de Lubac, "The Search for New Man." in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism,* Translated by Edith M.Riley, Anne Englund Nash, and Mark Sebane (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 399-368.

of salvation."[46] It is important to define the place from which, as a Christian, we begin our journey towards dialogue with Hinduism. It is owed, both to ourselves and to those with whom we seek to engage to be clear about our starting point. We begin from a belief in the centrality of Christ in the plan of salvation for all humankind. We proceed from there to declare our understanding of Jesus, who He is, who is the God he revealed, and what is his message, having recourse to the Bible and to the work of the Fathers of the Christian tradition. We will be guided in this by reference to the Magisterium, thus avoiding getting involved in theological debates surrounding such issues. Then, with the guidance of de Lubac we propose to work towards conclusions and determinations as to how best, while maintaining Christ's uniqueness, to offer Him to India in Indian garb, and from there to pursue authentic Hindu-Christian dialogue. De Lubac restored pride of place to the Scriptures and a return to what is of value in the Christian tradition. He validated bringing methods of historical criticism to bear on Biblical interpretation and also taking issue with some elements of the Roman Catholic tradition of apologetics. Beyond that he endorsed the search, also critically, for the workings of God's Spirit in other religious, in cultural and philosophical traditions, and in the discourses of the world now and everywhere.

Chapter Six will focus on a restatement of dialogue as compelling, necessary and wholly endorsed by Vatican II. In this final chapter we propose that by putting de Lubac's method into practice we can contribute to the evolution of mutual understanding between these two religions. Having set out the cultural and inter-religious contexts for the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding between Hindus and Christians it is appropriate by way of a conclusion to indicate how at a practical level what forms such engagements might take place, and how such encounters meet Henri de Lubac's core Principles of Auscultation and Catholicity**.** In the domain of theology there is need for practical approaches; we cite examples of such initiatives undertaken by the Church and suggest a framework of definitive steps that are warranted. The existence since the beginnings of Christianity of the Syriac churches in Kerala, with a foundational history of groundedness in Indian culture and mutually respectful relationships with Hindu neighbours, is of pivotal relevance to Hindu - Christian dialogue throughout India today.

[46]Henri de Lubac 'The Light of Christ' in *Theology in History*.' Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) 428-439.

We reflected on the current state of inter-religious dialogue in India which is a story of both progression and regression with account needing to be taken of both. In particular there is the primacy that must be accorded to dialogue in the arena of day to day interaction between Christians and Hindus, informed and guided by theological deliberations but outside the halls of academia. With this in mind we take note of the voices and writings of Hindus who claim no scholarship but only a dedication to their religion. De Lubac's way of doing theology is his conviction that the Spirit of God knows no boundaries. Not only the Scriptures but the wisdom of the ages, religious, and philosophical, as well as the empirical sciences, are all channels through which God speaks. I have found myself travelling in unexpected directions in search of resources that might enhance Hindu-Christian relationships. There is also listening to and learning from the Hindu cultures, its literature past and present, its social analysts, and of course its theologians and spiritual writers.

It has been a concern of this study to make connection between the domain of theology and the world of daily living, which must be the primary locus of dialogue. Also, within theological considerations, this study has attempted to indicate ways to offer Christ in Indian garb to its people, and to try to utilise dialogue with Hinduism to facilitate a process of inculturation within the Church, informed by Hindu and Indian culture and values.

This thesis, in its examination of how to promote theological dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity identified a number of promising avenues of exploration that identified points of convergence. To conclude our study, we shall evaluate to what extent the de Lubacian method and his Christological insights have moved Christian-Hindu relationships forward and how and where, it might lead us in the future.

CHAPTER 1
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

1 Introduction

Research on the issue of inter-religious understanding among the diverse religions and cultures in India is of interest to many. For the purpose of our study, specific aspects of this research will be identified and dealt with in depth. An objective here will be to identify the current state of inter-religious understanding and dialogue in order to signal a way forward in the light of the insights provided by Henri de Lubac and the deliberations of Vatican II documents. We will also examine the contribution of the Indian Church, and theological developments world-wide, that pertain to our study.

The Vatican Council issued a challenge to us to be open to the possibility that the one true God is active in non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Responding to this challenge becomes all the more urgent with the advance of globalisation and its attendant tensions between nations and cultures. Gorski's "Theology of Religions"[47] is an especially valuable resource and guide in the exploration of the meaning and value of non-Christian religions. Religious pluralism is a reality of our globalised world; different religions inhabit the same geographical space and that makes inter-religious dialogue a central issue in our time. The Church had previously maintained that it is the only means of salvation and was dismissive of other religions.[48] If we are to be Christian, we are compelled to seek conversations with those who are different. We need to come to grips with the term 'dialogue' and make earnest and meaningful engagement in this direction. The mission of the Church now involves not only proclamation but also dialogue.

1.1 Defining Inter –Religious Dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue is defined variously according to the different emphases given to it. In the most widely used definitions it refers to conversation and co-operation between leaders or members of different religions for the purpose of better understanding and working on joint projects.[49] Maurice Wiles conceives dialogue "as a genuinely reciprocal process, in

[47] Eugene F. Gorski, *Theology of Religions: A Sourcebook for Inter-religious Study* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2008), 24.
[48] Jose Koodapuzha, "Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue," in Thomas Padiyath ed., *Star From The East,* Festschrift in Honour of Archbishop Joseph Powathil (Delhi: Media House, 2013), 614.
[49] John Beversluis, *Sourcebook of the World Religions-An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality* (New World Library: California, 2000), 159.

which the two parties stand on an equal footing of readiness to receive as well as to give."[50] Mutual understanding generates harmonious co-existence. It requires mutual respect on the part of all participants.

The term is frequently used to refer to situations where people of different faiths engage in common celebration and religious meetings. In all its expressions it involves mutual encounter at a deeply human level, in an exploration of what may have been hitherto latent.[51] It has been promoted as a way of peace, reconciliation and love among all people. Humanity is one and has one ultimate destiny, God, whose providence, goodness, and plan for salvation extends to all[52]. In our globalised world we need to unite with those of other religions and none, in developing togetherness, sympathy and understanding, cooperation and solidarity, so that we can develop a mutual understanding of each other's positions. In the reality of global conflict, which often involves religion being used by conflict entrepreneurs as a weapon, religion's role in peace- building makes inter-faith dialogue obligatory. In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means "all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment," in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.[53] While each religion has its own ideals and ideas and each community has its own traditions and beliefs, it is only through dialogue that we can enter into the life-stream of our neighbours and acquaintances of all faiths. Dialogue is a means towards communal action leading to change. It is essential that the current, globalised world hosts more contact between cultures previously perceived as alien to each other. This promotes more opportunities for engagement and develops our respect for others and for God. It allows us to begin to acknowledge that truth and love transcend our own human reality and help to bring us closer to the divine reality.

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[50] Maurice Miles, *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue* (London :SCM Press,1992),4.
[51] Raimond Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983), 242-243.
[52] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate,* 1, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, 28 October 1965, in *AAS* 58 (1966), 740-744. Flannery A., ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Bombay: St. Pauls Publication, 1995).
[53] This view is developed in the two documents produced by the Pontifical Commission for Inter-religious dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Inter-religious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Rome 19th May, 1991), is a joint document of the Pontifical Council for Inter- religious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples. No.3. The attitude of the Catholic Church towards the followers of other Religious Traditions: reflections on Dialogue and Mission (984) and Dialogue and Proclamation (1991). For details, Joseph Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu, Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions*, (Carmel International Publishing Centre: Trivandrum, 2009),219-22.

1.1.1 Dialogue: An Element and Expression of Human Nature

Inter-religious dialogue fundamentally affirms the relatedness of human beings and at the same time the need and quest for all to live together.[54] The human penchant for separating ourselves into 'them' versus 'us', in denial of our one-ness and interdependence, creates a competitive, if not confrontational, relationship between religions. Dialogue aims to counter those dynamics, where there is a positive atmosphere with a genuine spirit of being exposed to and understood by the other party; both of them grow, subject to and under the influence of the other. Dialogue is 'a common, shared and concerted search for truth,'[55] related to oneself and one's religion, one's existence and existential context.

Appreciation of 'the other' in dialogue does not equate to an embrace of the other's beliefs and principles and a leaving aside of one's own tradition. Instead, it is about engaging beyond our boundaries and returning, enriched: "This growth is not a conversion of the one to the other, blindly following the ways and lifestyles of the other, but a genuine search and finding of one's own self in the context of another's saving, liberating and non-dominating presence."[56] In this sense, inter-religious dialogue is an extension of the inter-subjectivity of human nature. Gabriel Marcel calls this ontological dimension of human nature 'inter-subjectivity' while Martin Buber calls it 'I-Thou relation'.[57] For theologians today the relational dimension of dialogue is the key. Something more than verbal exchange is required. Gestures of solidarity, action together and even silent presence are called for. The importance of non-verbal communication should not be underestimated.[58] The inter-relatedness, mutuality and complementarity of human persons are central to the identity and function of the Church itself. Naturally this anthropology of perceiving a human person's uniqueness, relational dimension and equality could also serve as a foundation and steppingstone for discussions and dialogue with other religions.[59] In this sense, dialogue with other religions is not so much a new concept as a reality which has become a requirement in contemporary times.

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[54] Jose Koodapuzha, "Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue," 615.
[55] Maurice Wiles, *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue, 39.*
[56] Vincent Sekhar, *An Anthology of Religions in Dialogue*, (Bangalore: Claretian Publications,2008),8.
[57] Martin Buber insists that "only in relation with a Thou can a person become an I" and at the present day theologians and anthropologists try to present it as relational dimension of human beings. See, J. Koodapuzha, *Human Dignity*, Kottayam: OIRSI Publications, 1998), 205.
[58] See Michael Fitzgerald, *Developing Dialogue*, 1, Urban Dharma, 2002-2006.
[59] J. Koodapuzha, "Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue," 616.

1.1.2 Characteristics of Dialogue

(a) Dialogue is the opposite of monologue: Inter-religious dialogue is never an attempt to communicate truth to the other in a one-sided way.[60] Two persons coming together to talk about their truth concepts while holding fast to them as absolute will not serve dialogue. It does not at the same time mean the gelatinisation of religious truths and commitments to the detriment of their uniqueness and worth. On the contrary, any approach and attempt to dialogue is fundamentally oriented to the deepening of one's own religious commitments by sharing it with the other, supported by one's own experience. It maintains a profound respect and reverence for the religious tradition of the other, and his experience, assisted by a deep and loving openness and concern to learn from the other.[61] Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio,* referring to the importance of dialogue, makes this comment:

> Those engaged in dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or closed-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles or false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstanding.[62]

(b) Dialogue is a need of the time: The modern world is characterized by both mutual closeness and mutual distancing. It has become closer due to the development in transport and communication and it has become distant because of the extremist and partisan mentality developing among nations, religions and persons. It is in this context that dialogue between religions gains value. V.F. Vineeth makes a prudent observation in this regard:

> One religion earnestly encountering another religion is also moved to see itself in the other. In a way every man is reflected in the other person whom he encounters, ultimately because both share the same human nature. Seen from the perspective of Christian faith both participate in the same humanity of Jesus Christ. In the same way both religions encountering each other somehow reflect man's quest for self-transcendence and his need to relate to the ultimate which, of course is understood and articulated in different religions in different ways. Some of these articulations are so

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[60] J. Koodapuzha, “Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue”, 617-620.
[61] J. Russell, "Plurality of Religious Faith and Living in Community," S. Rao, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue and World Community*(Madras: The Christian Literature Society,1991),165.
[62] Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* On the permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate, 7th December 1990, No. 56.

> inspirational that a close contact with a person who earnestly follows his religion really calls one to rethink the mystery of his own religion.[63]

In this sense inter-religious dialogue should be perceived as an attitude and activity of committed and dedicated people of various religions with an aim to encounter each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect and esteem. Resulting from this we can both arrive at a common ground where we can live and act together, contributing to the peace and development of our society.

(c) The motive of Dialogue is mutual enrichment: Relations with people of other religions can degenerate into rivalry or be contaminated by a polemical spirit. Where the relationship is positive, it will lead to admiration for what is good in the other religion. There occurs a mutual enrichment in the process of dialogue which widens and deepens our religious experience, complements it, and clarifies and sharpens our framework.[64] Dialogue always helps to find and clarify the interrelatedness and the thread that links different religious concepts and convictions. It enables one to gain insights into the life of oneself, others and the whole created world. In this process one cannot reject the possibility of confusions, contradictions and even opposition. But they can be used for further clarification and can prompt the person to search for unifying elements and parallelisms in other religions in line with the belief that "It is through dialogue and common work that all such matters can be clarified, hindrances overcome and progress achieved."[65] This statement is to be read in conjunction with the statement of Pope Paul VI that in dialogue "our purpose is to win souls, not to settle questions definitively."[66]

Dialogue and salvation are interlinked through God's relationship with humanity where the salvific act of God occurs within an affective dimension.[67] Hence the importance of the following statement:

> Inter-religious dialogue at its deepest level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue

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[63] V.F. Vineeth, "Dialogue and Theological Development," in A. Pushparajan ed., *Pilgrims of Dialogue,* (Munnar: Sangam Dialogue Centre, 1991), 212-214.

[64] Jose Koodapuzha, "Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue,"618-19.

[65] I. Puthiyidam, "Theology of Religions in the Indian Context," in K. Pathil (ed.), *Religious Pluralism - An Indian Christian Perspective*, (Delhi: ICPK1991), 222.

[66] Even when the discussion in Vatican II was in full swing Pope Paul VI dared to choose dialogue as the fundamental theme of his encyclical Ecclesiam Suam, (August 1964), No, 63.

[67] It is a part of the dialogue that God had made to humanity in history. Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* tries to present the whole relation between man and God as a dialogue. God through the creative act entered into a dialogue with mankind and mankind in return dialogues with God through prayer. The different aspects of dialogue between God and man is explained in art. 71-77 of *Ecclesiam Suam.*

> which God maintains with humanity. An open and sincere inter-religious dialogue is our co-operation with God's ongoing dialogue with humanity. By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore a work desired by God, an integral element of the Church's evangelizing mission which finds expression in the service of faith and promotion of justice.[68]

(d) Dialogue is seeking truth together: The nature and function of Truth in a dialogical relationship need to be more carefully explored. What sort of Truth are we talking about in the context of inter-faith dialogue? Truth in religious experience is much more participatory than speculative; as Paul Lehmann says, "it expresses a movement and a relationship in which people are caught up and involved."[69] To participate in truthful dialogue involves being opened to each other in all honesty, both affirming and criticising when necessary. Dialogue means speaking truth in love. As qualities for inter-religious dialogue, *Ecclesia in Asia* observes that 'inter-religious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, and that a willingness to listen and a desire to respect and understand others is indispensable'.[70] This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment.

2 The Church and Inter-Religious Dialogue

Church history has been constantly punctuated by encounters with other religions which have elicited many different responses. On many occasions it was unfairly guided by the principle that there is nothing to be appreciated in other religions as Christianity was the only divinely willed or divinely revealed religion. Where the main consideration was to bring other people to Christianity the Church found itself in a defensive or polemical situation, with the result that other religions began to view the Church and its activities with contempt or suspicion. Statements by Catholic leaders from the 6th to 15th century declared that no one would experience salvation unless they came into the fold of the Holy Roman Church. Pope Eugene IV in *Cantate Domino*,[71] proclaimed in 1442 that such people were excluded from salvation. This was in line with the thought of the Council of Florence.[72] The Protestant Reformation

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[68] "Evangelization and Inter-Religious Dialogue - Final Presentation," *Bulletin of the Secretariat* 82 (1993), 6.
[69] Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics* (London: SCM Press,1976), 63.
[70] *Ecclesia in Asia*, 31.
[71] The Trinitarian dogma of the Church is explained in Pope Eugene IV's Papal Edict *Cantate Domino* and in this context he reiterates the Church's view on necessity of the Church for salvation. The term *Cantate Domino* means 'sing to the Lord.'
[72] Council of Florence (1438-1445) states that "no one outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews and heretics and schismatics can share in eternal life, but will perish in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. "Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1351. For details, Koodapuzha, "Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue," 618-19.

introduced only a minor modification to the Catholic position; for Martin Luther salvation was only accessible to Christians.[73]

In the fifteenth century however, we find Nicholas of Cusa bringing a different perspective, one that is closer to the present-day concept of dialogue. He speaks of a vision he had in which he saw how differences between warring sects were permanently reconciled in a vast system of religious unity". In his vision, pagan and Christian are jumbled up in a remarkable order as it features a Greek, an Italian, a Hindu, an Arab, a Chaldean, a Jew, a Scythian, a Persian, a Syrian, a Spaniard, a Tartar, a German, a Bohemian and finally an Englishman.[74] According to the vision there occurred, or will occur, a time when all religions come together and live together in mutual respect and esteem, instead of mutual alienation.

Despite the dream of Nicholas of Cusa, centuries have passed without systematic, sincere and serious attempts being made to enter into meaningful dialogue with other religions. But with the Second Vatican Council, the long maintained negative approach to other religions gave way to a meaningful recognition of them. The Council came up with the historic statement that elements of salvation and the spirit of God are present and active in other religions. The Council Fathers signalled the need for an attitude of appreciation and respect for other religions on the part of the Catholic Church. The statement of Vatican II was very warmly received from all parts of the globe, especially in those regions where religions existed side by side. From this point on the study of other religions[75] became normative within the Church. The concern that an exclusivist mentality would persist and would keep the Church alienated from other religions and communities, led to the formation of the Secretariat for Non-Christians by Pope Paul VI on 19 May 1964. It was later renamed as the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue on 28 June 1988 by Pope John Paul II. The Church has taken the lead in opening up to other systems of faith, encouraging regular and systematic relationships.[76] The results of these encounters are becoming evident: a

[73] "Those who are outside Christianity, be they heathens, Turks, Jews or even false Christians and hypocrites... cannot expect either love or any blessing from God, and accordingly remain in eternal wrath and perdition." Luther, *Larger Catechism* II, 3.

[74] M. Wiles, *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue*, 10.

[75] Religion implies all acts of worship which the human person renders to God, and thus the moral habit which inclines the person to perform such acts in the natural and supernatural order. See, P.Palazzini, "Religion "in Pietro Palazzinie, ed., *Dictionary of Moral Theology* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1962),1030.

[76] To foster the work of dialogue, Pope Paul VI set up in 1964, the Secretariat for Non-Christians later renamed the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. The Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Dialogue has published a collection of the Interventions of the Pontifical Magisterium with regard to Inter-religious Dialogue

genuine respect for the moral, spiritual and psychological values present in each tradition, a search for common ground, and a sense of universal responsibility for the planet, as a whole, in all of its dimensions of need. The Pontifical Council is endowed with the responsibility:

(a) to promote mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of other religious traditions; (b) to encourage the study of religions; and (c) to promote the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue.

2.1 Positive Approach to Other Religions and Living Dialogue

The whole human race has the same origin and destiny. According to Stanley J. Samartha, "the universal saving will of God in relation to humankind, the presence of the resurrected Lord and the action of the Spirit are not exhausted within the confines of the Church."[77] Discerning God's ways and the working of the spirit beyond the borders of the Church, and of our own cultures, is a duty incumbent on us. It is of crucial importance to realise that only in an atmosphere of respect, appreciation and living dialogue can genuine inculturation take place. Hyun Kyung Chung, points out that: "Every religion and theology is influenced by its social location. Class, race, gender, caste and the cultural dynamics are playing important roles in the formation and the development of the specific religion and theology."[78] It is much more than a matter of comparing and contrasting theological concepts; culture and context, historical and current must be part of the deliberations.

We can recognise within all religions a shared locus of religious experience. Aloysius Pieris suggests that in our contemporary world, the struggle for liberation and for the transformation of this world provides a cross-cultural, cross-religious basis for defining and sharing religious experience among all religions: "I submit that the religious instinct be defined as a revolutionary urge, a psycho-social impulse, to generate a new humanity."[79] The dynamics of dialogue and the role of the Spirit are integrally connected. It would appear that the partners are taken over and led by the Spirit, in dealing with the subject matter of the dialogue. Both partners in dialogue commit themselves to a mutual search for truth, in which the role of the transcendent, the presence of the Spirit, is made manifest.

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since 1963. For details see Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Dialogue, *Inter-religious Dialogue -The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church* (1963-1995*),* Boston, 1997.

[77] Stanley J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1981), 63-67.

[78] Hyun Kyung Chung, "Asian Christologies and People's Religions" *Voices from the Third World,* XIX (June 1996), 215.

[79] Aloysius Pieris, " The place of Non-Christina Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of the Third-World Theology,"*in Irruption of the Third World challenges to Theology,* Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres. eds., (New York: Orbis 1983), 134.

2.1.1 Searching for Harmony Through Inter Religious Dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue involves not only communication between two believers at the religious level but at the level of hearts and minds [80] and it must be accepted as a legitimate activity of the Church.[81] First of all there must be a felt need for inter-religious dialogue in order that it be successful. In this pluralistic world, we know that within each religious community there is a spectrum of opinions regarding 'the other', ranging from hostility, to tolerance, to cooperation. Against this, those who believe that dialogue is the right approach will have to explain to, and convince others within their own community, that dialogue is a better alternative than conflict.[82]

Pope John Paul II's call to the world's major religions in 1986 in Assisi, to join with Catholics in inter-religious dialogue and to pray for peace, electrified the world[83]. This allowed participants to build bridges and probe the depths of each other's beliefs while recognising that, for all people, the ultimate desire is to understand the transcendent, in so far as is humanly possible, irrespective of religion or era. In inter-religious dialogue, we are involved in a partnership which can enable us to search for some fundamental answers to queries like "Who are we? What is our common destiny while living here and now?" As a human family we are bound together not by trauma, tragedies, and difficulties but by our common undertaking of the sacred dignity of each human person rooted in the transcendent. It is essential that while we are building bridges along those common pathways, which allow us to recognise the differences existing between us, we must not allow them to become barriers, obstacles or sources of antagonism.

3 Religion Shaped by Culture

All religions have developed in cultural contexts and appear to the world in cultural garb. Those seeking dialogue need to be able to distinguish between the culture in which it has become clothed and the transcendent truths to which it is pointing.[84] There are different

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[80] See, Francis C. Arinze, *Church in Dialogue: Walking with Other Believers* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 332.

[81] Arinze, *Church in Dialogue: Walking with Other Believers*, 333.

[82] See, Paul Mojzes, "How Inter-religious Dialogue can contribute to a Bright Future for Macedonia", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* xxxix (2002) 12, 5.

[83] Day of Prayer for World Peace was celebrated in Assisi in October 1986, 1993 and on24th January 2002 with the participation of the leaders of all world religions.

[84] There is a very different view of what religion is depending on whether one is viewing it from a Western or an Eastern perspective. Looking at it with western eyes, Rudolf Otto, the famous German theologian, presented the essence of religion as awe, incorporating a mixture of fear and captivation before the Divine Lord. However, such an explanation was totally inadequate when attempting to explain the Eastern religions or the primitive religions where they place much greater emphasis on immanence rather than transcendence. Consequently, anthropologists such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) described religion as a "feeling of absolute

views of what religion is depending on whether one is viewing it from a Western or an Eastern perspective. Looking at it with Western eyes, Rudolf Otto, the famous German theologian, presented the essence of religion as awe, incorporating a mixture of fear and captivation before the Divine Lord. However, such an explanation was totally inadequate when attempting to explain the Eastern religions or the primitive religions where they place much greater emphasis on immanence rather than transcendence. Consequently, anthropologists such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) described religion as a "feeling of absolute dependence", the experience of which caters for an understanding of faith traditions in a much wider perspective. His contribution to the development of theology was that he fully reasserted the immanence of God and the centrality of religious experience, as an essential part of theological reflection.[85]

The depth of our religious understanding allows for "the otherness" in religion and it depends on how our lives are organised around the depth of a variety of experiences and greatly dependent upon the surrounding culture. Francis Clooney suggests that dialogue entails Christians developing the skills to be able to share each other's theologies in an environment that encompasses more than theology. He recommends the reading of the scriptural texts of the 'other' while recognising that this entails knowledge also of the language and culture.[86] The more he reads and is ready to learn, the more the Christian theologian can discern these 'seeds of the word' in the scriptural texts and writings of other faiths.

4 Recognising Differences

At the same time as recognising similarities between faiths, the theologian must also identify the differences. Clooney points out that one of the dangers of reading other texts and seeing parallels and differences is the danger for Christians of not being able to identify where there

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dependence", the experience of which caters for an understanding of faith traditions in a much wider perspective. See, Winston L. King, Religion, in Mircea Elaide, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 282-286.
Culture and religion are inter-dependent in helping to establish a social order. Modern advances in science, social science and technology has rested from religions the moral authority to fully explain the mysteries of life and impels religions to constantly dialogue with culture so that they can access the wisdom and knowledge emanating from such diverse backgrounds. Christian faith cannot exist in isolation as it is essentially cultural. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Culture", in: *Colliers's Encyclopaedia*, vol. 7, William D. Halsey and Bernard Johnston, ed.,(New York: Macmillan Educational Company, 1990), 558-560. See also, Jarich Oosten, "Cultural Anthropological Approaches" in Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion*, vol. 2, (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1985), 237-239.

[85] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Reden über die Religion,* English translation by Richard Crouter: *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19880), 22-23.

[86] Francis X. Clooney S.J., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 90.

is real difference of belief and understanding. If it is understood that Christianity and other religions are all versions of the 'same thing' or offering the same outcome, then there is a danger of trying to see the 'common core' that all religions have and then reducing them all to a homogeneous entity.[87] The focus of inter-religious dialogue is not on uniformity but on unity in diversity.

Theologians have a special responsibility to identify where there are important theological differences. A. Alangaram presents the Asian bishops' belief that the Church, in her dialogue with other religions, recognizes "the living faith of mankind.[88] We may agree on various things and disagree with others but we need to learn how to do this from the example set by those such as Roberto De Nobili. He illustrated a humility and courage by living as a Brahmanian in Madurai. Through wearing the sacred 'thread' Brahmins proclaim that they are high caste members in their society. By not wearing this thread, De Nobili showed that he identified himself with all castes including the *Dalits*.[89] This form of humility was a way of showing that Christian love and goodness were different from love and goodness in a secular society where humility counts for little. Christian humility here is based on faith and not on pretence.[90] During this debate regarding religious pluralism, Christians can no longer regard other non-Christian religions as foreign to them but, indeed, as their friends and neighbours. The most important issue is for Christians to have a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the reality of Jesus, Father and the Spirit in their encounters with religious pluralism.

The primary religious community for a person is, of course, the community of those who share the same faith as that person. There are complex challenges for all religions in multi-faith environments. For Christians it will obviously be the Eucharistic community[91], but at the same time, the human community to which a person belongs in a multi-religious situation, is not limited to the economic, cultural, social and political levels. There is also a community at an inter-religious level in which differences are to be explored and experienced in dialogue. The basic challenge for all is to ensure that religions are not a source of differentiation and division, but rather a help towards a common pursuit of liberation and

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[87] Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002),10.
[88] A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*: *Towards an Asian Contextual Christology* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1999), 188.
[89] *Theology and the Dialogue*, 143-148.
[90] Catherine Cornille, *The im-Possibility of Inter-religious Dialogue*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008),14.
[91] Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu, Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions*, 220.

wholeness. A Christian in a multi-faith situation who is working to bring about such harmony is visibly witnessing to the Kingdom of God.[92]

5 Vatican II: A Turning Point in the Christian Attitudes Towards Developing Inter-Religious Dialogue

The Second Vatican Council radically revised our concept of non-Christian religions. This was the first Council to deal with other religions and with the Church's relationships to them, adopting a positive and respectful attitude towards them. It marked the beginning of a new era in the realm of the Church and world religions.[93] The spirit of the Council involved openness to other religions, dialogue with them, in the spirit of '*aggiornamento*' (renewal), and appreciation of values contained in them.[94] It tried to recognise what is true, good, and holy in other religions and called for fruitful dialogue and collaboration to build a world community of peace, liberty and justice.

The Council encouraged dialogue and collaboration,[95] with an attitude of profound respect towards the world's religions.[96] It was the mind of the Council that "We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of the Paschal Mystery in a manner known only to God."[97] Thus, inter-religious dialogue can be taken as 'witnessing to one's own faith and way of life', while acknowledging, preserving and encouraging the spiritual and moral truths found among people of other religions. The Church asserts that God creates all men and all have the same goal, namely God. His providence, manifestations of goodness and His saving designs are extended to all men."[98]

In heralding a new openness to other religions, the Council was in fact re-asserting a traditional perspective.[99] *Ad Gentes* reaffirmed the theological thread from the patristic period, which acknowledged the value of elements in other religions in preparation for

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[92] M. Fitzgerald, "Developing Dialogue," 2.
[93] See, I. H. Victor, "Gospel, Mission and Dialogue: Second Vatican Council and Islam", in *Vidyajyoti,* 63 (1999) 4,267.
[94] See Bevans, Stephen B. and Schroeder, Roger P. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York, Orbis Books) 2004), 86.
[95] See *NA*, 2-4; *LG,* 16.
[96] *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 10, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, 7 December 1965, in *AAS* 58 (1966) 947-990. Text: Flannery A., ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, St. Paul's Publication, Bombay 1995.
[97] *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965, in *AAS* 58 (1966) 1025-1120, 22.
[98] H. Staffner "Mission Methods According to Vatican Council II", in *Indian Missiological Review,* 9 (1987) 1, 231.
[99] Bevans, Stephen B. and Schroeder, Roger P. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Maryknoll, 2004) 249.

receiving the gospel.[100] At the same time it can be asserted that the Council's proposal to adopt a more positive attitude towards other religions was a major shift from a long-standing more negative attitude towards them. It was the Indian Bishops, in fact, in the First Indian Plenary Council in 1950, who were the first group to offer such an approach when they declared:

> We acknowledge indeed that there is truth and goodness outside the Christian religion, for God has not left the nations without a witness to Himself, and the human soul is naturally drawn towards the one true God. With the passage of the centuries, serious errors have almost everywhere been mixed with these truths and this is why the various religions contradict each other even on essential points.[101]

Similar types of positive attitudes gradually grew in the Church and found a more complete expression in the documents of the Second Vatican Council."[102] The Council transformed the whole concept of the traditional understanding of mission when it emphatically stated "that the human person has a right to religious freedom and nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters."[103] The Church is guided by the faith that God, the Creator, wants to save all humankind in Jesus Christ. Eternal salvation is open to all. 'Its (Church's) mission should be oriented towards the universal fatherhood of God, and the Church should be able to witness to the unfathomable love of God revealed in His Son Jesus Christ.'[104] As a result, inter-religious dialogue became part of the ordinary lives and duty of every Catholic community. It is a sign of the love of God with respect to human liberty and allows every person to respond in his/her time and speed on the road to truth. Dialogue also protects religious freedom in discussions with other traditions while recognising and enshrining their dignity.

Following Vatican II, the Catholic Church took some positive steps to encourage better inter-religious relationships, both at official level in the activities of the Pontifical Council for

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[100] Robert Schreiter points out three theological developments in *AG* and other council documents that define the tensions that would underline the crisis of Catholic theory and practice of mission in the following twenty years.
See, Robert J. Scheiter, "Epilogue: Mission for the Twenty –First century: A Catholic Perceptive," in Stephen Bhavans and Robert Schroeder, eds., *Mission for the Twenty –First Century* (Chicago: Publications, 2001),34.
[101] Acts and Decrees of the First Plenary Council of India approved by Pius XII, 1950. No. 11.
[102] Jose Kuttianimattathil, "*Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," in Thomas Anchukandam, ed., *Towards a deeper Understanding of Vatican II and the Post-Conciliar Documents*, et al. (Bangalore: Kristujyoti Publications, 2001), 234.
[103] Pope Paul VI, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae,* December 7, 1965 No. 2.
[104] Bosco Puthur "Our Mission Today in the Context of Communalism Vs Religious Indifference", in *The Living Word*, 93 (1987) 6, 425.

religious dialogue, and at grassroots level.[105] Pope Paul VI continued in the spirit of Vatican II in 1964, when issuing his encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* which devoted more than half the document to discussing "dialogue." In 1974, The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC), in its document, *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, spoke of triple dialogue with people, culture and religions.[106]

Vatican II marked a turning point in the Church's history. It brought to an end an exclusivist interpretation of the statement of St Cyprian "Outside the Church there is no salvation" (*extra ecclesia nulla salus*').[107] We will address this issue to some extent in the light of Henri de Lubac's methodology in later chapters. The dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* states:

> Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with his grace strive to live a good life.[108]

Since the Council's declaration on religions recognises the profound religious sense that enlivens all these traditions, Catholics are called as never before to dialogue and collaborate with other religions, "with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, to recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral as well as the social-cultural values found among these men."[109]

5.1 *Nostra Aetate* Inaugurates a Greater Openness to Other Religions

An attitude of appreciation and respect for other religions was considered foundational for inter-religious relationship. *Nostra Aetate*[110] and other documents put on record the Church's

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[105] Paul F. Knitter, "Bridge or Boundary?: Vatican II and Other Religions," William Madges,ed., in *Vatican II: Forty Years Later*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 266.
[106] Evangelization in Modern Day Asia: Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly," no.12-15 (Taipei: 27 April 1974), in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 19991*, ed. Gaudencio B. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992), 14.
[107] Jose Koodapuzha, "Church on the Road to Inter-Religious Dialogue", 613.
[108] *Lumen Gentium*,16.
[109] *Nostra Aetate*,2.
[110] The history of *Nostra Aetate* is a little complex. It began with the wish expressed by Pope John XXIII that the Council should issue a statement on the Jews to clarify the Church's stand with regard to them. However, many Bishops from the East strongly recommended that the statement on the Jews should be enlarged to include all non-Christians; making an observation that the Council had given only two lines to two-thirds of the world. Suggestions also came that Judaism be treated not separately, but in the general context of the Church's relationship to other religions. Hence, the Pope set up the secretariat for non-Christian religions, which took up other suggestions concerning religions of the world. Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Re-Discovering Vatican II:*

vision and approach to other faith traditions. While *Nostra Aetate,*[111] which Pope Paul VI promulgated in October 1965, is not a long document, it has far reaching consequences for theological thinking. This document not only affected Catholics within the Church, it also opened doors and built bridges to members of the Jewish, Muslim and non-Christian religious communities. *Nostra Aetate*, the shortest in length of the conciliar documents, initiated a new era of reaching out in friendship with members of non-Christian religions. It has led to a positive appreciation of the values found in other religions.

The basic story of *Nostra Aetate* has been told a few times by those who helped compose it."[112] This document situated in a specific geographic and historical context. The context explains the specific attention to the Church's teaching about Jews and Judaism in the final document and its history of drafting.[113] The document *Nostra Aetate* originated as *Dei Iudaeis* from its early beginning before the Council in 1964. The influence of non-Western Bishops from Middle East, Africa and Asia widened the scope of this document to include other religions as well. As a result, its name changed into *Dei non-Christianis* in the last year before its proclamation in October 1965.[114] The change from a document on the Jews to a document about all non-Christian religions not only is a matter of politics but also has a deep theological root. The connection of *Nostra Aetate* with the "dialogue encyclical" *Ecclesiam Sumam* by Pope Paul VI from 1964 and with Vatican II's dogmatic constitution about the Church, *Lumen Gentium,* from the same year. A proper hermeneutical approach to the document *Nostra Aetate* can only be given by these historical and theological analysis.[115]
In promoting relationships among religions, the Church identifies common elements among them, especially awareness of a supreme being. In Hinduism, for example, Man explores the divine mystery and the various schools teach a way by which men can attain perfect liberation or supreme illumination through higher help. Of particular relevance to this study

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Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 125-129. See also, James M. Barrens, *In Our Time—Nostra Aetate: How Catholics and Jews Built a New Relationship* (St. Petersburg, FL: Mr. Media Books, 2015).
[111] The Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* " Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" no,1.
[112] Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., "The Declaration on Non-Christian Religions," in John H. Miller, ed., *Vatican II An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 335-348.
[113] Pim Valkenberg and Antony Cirlli, *Nostra Aetate: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Catholic Church's Dialogue with Jews and Muslims* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 6.
[114] Valkenberg and Cirlli, *Nostra Aetate: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Catholic Church's Dialogue with Jews and Muslims*, 6-7.
[115] Ibid., 8. For an insightful discussion of such a hermeneutics of the Council with application to the relations between the Church and Jews and Muslims, see chapter1, "Interpreting the Interpreters" in Gavin D'Costa, Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)10-58.

is the following reference in *Nostra Aetate* to the great religions of Asia, viz., Hinduism and Buddhism:

> Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus, in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical enquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through esthetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust …the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which…often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people.[116]

It is difficult to over-estimate the significance of the Church's acknowledgement of "what is true and holy in these religions" or that other religions contain "truth which enlightens all people". It is a declaration that the rays of truth of the all-illuminating God are present in other faiths.

The purpose of Pope John XXIII in setting up Vatican II was to open up the Church to a rapidly changing world. *Nostra Aetate* was the Catholic Church's declaration to non-Christian religions of a new form of engagement worldwide. The Church, having reflected on how, directly or indirectly, it had advocated certain practices which may have been less than welcoming for Jews, Muslims and other non-Christian religions, not only addressed these concerns but also created a foundation for engagement and dialogue with other faith traditions. Dialogue was promoted as a way to peace, reconciliation and love to all people. It was felt that it was important for dialogue to be mainstreamed within the mission of the Church and not regarded as an optional extra. In this way, it has become part of the ordinary lives and duty of Catholic communities everywhere.[117]

All this was affirmed by Pope John Paul II when he spoke on his first trip to India on February 1, 1986:

> My purpose in coming to India has both a religious and human dimension. I come to pay a pastoral visit to the Catholics of India, and I come in friendship with a deep desire to honour all your people and your different cultures. As I begin, I take this occasion to express my sincere interest in all the religions of India — an interest marked by genuine respect, by attention to what we have in common, by a desire to promote interreligious dialogue and fruitful collaboration between people of different faiths.[118]

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[116] *Nostra Aetate*, No, 2.
[117] Ibid., 2.
[118] See, John Borelli, " Why Hindu-Christian dialogue: A Catholic Reflection" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* (Newport University Newport News, Virginia, 2006)15.

Since1964, much more work on this issue has been done by both Catholic and Protestant thinkers, and this has led to an affirmation that God's salvific purposes may be worked out though non-Christian religious commitments. So we may take *Nostra Aetate* as an opening volley in the struggle against 'the old unhappy things and battles far ago'; quite certainly countless Roman Catholic people have taken it as a full mandate for interfaith dialogue.[119] It opens up a new horizon, liberating us from attitudes of hostility towards other religions and enabling us to embrace the followers of these.

6 Inter-Religious Dialogue and Evangelizing Mission

The document of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions, Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (1984), states that the evangelizing mission of the Church is a single but complex and articulated reality. It indicates the principal elements of this mission: presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; inter-religious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis.[120] Proclamation and dialogue are thus both viewed, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church. They are both oriented toward the communication of salvific truth.[121]

Unfortunately, the practice of dialogue raises problems in the minds of many. There are those who would seem to think, erroneously, that in the Church's mission today dialogue should simply replace proclamation. The Second Vatican Council defined the Church as "a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race."[122] In doing so it linked the identity and mission of the Church on the one hand with the unity of the human race on the other. There is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world. The Book of Genesis attests both that God created the human race as one and that each human being is created in the image and likeness of God.

There is a tendency in the Church, especially in India, to hold that certain truths have been superseded. These include the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture, the and the salvific universality of the

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[119] John Borelli, " Why Hindu-Christian dialogue: A Catholic Reflection",16-18.
[120] For details see *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* AAS:75 (1984) 816-828. For details, Joseph Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu, Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions*, 219-22.
[121] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 3.
[122] *LG* 1, 9; *GS* 42.

mystery of Jesus Christ. Such tendencies betray a false notion of inter-religious dialogue. The recent document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith strongly affirms that "Inter-religious dialogue, (therefore) as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission. In *Ad Gentes,* equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ - who is God himself made man - in relation to the founders of religions."[123]

6.1 Mission: Proclamation and Dialogue

The Mission of the Church involves both Dialogue and Proclamation: In *Novo Millennio Ineunte* Pope John Paul II very clearly affirms that the primary task of the Church is the mission to the Gentiles; missionary activity continues to be about presenting Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue insists that dialogue "cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation,"[124] while our missionary duty does not "prevent us from approaching dialogue with an attitude of profound willingness to listen."[125]

Following Vatican II, mission now has two essential and inextricably linked ingredients, namely proclamation and dialogue. Proclaiming the message of Christ for the salvation of the world must be carried out in conjunction with dialogue, while not being replaced by it. The command of Jesus to "Go teach all nations" (Mt 28:19) remains operative. Pope John Paul II teaches that not only individuals but whole cultures need to be transformed by the influence of the Gospel. In her attempts at evangelization the Church encounters different cultures, religions and socio-economic systems. Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that the social changes we had witnessed in previous decades had profoundly altered our way of looking at the world.[126] Advances in science and technology, profound changes in the economic sphere, mixing of cultures and races due to the recent phenomena of migration and globalization- have all affected the process of evangelization.[127] The Church is

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[123] Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Declaration Dominus Jesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ,* 22.

[124] Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, "Instruction on the Proclamation of the Gospel and Interreligious Dialogue: *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations"* (19 May 1991), 82. Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu, Ecclesial Vision,*219-22.

[125] *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, (*At the beginning of the new millennium*) is an Apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II, addressed to the Bishops Clergy and Lay Faithful "At the Close of the Great Jubilee of 2000" No,59.

[126] Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper,* Rome, 2010, No. 2.

[127] Now the new evangelization is a call to find our 'new ways of being Church in a changing world' (*Lineamenta* 9).

invited to analyse the present changes and challenges so as to propose new means of evangelization capable of incarnating Christian values into human cultures.

In common with the rest of the world, Indian society has been greatly affected by the problems brought about by globalization and migration. Evangelisation in India must pay attention to the particular context, including the rich religious and cultural heritage of the nation but also the gross injustice of the socio-economic conditions of the masses. The success or failure of mission depends on the capability of the evangelizing agency to engage with the particular context. The gospel is never preached in a vacuum. The mission of the Church in India is to a people with deep religious faith.[128] Despite all the richness of the Hindu religious tradition, there are elements that diminish humanity. Working for justice and development is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel. The Church should, in accord with her own honourable tradition, be the champion of the cause of the low castes and outcasts.[129]

Pope John Paul II was at pains to explain that dialogue was not meant to be a casual conversation or a slick way of bringing about conversion, but more "a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment."[130] This was a sure indication of his view that both sides of the discussion had much to gain and learn from the experience. Those involved in dialogue must be open to being questioned, purified and thoroughly challenged.[131] Christians involved in dialogue with other believers must also be prepared "to allow themselves to be changed by the encounter."[132] Pope John Paul II also clearly stated the Church's view on inter-religious dialogue in his encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*:

> dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but as an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep

[128] In presenting the faith to the non-Christians of India, the ancient Thomas Christians had their own unique ways and means. Through their life witness they tried to diffuse the gospel of Christ among their non-Christian brethren. There had been 'a life of dialogue' between the non-Christians and the Christians of India. See, Placid J. Podippara "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship" in the St. *Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. II ed., George Menachery (Madras: BNK Press, 1973), 107-112.

[129] Placid Podipara, *The Pre Sixteenth Century Church of the Thomas Christians of India and its Work of Evangelization,*(Changanacherry: Sandesanilayam, 1977), 77.

[130] RM, 55: DP 77. The encyclical*, Redemptoris Missio, On the permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*, was published by Pope John Paul II in 1990 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Ad Gentes* and the 15th Anniversary of *EvangeliiNuntiadi*. DP -Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and Proclamation Reflection And Orientations On Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel Of Jesus Christ.

[131] DP 32,49; RM, 56.

[132] DP, 47.

> respect for everything that has been thought about in human beings by the Spirit which blows where he wills.[133]

All of these pronouncements profoundly addressed the confusion that had prevailed previously within the Church and in theology, especially with regard to the salvific effect of Jesus Christ, the necessity of the Church for salvation and the relativism of the possibility of all religions being equally authentic and valuable.

In 2000, *Dominus Jesus*, the declaration by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith was written in response to the work of Asian Bishops struggling with pluralism and fidelity in non-Christian contexts, [134] as highlighted in our General Introduction. The fact that this document was ratified by Pope John Paull II is an indication of how seriously this issue was taken in assessing the truth value and theological status of non-Christian Religions. *Dominus Jesus* stated that "there is only one path to salvation and that is through the one and triune God, realised in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God, actualised with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value to all humanity and to the entire universe." [135] The multiplicity of religions in the world, the salvation of non-Christians and the irrelevance of distinctions between religions are central issues in the debate about religious pluralism. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger stated:

> … even the three basic lines of response in the present discussions about Christendom and world religions – exclusivism inclusivism, pluralism- are all determined by the way of putting the question: are other religions always treated as being ultimately of more or less equal value, always looked at from the point of view of their value for salvation?[136]

As already stated, inter-religious dialogue should always be a dialogue of respect as it strives to better clarify and understand the signs of the ever-present dialogue that God maintains with humanity.

6.2 Inculturation

Whether in proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to non-Christians or in dialogue with them there is need to take account both of the cultural garb in which our understanding of the

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[133] John Paul, *Redemptor Hominis*, 12.
[134] Eugene F. Gorski, *Theology of Religions: A Sourcebook for Inter-religious Study* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2008),vi.
[135] *Dominus Jesus,* no.12 The document *Dominus Jesus* attracted enormous attention and many Catholics and non-Catholics felt that what it asserted was out of step with the teachings and interfaith activity. However, it is stated that the CDF Declaration actually was issued by John Paul II and that it reflects his own thought on Christ, the Church, and the salvation of non-Catholics; and, that it does not hinder his inter faith activity.
[136] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian belief and world religions*, trans. Henri Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 17.

Gospel is attired and of the culture[137] of those with whom we are engaging. Inculturation is a dynamic process of insertion of the Christian message into the living culture of a people with a view to enriching that culture and enriching Christian life itself.[138] It is an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interpretation and assimilation of the values of a culture with Christianity in having an encounter. In this perspective inculturation is a two-fold process: (1) the assimilation of the Christian message and Christian values of the Gospel into the culture of a particular people, as well as the assumption of the local culture together with the local Christian living into the Gospel message. The Risen Christ does not belong to any culture. At the same time people must be able to know Christ as being 'at home' with them.[139] The process which enables this to happen is called inculturation. For those coming on mission from another culture it involves awareness of the cultural baggage which they themselves carry and at the same time a respectful inquisitiveness about the cultures they encounter.

Culture could be briefly defined as a way of life of a society or distinct group of people.[140] It finds its expression in the individual and collective behaviour of the people. *Redemptoris Missio* refers to two dimensions of inculturation: Firstly, there is seeking to integrate the authentic values and positive elements of the culture into the life of the Christian community. Secondly, there are enabling gospel values to influence cultures and to enhance and purify them. "Inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their insertion in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."[141]" Every culture needs to be transformed by the Gospel values in the light of the paschal mystery."[142] There is a renewed awareness of the need to acknowledge and take into account the semitic religio-cultural background into which Jesus Christ was born

[137] The culture of a people is generally described by anthropologists and sociologists as the integral way of people's life lived with a world view of a "collective unconscious" to which they give expressions by means of their language and signs of communications etc.
See, Sebastian Alackapally, CMI, *Inculturation and Interreligious Harmony of Life,* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019), 12-14.
[138] Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1991), 62.
[139] In the 1970s Cardinal Otunga of Kenya pleaded with European missionaries to desist from exporting 'entire forests' from Europe to Africa but instead to come with seeds, which, 'in this part of God's garden will become flowers that have never been seen before'.
[140] The term "way of life" refers to lifestyle, customs, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies such as those connected with birth, marriages and death, and much more.
[141] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* 1990, 52.
[142] Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Africa,* Post Synodal apostolic Exhortation, 2011, 61.

and from which his teaching emanates. The importance of this is underlined in the Vatican II declaration in *Lumen Gentium*:

> In carefully planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race, the God of supreme love, by a special dispensation, chose for Himself a people to whom he might entrust His promises. He entered into a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:16) and through Moses, the people of Israel.[143]

From this it is only natural that the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* emphasizes: "On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted the biblical world, or more concretely the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived."[144]

6.2.1 Inculturation: A Lengthy Process

Inculturation is not the responsibility only of specialists but must spring from the faith experience of the new community of believers. This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community's Christian experience. In effect inculturation must involve the whole people of God and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic '*Sensus Fidei*"[145] which must always be kept in mind. It must be the expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the

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[143] From time to time God sent to this people holy men and prophets to strengthen their faith in 'One God' and to keep among them the expectation of the Redeemer. The chosen people of Israel were of the Semitic culture and professed the Judaic religion. Christ was born into this community and the gospel was announced in the Semitic religio-cultural background. Thus, the religion and culture of Israel became a vehicle for the proclamation of the Gospel. Christ in his preaching, draws elements from their culture, their life-situations, symbols, sayings and signs they were accustomed to. We can fully understand the Gospel only in this religio-cultural context. If all these elements are dissociated from the Gospel, the significance and meaning of his words and actions become unintelligible. *LG* no 14.

[144] Pope Paul VI, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1975.

[145] *Sensus fidei* (sense of the faith), also called *sensusfidelium* (sense of the faithful) is, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "the supernatural appreciation of faith on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals." International Theological Commission *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church, (2014).
It is safe to assume that there was widespread acceptance, following Vatican II that the Spirit is very active among all the people of God in instigating, developing and sustaining a sense of faith. Francis Sullivan sees it as supernatural since it is initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit. In addition it is a gift that all of God's people receive from the Spirit. This actually implies that *Sensus fidei* applies not only to the Magesterium, a chosen few or indeed the Catholic Church but, indeed, to all Christians, since the sacrament of baptism has incorporated them into the Church. The existence of *Sensus Fidei* among all Christians has massive implications for the Catholic Church. The fact is that if the presence of the Spirit among the faithful is to be taken seriously, we must consider the *Sensus Fidei* and *Sensus Fidelium* of the whole of God's people, not only in matters of doctrine but also in a variety of important areas such as Church mission, practice, discipline, worship, interpretations, etc. This will most likely pose major practical difficulties as many Christian traditions have been involved in the historical development of theological patterns of thinking which has included local cultural outlooks in different areas without referring to the magesterium. Authors like Edward Schillebeckx, speaks about the authority of the faithful in the Church. See Schillebeckx," The Teaching Authority of all -A reflection about the structure of the New Testament", Concilium 4/180(1985). See, also F.A Sullivan, *Magisterium*: *Teaching Authority of the Church* (Dublin: Gill &Mac Millan, 1983), 21.

community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. According to Antonio Autiero in matters of moral theology, the magisterium should attend to the actual experience of those members, rather than basing their judgements solely on foundations of a deontological kind.[146] The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith.[147] Pope Paul VI also exhorted the Bishops of Africa on the process of inculturation. It will require an incubation of the Christian 'mystery' in the genius of your people in order that its native voice more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the Universal Church".[148]

Inculturation should not impair the integrity of Faith. Pope Paul VI teaches that when proclaiming the Gospel to the peoples of different cultural and social milieu; the content of the Catholic Faith, which the Lord entrusted to the Apostles, must be neither impaired nor mutilated. While being clothed with outward forms proper to each people, and made explicit by theological expression which take account of differing cultural, social and even racial milieu, it must remain the content of the Catholic faith just exactly as the ecclesial *Magisterium* has received and transmits it.[149] Pope John Paul II repeats the same demand:

> Inculturation must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christ, and Christian faith. Finally, Syncretism is to be distinguished from inculturation Syncretism occurs when elements from other religions- Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or Tribal religions are taken and inserted into Christianity, resulting in its distortion[150]

These dimensions of inculturation should inspire us as we travel along the road to inter-religious dialogue in the Indian context.

7. Inter-Religious Dialogue - A Duty of All

Some may consider inter-religious dialogue a marginal activity, something which can be left to a few experts. This is not the thinking of Pope John Paul II. He has presented his position

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[146] Antonio Autiero, 'The Sensus Fidelium and the Magisterium from the Council to the Present Day: Moral-Theological Reflections,' in Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam, eds., *The Sensus Fidelium and Moral Theology. Readings in Moral Theology* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017), 193-213.
[147] *Redemptoris Missio*, No 52.
[148] Pope Paul VI, Address at the symposium of African bishops in Kampala, July 31, 1969 - AAS 1969, p.577.
[149] *EN* No. 65
[150] It is sometimes of apparent similarity or incorrect understanding of the non-Christian element. The elements borrowed could be chants, symbols, postures, the architecture of the building etc. For example, celebration of the Eucharist in a squatting posture as the Hindus offer *pugas*. It is to be noticed that in certain instances the Hindu custom is standing posture. Another example of the misplaced use is the following verse:" "asato ma sat gamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrityor ma amrtamgamaya" (Lead me from unreality to reality, from darkness to light, from death to immortality). Here the supposed meaning of "sat" is "sathyam," and "asath" "asathyam" falsehood because of the similarity with Malayalam. The apparent reality and unreality is the result of "Maya". As long as the cycle of death and rebirth goes on things are seen as real, the darkness continues. Only Brahman is reality and truth. Identification of Brahman with self is the only solution.

very forthrightly in *Redemptoris Missio*: 'Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way.'[151] The Second Vatican Council had underlined the importance of dialogue already. The decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, states: Bishops should dedicate themselves in their apostolic office as witnesses of Christ before all men.[152] In other words, they are bishops not solely for the Catholics in their diocese, but for all its inhabitants of whatever religion or none they may belong to. They are therefore encouraged to establish relations on as wide a scale as possible:

> Since it is the mission of the Church to converse with the human society in which she lives, bishops especially are called upon to approach men, seeking and fostering dialogue with them. These conversations on salvation ought to be distinguished for clarity of speech as well as for humility and gentleness so that truth may always be joined with charity and understanding with love. Likewise, they should be characterized by due prudence allied, however, with that trustfulness which fosters friendship and thus is naturally disposed to bringing about a union of minds.[153]

This text mentions "bishops especially," since it is specifically dealing with the role of bishops. Yet the use of the qualifier "especially" shows that bishops do not have a monopoly of dialogue. In fact, here, as in other aspects of their ministry, they need the co-operation of all. Inter-religious dialogue provides a field for collaborative ministry. Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, says that in this area "the contribution of the laity is indispensable".[154] He speaks first about the example that they can give in their life situations, and also the relations that they can build up through their activities. Specific mention is made of the possibility of contributing through research and study.[155] Besides, CCEO, the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, binds the Eastern Catholics to be fully committed to the dialogue stating, "Dialogue and co-operation with non-Christians are to be eagerly and prudently encouraged."[156]

Though dialogue takes place between individuals, not systems, a passage from *Dialogue and Proclamation* suggests that even religions as such can be brought into dialogue. The Church encourages and fosters inter-religious dialogue not only between herself and other religious traditions, but even among these religious traditions themselves. This is one way in which she fulfils her role as "sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of

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[151] *Redemtoris Missio*57.
[152] *Christus Dominus* 11.
[153] *Christus Dominus* 13.
[154] *Redemptoris Missio* 57.
[155] Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu, Ecclesial Vision,* 220.
[156] CCEO Can. 592 #2.

communion with God and unity among all people."[157] She is invited by the Spirit to encourage all religious institutions and movements to meet, to enter into collaboration and to purify themselves in order to promote truth, and to live in holiness, justice, love and peace - dimensions of that kingdom which, at the end of all time, Christ will hand over to his Father (1 Cor 15:24).[158]

8 Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Indian Context

Jim Fredericks, in his experience of dialogue with Buddhism, states that dialogue at its best takes the form of a common search for a truth genuinely significant to both Buddhists and Christians. He further underlines the fact that dialogue which excludes argument and debate in the name of misguided *irenicism* often becomes barren and platitudinous.[159] Paul Lakeland stresses the imperative that globalization compels the Church to engage in explicit dialogue with other religions. [160] While dialogue is required everywhere, what sets India apart from the rest is the approach that it takes. Felix Wilfred highlights the fact that the Indian approach "is not concerned primarily to put forward new theories and theoretical constructs about the place of non Christian religions and debate about their salvific value" but "the concern is the existential and experiential encounter with peoples of other faiths with whom Christians live and interact every day."[161] This view chimes with that of Henri de Lubac whose call for auscultation is discussed later.

India is the birthplace of many faiths and it has accommodated multiple religions, not least the major world religions.[162] The Church must cherish the astonishing array of faiths, beliefs, and traditions in India that are central to the religious beliefs and customs of its people.[163] India cherishes the values of non-violence, and the spirit of pluralism regarding faiths, which made India receptive towards all religions. The religious pluralism of Indians and the massive adherence of its people to religious practice should be cause for celebration by the Church. They are manifestations of God at work.

A characteristic of Indian society has been its secular democracy. But the term secular has a different connotation in India from that of Europe. In order to preserve peace and order

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[157] *Lumen Gentium* 1.
[158] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 80.
[159] James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*: *Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2004), 109.
[160] Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds., *Constructive Theology*: *A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 219.
[161] Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations: The Journey of Indian Theology*,(Madras: University Publications), 225.
[162] Mattam, Religons, 14.
[163] Ibid.,15.

in a religiously and culturally diverse empire, the late 16th Century Emperor Akbar (Moslem) operated on the principle that the pursuit of reason rather than absolute reliance on religious tradition should be the way to deal with social issues and ensure social harmony. He laid the foundations of a non-denominational secular state. But his was not a secularism that excluded religion. Rather it allowed everyone to practise their own faith and indeed it also accommodated the long tradition in India of people who did not subscribe to any form of religious belief. The present Dalai Lama offers this traditional Indian concept of secularism as counterpoint to the European understanding of the word with its connotations of being alternative to religion. Far from implying antagonism towards religion it actually implies a profound respect for all religions and an inclusive and impartial attitude towards non-believers. While it found particular expression under Akbar, and nearer our time in Mahatma Gandhi and now also in the Dalai Lama, it actually has roots that stretch back more than 2000 years in Indian history.

Against this background, India could have much to offer the world as it wrestles with reconciling diversity. To this historical legacy the Church in India can draw also on Vatican II's vision of humanity as organically one in Christ. Tragically however that great historical legacy is being overwhelmed by the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and its increasing influence on Indian politics and society today. Tolerance has been a feature of India's secular democracy, but it is now threatened. Inter-religious dialogue is crucial to its recovery. The Church of Vatican II has a unique role in this.

As indicated in general introduction, in the context of growing nationalism, people discarded Christianity as Western and imperialistic. Stanles Jones describes the awakening of the national spirit in India demanded a new approach in the mission method: to relate the Christian in Indian culture and national consciousness movement.[164] Indian Christians attempted several ways to present Christ and Christianity in the culture and forms of Indian society and Christian *Ashrams*[165] were one of those attempts. Through these, they envisaged a national reconstruction and the establishment of a community in line with the Kingdom of God on earth. This kingdom centred mission praxis and showed solidarity with the people

[164] Stanle Jones, "The *Ashram* Ideal," in Indian Churches Problems of Today, ed. Brenton Thoburn Badley (Madras: Methodist Publishing House, 19300, 44.

[165] In the ancient Indian tradition, *Ashrams* were the abode of ascetics who lived in solitary life in devotion and meditation. See, Savarirayan Jesudason, *Ashrams, Ancient and Modern: Their Aims and Ideals* (Vellore: Sri Ramachandran Press,1937).

who struggle for equality, liberty, justice and freedom.[166] Henri de Lubac's respect for the dignity of other religious traditions and the expression of the firm hope of their fulfilment in Christ finds expression in these. The Church knows herself to be the sign of a gathering of all the nations; she extends an open door to all of humanity, whatever their circumstances or beliefs, for whom she sees her mission as being 'to serve and not be served'. This combination of respect for other religions and appreciation of one's own faith could lead us to fruitful inter-religious dialogue**.**

However, as mentioned above fundamentalism does pose problems within Hinduism and also is a problem too within the Christian Churches. Alangaram explains fundamentalism within the Christian Community as "the stance of the groups of Christians, who, by their behaviours and attitude, appear to isolate themselves from the great majority of Christian communities, refusing to accept the authenticity and legitimacy of the same communities."[167] De Lubac set great store on the desire of God, having created all humanity, wanting to save it. It would be difficult to imagine a better way of establishing effective mission and dialogue in India than doing so with a view to promoting the desire of God. De Lubac's theological method can be bridge that helps us to address these issues more fully in the concluding chapters.

9 Towards a Theological Method for Mission and Dialogue in the Indian Context

As already stated, inter-religious dialogue is compelling and necessary and wholly endorsed by Vatican II. We proceed to suggest ways of moving the process forward. Beyond the domain of theology there is need for practical approaches; we cite examples of such initiatives undertaken by the Church and suggest a framework of definitive steps that are warranted. We reflect on the current state of inter-religious dialogue in India. It is a story of both progression and regression with account needing to be taken of both. The challenge remains to deal with the historical legacy which has created the perception in India of Christ as foreigner. The term 'dialogue' permeates this text. It warrants some 'unpacking' as regards its various meanings, dimensions and its variations in different contexts.

The Church places the promotion of peace and harmony between people at the heart of its purposes. There is only one human community. It has only one origin and ultimate destiny, God, whose providence, goodness, and plan for salvation extends to all as declared

[166] Philipose Thomas, Christian Ashrams and Evangelisation of India," Indian Church History Review XI, no, 3 (December 1977):206-207.
[167] A. Alangaram SJ, *Christ of the Asian Peoples*: *Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*,182.

in *Nostra Aetate*.[168] The Second Vatican Council is inspired by a truly universal concern. We are to live our Christian Faith and pursue the vision of Vatican II by means of togetherness, sympathy, solidarity and co-operation. Ours is a religiously pluralistic world. Each religion has its own ideals and ideas; each has its own traditions and beliefs. Dialogue becomes compellingly relevant and necessary, given this reality. Since God is one, the world is one and humanity is one, we must find a way for Hindus and Christians to meet and cooperate at these vantage points to reinforce the religious life of humanity. It is at the very core of our responsibility to reach a mutual understanding between the respective faiths.

9.1 India on the Road to Dialogue

The present positions and insights in the Indian theology of religions are the results of a long journey involving many stages. In the past the relationship of Christianity to other religions was marked by confrontation and apologetics, issues which will be addressed by de Lubac's methodology in an attempt to bring about a fruitful resolution. Fortunately, people like Brahmobandhav Upadhyaya and Roberto De Nobili were, to some extent, a departure from these general trends.

In the nineteenth century, any religion other than Christianity was considered, at its best, as preparation for Christianity. Eric Sharpe states that Christianity was viewed as the fulfilment of the spiritual quest of humanity as expressed in their various religious traditions.[169] The 1982 Federation of the Asian Bishops' conference (FABC) reflected a shift from previous attitudes with its assertion that primary importance should be given to getting involved in the life of the neighbour next door. It is argued that dialogue promotes mutual understanding and enrichment through common prayer, sharing of experience and reflection; in this way we deepen not only our common realisation of the truth, but also our common commitment to assure a religious dimension to people's quest for a fuller life of peace, freedom, fellowship and justice.[170] The Conference challenged us to examine ourselves and to be faithful to our culture and to our mission: presenting Christ, the "true light that

[168] *Nostra Aetate*, 1.
[169] See Eric J. Sharpe, *Faith meets Faith: Some Christian Attitudes to Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: SCM Press, 1977).
[170] BIRA III, "Statement and Recommendations of the Third Bishops' Institute for Inter-religious Affairs, Madras India 20 November 1982", in G. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Vol. 1, Claretian Publications, Philippines 1997, 120.

enlightens all men,"[171] in a more appreciable manner, respecting the existing religious cultural traditions, and entering into sincere dialogue:

> Inter-religious dialogue is another integral part of evangelisation, which in the situation of our Churches needs to be become a primary concern. We live in the midst of millions of people belonging to the great religious traditions born in our sub-continent, to whom the name of Jesus their Saviour has not been proclaimed…In this context we believe that inter-religious dialogue is a true expression of the Church's evangelising action in which the mystery of Jesus Christ is operative, calling us all to conversion to him who is the fullness of truth and salvation. We would wish to see inter-religious dialogue become a reality at the grassroots level of our Churches, through greater openness and reaching out of all their members towards their brothers and sisters of other religious traditions….While the Church is the visible sign of the presence of Jesus Christ and his Spirit in the world, we believe that the same mystery is also present beyond the boundaries of the Church community and that our non-Christian brethren in ways unknown to us also relate to the mystery of the Church.[172]

Asian bishops regard the change of attitude in the Church's notion of other religions as a kind of liberation through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church today officially declares to the world that other religions are worthy enterprises and that she has to enter into dialogue with them.[173] The Catholic Bishops Conference in India (CBCI)[174] is one of the oldest Episcopal Conferences in the world. It has made a significant contribution to the development of the theology of inter-religious dialogue and has conducted major seminars organised by its commission on ecumenism and dialogue. It promotes the spirit and practice of dialogue in India with particular attention to Hindu-Christian dialogue. The documents of the CBCI offer a guideline for inter-religious dialogue, clarifying what the church means by it and providing the theological basis for it. This document is addressed to all Catholics in India, inviting them to be open to, and to foster dialogue with members of other religions.

Aloysius Perris and Paul Knitter provide much food for thought to assist us in reflecting on inter-religious collaboration. According to Perris the world religions can meet on two different levels. He depicts the first as a level of personal salvation with regard to the transcendent, whether through *Yahweh, Allah, Brahman* and *Nirvana* etc. The second is at the level of personal relationships such as charity, neighbourly love, fraternity, and *ahimsa*

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[171] Jn 1:9.
[172] FABC, *Discovering the Faces of Jesus in Asia Today, A guide to doing mission in Asia*, no 3.1, published in 1999. (FABC: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference).
[173] Gaudencio B. Rosalesr, C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For all the People of Asia* (Philippines: Claretian Publication, 1992), No. 258.
[174] See CBCI Commission *on Dialogue* (India,Varanasi 1977), 43.

(non-violence).[175] While Paul Knitter emphasises the second level, he still promotes the importance of the first level. His awareness of the great neglect of the second level is his main reason for his emphasis on it. In addition, he proposes that all religions should be grounded in 'a global responsibility in saving people:

> Yes, religion has to do with God or the Ultimate, and with life after death, and with altering or expanding our consciousness but it also has to do with confronting, specifying, and then repairing what is wrong in the way human beings live their lives together in this world.[176]

Knitter's assertion that all religions need to be as much concerned with life before death as with life after it; this factor represents a challenge for Hinduism, which in this study will be addressed in the context of convergence and divergence between the Christian and Hindu Faiths.

Knitter also presents four evolutionary models of the Catholic theology of religions: (1) Christ against religions, (2) Christ within religions, (3) Christ above religions, and (4) Christ together with religions.[177] In the past his theology was regarded as theocentric, a perspective which does not see Christ as being normative for salvation. However, it seems that he moves beyond *theocentrism* when declaring "The evolution in Catholic theology of religions must therefore move beyond *theocentrism* to *soteriocentrism*."[178] Hans Kung,[179] Lucian Richard[180], Raymond Panikkar[181] and many others are calling for inclusive Christologies so as to provide a new theological model for dialogue with other religions. Alan Race was the first to introduce a trilogy of perspectives - namely exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.[182]

a) Exclusivism states that salvation is available only through Christ and his Church. The conservative exclusivists approach proclaims that salvation is only in Christ and that there is little, if any, value in any other religion. Stanley Samantha explains that, in dealing with the place of Christ in a multi religious society, there may be reluctance to re-examine the

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[175] Aloysius Pieris, "The Church, the Kingdom and the other Religions" *Dialogue*, XXII (October,1970), 7.
[176] Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions* Preface by Hans Kung (New York: Orbis, MaryKnoll, 1995),100.
[177] Paul Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at Cross Roads," in *Christianity Among World Religions,* Hans Kung & Jurgen Moltmann, eds., (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986), 99-107.
[178] Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* (New York,: Maryknoll Orbis: 1985), 145.
[179] Hans Kung "Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Religions. Some Theses for Clarification," in *Christianity among World Religions*, 119-125.
[180] Lucian Richard, *What are They Saying about Christ and World Religions*? (New York :Paulist Press:,1981), 73.
[181] Raimundo Panikker, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man,* (Orbis: New York, 1973), 53.
[182] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*: *Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Obris Books, 1982), 56.

exclusivists approach. There is a possibility that it will have a negative impact on different groups attempting to live together in harmony and cooperation for the common good.[183]

b) Inclusivism sees salvation as available only through Christ, but it is available to others besides Christians. The inclusivist attitude recognises and accepts the salvific richness of other faiths but then views this richness as the result of Christ's redemptive work and as having to be fulfilled in Christ.[184]

c) Pluralism believes that salvation through Christ is but one of a number of ways of attaining salvation. The pluralists position moves away from the insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity towards a recognition of the independent validity of other ways. Langdon Gilkey emphasises the need for understanding of plurality where we must all accept the understanding of "parity "of esteem between religions. Vatican II and the Ecumenical movements have been central to the enhanced understanding between different denominations.[185]

Karl Rahner suggests that an exclusivist position poses a major problem for Christianity today. He is concerned about its endurance and virulent re-emergence from time to time: Maintaining that the Christian religion is "the one and only valid revelation of the one living God… must be the greatest scandal and greatest vexation for Christianity."[186] James Fredericks on the other hand states that each and every theology of religions must accept both the necessity y of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and the universality of God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is extremely difficult to see how these seemingly contradictory viewpoints can be accommodated. Fredericks continues to develop his exclusivist approach by explaining that "Christianity is the only true religion and that it is the only religion founded on Jesus Christ who is the unique and one true saviour of the world. He stresses that, while God's salvation is available to all, it can only be through Jesus Christ."[187]

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[183] See, Stanly J. Samartha "The Cross and the Rainbow Christ in a Multireligious culture" in John Hiick and Paul Knitter eds, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 69.
[184] John Hiick and Paul Knitter eds, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), viii-ix.
[185] See, Langdon Gilkey, "Plurality and its Theological Implications" in *The Myth of Christian Uniquness Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* eds., John Hiick and Paul Knitter (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 37.
[186] Karl Rahner, "Christianity and Non Christian Religions," *in Theological Investigations,* Vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 116.
[187] James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non Christian Religions,* (Paulist Press, New York: 1999), 14

Vatican II opened up the possibility of other religious traditions being seen as "paths" to salvation. John Paul II reinforced this teaching throughout his pontificate. Fundamental to our current topic are the questions of truth being present in other religions, in this instance Hinduism, and of the possibility of salvation for its followers by means of it.[188] Michael Amaladoss states, "in dialogue with other religions, the claim of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ has presented a problem while some theologians argue that it is not a problem for Christians in Asia in the context of dialogue."[189] Pieris explains that the Church has, in some cases, adopted a more convenient kind of uniqueness which she spells out in terms of the *theandric* (God Man Saviour) model. But this model makes no sense in many of our cultures where it often evokes the image of one of the many cosmic forces rather than of a Personal and Absolute Creator Redeemer. Moreover, it is totally untranslatable into some Asian languages, and suffers also from an ontology before which soteriology fades into insignificance.[190]

Felix Wilfred, meanwhile, displays great sensitivity in his portrayal of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ since he is very well aware of how serious the consequences of being too dogmatic might be for the theology of religions and for the practice of dialogue. Initially, Indian theology had hoped to maintain an openness and understanding towards other religions while, still at the same time, proclaiming the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. But in dealing with the concrete reality of trying to reconcile these two diverse points of view it had to take account of the fact that this assertion displayed a lack of respect for their experience of not having a divine saviour in their religion.[191] It is understandable that the followers of other religions might have felt aggrieved that Christians would insist that only their saviour was unique. This exclusivist approach was not conducive to developing mutual understanding or, indeed, to promoting cordial dialogue.

9.2 Voice of FABC in the Development of Dialogue

The Federation of the Asian Bishop's Conference (FABC) has stated that the starting point for dialogue is with the next-door neighbour. Being properly engaged in dialogue has the potential to promote mutual understanding and enrichment through common prayer, sharing

[188] While dealing with this issue a variety of views have emerged such as Ecclesiocentrism, Theocentricism, and Christocentricism, each of which places a particular emphasis on exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist outlooks.
[189] Michael Amaladoss, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A View from Asia,* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1998), 216.
[190] Aloysius Pieris, "Inter-religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm," *Voices from the Third World,* XV (December 1992), 186.
[191] Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*: 235.

of experience and reflection. In this way we are enabled to deepen, not only our common realisation of the truth, but also our shared commitment to ensuring a religious dimension to people's quest for a fuller life of peace, freedom, fellowship and justice.[192] It challenges us to examine ourselves and invites us to be faithful to our culture and to our mission, presenting Christ, the "true light that enlightens all men".[193]

We seek in our study to identify our point of departure in inter-religious understanding and dialogue, through utilising the insights provided by Henri de Lubac and the deliberations of Vatican II. That journey involves establishing clarity as to our own understanding of God, the universe, the inter-dependence of all that exists in the Universe and what God's plan might be for us in today's setting. To this end here we examine some contemporary trends in Indian Christology and consider various approaches to the interpretations of Christ in India. From all of this we must establish how best to engage, practically, in dialogue and collaboration.

10 Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology

Every Christology has its basis in a specific cultural context. Taking into account contemporary trends in Indian Christology, it is essential to consider the multi-religious context, the situation of poverty and discrimination in the name of caste and tribe.[194] The *Dalits* (SCs), and *Adivasis* (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constitute a significant part of the Indian population. The Church in India is not unaffected. Christians who work for the liberation of the Dalits suffer persecutions from the upper castes.[195] It is essential that we take account of the caste system when dealing with Christology in India.

In studying the Christian interpretation of Christ in India, Stanly Samartha expresses the opinion that Christ should not be regarded as the sole possession of Christianity.[196] Interpreting Christ in India had not been the monopoly of Christians, since some Hindus, such as Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekanadha and Mahatma Gandhi, are credited with finding a variety of serious

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[192] BIRA III, "Statement and Recommendations of the Third Bishops' Institute for Inter-religious Affairs, Madras India 20 November 1982", in G. Rosales , C.G. Arevalo , eds) *For all Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Vol. 1, Claretian Publications, Philippines 1997, 120.

[193] John 1:9.

[194] Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology," *Thomas Christian Heritage: Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre* Vol I (November 2008), 54.

[195] See S Vikrant, "Hinduism, Caste and Christianity," KristuJyoti 21 (2005), 312-326; "Elements of an Indian Christology" in J. Mattam & K.C. Marak eds., Blossoms from the East: Contribution of the Indian Church to World Mission, Mumbai 1999,91

[196] Stanly J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ,* (Tamilnadu, Madras: XLS, 1974) 177-84.

interpretations of Christ, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries[197] and this will be greatly elaborated upon in Chapter four. There have been serious attempts by many Christians to present Christ in India, but so diverse is the Indian context and so great the plurality of expression that we are unable to capture the richness of the mystery of Christ in a single Christological description. Roberto de Nobili, who became a *sannyási*,[198] did more than most to introduce Christ to Hinduism, through his praxis of inculturation. He was convinced that the message of Christ could only be incarnated in India by accepting the long-held religious heritage of the Hindus.[199]

Other Christian theologians of a Protestant background, Aiyadurai Appasamy (1891-1975) Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1929) and Vengal Chakkari (1880-58) followed a theology of *Bhakti Marga*[200] in their attempts to introduce Christ to Hindus. Samuel Ryan interpreted Christ with reference to a perspective rooted in Indian culture that it is essential to uphold the dignity of the human person while standing up for the poor, the marginalised and the untouchables. His Christology was developed in solidarity with the poor.[201]

11 Christian Interpretations of Christ in India

In light of the diversity of Indian Christology and the great number of theologians contributing to it, it is not possible to present all of the different Christologies. We will confine ourselves to a few of the different approaches employed by theologians under the guidance of the Indian Theological Association.[202] The following categorization is meant only indicate the major theological thrust of these authors.

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[197] "Jesus as the Teacher" by Ram Mohan Roy, "Christ as the Manifestation of the Divine(Cit)" by Keshub Chunder Sen, "Christ as the Embodiment of Divine Love" by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, "Christ as the Jeevanmukta" by Swami Vivekanada , "Jesus as the Messenger of Peace" by Mahatma Gandhi are only some of them. See,Malekandathil M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, (SCM Press: London, 1969).

[198] *Sannyási* is a Hindu religious monk who presented Jesus as a *guru* (teacher) or s*at-guru* (teacher of reality).

[199] Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations:* The journey of Indian Theology, (University of Madras,1993), 16.

[200] An Indian system of thought about the way of life to reach God. See, Antony Mookenthottam, *Towards A Theology in the Indian Context,* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corp, 1980), 13-14.

[201] See, Kirsteen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 138-142.

[202] See Indian Theological Association, Society and Church: Challenges to Theologising in India Today. Statement of the Indian Theological Association 26th Annual Meeting, Bangalore, 2003, 1-4.

11.1 Spiritual-Contemplative Approach

The spiritual-contemplative approach involves the Ashram movement in which Swami Abhishiktananda[203] appropriated Hindu spirituality into Christian theology, which has made a major contribution to inter-religious dialogue in India. His contribution lies in his incorporation of these ideals into Christian theology. He would claim that the Jesus of history is a phenomenon which is manifest as the real Christ of faith. Christ is *Sat-purusha* the real and definitive and true *(Sat)* man *(purusha)*. The Vedas and Upanishads[204] find their fulfilment in Christ, who is really the end of the Vedanta. He feels that every human being has a deeper and essential capacity to experience God within his heart. All the spiritual paths followed by different religions are integrated and fulfilled in Christ[205].

Bede Griffiths emphasises the mystical experiences that underlie both the eastern and western traditions when he describes mystery as "the truth to be found beyond all the formulations of the schools and beyond all revelations of the scriptures, in the inner depths of the heart, beyond words and thoughts, where the divine word is spoken and the mystery of being is made known."[206] He promoted the *ashram* model of life which put great emphasis on prayer and theological reflection. He viewed silence and meditation as being the best way of experiencing the resurrected Christ -an experience beyond *nama-rupa* (names and forms).[207]

11.2 The Intellectual-Theological Approach

In the theological approach Christian scholars enter into dialogue with the philosophical, cultural and religious traditions of India. Brahmabandab Upadhyaya[208] employed the *Vedas* as a platform to build up Christian theology and presented Jesus according to Indian culture and philosophy. He used the Vedantic understanding of Brahaman as *Saccidanada* (*Sat* = being, *Cit* = consciousness and *Ananda* = bliss) to explain the Christian doctrine of the

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[203] Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) was born in France in 1910. He was a Benedictine Monk who came to India in 1948. Together with Jules Monchanin he founded the S*accidananda* at Tannirpalli (Tamil Nadu) in 1950.

[204] These Hindu Scriptural texts provide a context for our study and will be greatly elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

[205] Gispert-Sauch, "Christ and the Indian Mystical Tradtition-Swami Abhishiktananda", Jeevadhara 28 (1998), 193-206; J. Kavinkal, "Elements of an Indian Christology", 93-95.

[206] Bede Griffiths, Return to the centre, London,1976, 107 as cited in J Kavunkal, "Elements of Indian Christology", 95

[207] See, A. Kolencherry, "South Indian Contribution to Subaltern Alternative Theologies", Indian Theological Studies, 40 (2003),130-133.

[208] Bhavani Charan Banerji, later known as Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907), was a Brahmin who was baptized into the Catholic Church. see J. Lipner & G. Gispert-Sauch,eds., *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadyaya,* Vols. 1-2,(Bangalore : Dharmaram Publications,1991),37.

Trinity. With regard to Vedantic thinking, there is no higher concept of God than *Nirguna Brahman*, the attribute less Absolute. The totality of this concept of God is best seen in the Catholic doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Christian God is seen as the supreme Brahman or *Saccidandanda*. Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the *Cit* of God is not seen as a specific aspect of God, the supreme Brahman, but actually as the supreme Lord. Upadhya attempts to present the one person of Jesus Christ as having both divine and human natures described by the term *Nara-Hari* (Man-God). He would not use this the term *Hari* as a proper name for *Vishnu* who is the absolute God in the *Vaishnava* Tradition in Hinduism. He used Indian categories to explain the mystery of the hypostatic union.[209]

Michael Amaladoss endeavours to rediscover an Asian Jesus in his presentation of a Christology which can easily be interpreted in India. He considers the interesting prospects of what names and symbols Asians would have adopted to show their understanding of Jesus had Christianity spread towards Asia rather than Europe. He declares, however, that no concepts or symbols can do justice to the mystery of Jesus Christ. It is felt that images should not be judged from a theological framework because there is a major difference in the language of images and theological principles from a given time and location. Rather than comparing images/symbols he would prefer that people search creatively for new images from the cultural context of India.[210]

11.3 Socio-Political Approach

The Socio-Political approach arises from the problems confronting the common people and involves many theologians in the struggles of the poor and the marginalised. Sebastian Kappen tried to formulate an Indian theology of liberation.[211] He implicitly believes that commitment to the message of Jesus can bring about a total liberation in the Indian context. He is convinced that through the rediscovery of the historical Jesus, we can restructure Indian society for the benefit of all. He invites us to leave behind our comfort zone of the orthodoxy of our faith and grace and to really study how to establish ethical conduct in our daily praxis. Kappen posits that the traditional interpretation of Jesus is one sided because it places much greater emphasis on His divinity than His humanity. Consequently, he presents Jesus in his humanity so that we experience Him, in His divinity. Christology must be interpreted in the context of the ingrained injustice and oppression so common in the social and religious

[209] F. Wilifred, *Beyond Settled Foundations* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1993), 19-36.
[210] See Michael Amaladoss, *The Asian Jesus* (New Delhi: SPCK, 2005) 16-18.
[211] Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom,* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), 50. Also see J. Parappally, "Sebastian Kappen's Vision of A Contextual Christology" *Jeevadhara*, 28 (1998), 236-252.

aspects of Indian society.[212] Central to the theology of George Soares-Prabu[213] is his belief that it is through the poor and the oppressed that God brings radical changes and transformation. The soul of his Christology is the Jesus of faith and not the Jesus of history or the Christ of faith. Jesus of faith refers to the Jesus encountered by his first followers and presented in the gospels.[214] His declared aim is to see the liberation of all people from all forms of alienation, oppression or discrimination irrespective of caste, colour, and gender or religion.

12 Hindu View of Christ

Having considered these different approaches it is essential that we present Christ's message with great respect for the philosophy, culture and vocabulary known to the Indian people and to construct a theology, appropriate to our context. But the challenge to do so is compounded by the perceptions that prevail about Christ and his message that relate to Christian mission to India that accompanied colonisation. As indicated in the general introduction, *Ecclesia in Asia* No.20 states that "Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus, who was born on Asian soil, as a Western rather than an Asian figure."[215] Culturally, Jesus is often portrayed as European and not Asian which has resulted in Christianity being viewed as Eurocentric. This is all the truer in India, where Christianity finds itself sharing space with and already long-established and highly developed religious traditions.[216]

Indian Christians need a Christ who is 'at home' in India. But our issue here is how to speak of Christ to Hindus in a way that can enable them to feel 'at home' with Him. Sadly, we are ill-prepared to do so, and we have to acknowledge that Christ and Christianity are still considered foreign to Indian culture and heritage.[217] Christianity in India is still presented with a "western" rather than an Indian "face." To be Indian and Christian at the same time and to present Jesus as our own, respecting Indian social and religious cultural heritage, in terms of our philosophy, our images and vocabularies constitutes a great challenge to Christianity in India today. For the sake of not only Christians, but also of dialogue with our

[212] J. Parappally, "Sebastian Kappen's Vision of a Contextual Christology", *Jeevadhara* 28(1998), 236-252.
[213] George M.Soares-Prabhu (1929-1995) is a biblical exegete and theologian from India.
[214] Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology,"56-59.
[215] Pope John Paul II, Post -Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* (November 6, 1999), no 20.
[216] Xavier Kochuparambil, *Evangelisation in India* (Kottayam: Vadavathoor, 1993), 210-12.
[217] The same idea is expressed by the Asian Synod, as we read it in *Ecclesia in Asia* 20: "In the opinion of the Synod Fathers, the difficulty is compounded by the fact that Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus – born on Asian soil – as a western rather than an Asian figure".

neighbours, we need to find a way of presenting Jesus as both Indian and Christian at one time, while still respecting all aspects of Indian social cultural heritage. More than a century ago Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, the father of Indian theology, covered it all when declaring:

> It is the foreign clothes of the Catholic faith that have chiefly prevented our countrymen from perceiving its universal nature. Catholicism has donned the European garb in India. Our Hindu brethren cannot see the subtlety and sanctity of our divine religion because of its hard coating of Europeanism. When the Catholic Church in India will be decorated with Hindu vestments, then will our countrymen perceive that she elevates man to the universal kingdom of truth by stooping down to adapt her to his racial peculiarities.[218]

There is a necessity for Indian theologians to present Jesus as an integral part of Indian culture and its way of thinking. It is only by doing so that it can help to allow Christ and Christianity to become fully established in the Indian Hindu religious thought process. This firmly places additional weight on the shoulders of theologians to construct relevant Christologies to promote Jesus from an Indian perspective. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II emphasises this identical point with the Synod Fathers stating:

> The Synod Fathers were well aware of the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking. They pointed out that such an inculturation of the faith on their continent involves rediscovering the Asian countenance of Jesus and identifying ways in which the cultures of Asia can grasp the universal saving significance of the mystery of Jesus and his Church.[219]

There can be no doubt that wherever the Church is called to proclaim the gospel she will have to encounter local cultures and religious traditions. As Pope Paul VI so correctly observed, "The split between the gospel and culture is without a doubt the tragedy of our time."[220] It is sad that this situation has pertained for centuries. In his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II stressed the *importance* of enculturation when stating:

> Through enculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.[221]

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[218] Brahmabandab Upadhay, "The Clothes of Catholic Faith", in *Sophia monthly*, August 1898, in Julius Lipner & George GispertI-Sauch eds., *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, vol. II, United Theological College, Bangalore, 2002, pp. 206-207.
[219] *EA* 20.
[220] *EN* 20.
[221] *RM* 52.

These sentiments chime with those of Henri de Lubac as we will see in the next chapter. Christians in India are challenged by the great religious tradition of Hinduism not only to live what we believe but also to penetrate the Indian culture and to construct the communication and dialogue necessary to share what we profess and propose. It is this encounter that highlights the necessity of developing contextual Christologies. Christian theologians in India deserve the highest commendation for continuing to hone in on these topics over many decades and devoting themselves selflessly to building up such contextual theologies. These will also play a central role in our deliberations below.

Indian culture and religious heritage provide the landscape in which the Church in India resides. It cannot live detached from it. Nor can it not engage in dialogue with the religions that share the landscape. The great and long-standing traditions of Hinduism present Christians in India with a major challenge to live out their beliefs authentically, while also immersing themselves in Indian culture. In addition, there is the necessity of building the dialogue and exchanges necessary for mutual sharing of what is professed and of developing methods for moving forward together. As a result, there is an inevitability about the development of an Indian Christology as it is impossible to separate Christianising from the essentials of dialogue and mission.

13 The Need for Definitive Steps

If we are to facilitate further dialogue with other religions effectively so that we might make the world a better and more peaceful place, devoid of religious and political extremism we need to take definitive steps.

1. Broaden the Horizons: Dialogue is not just the responsibility of a few "experts" but is a mentality that is a fundamental basis of being a Christian. The universality of Catholicism as emphasised by Henri de Lubac, demands that all who belong to this faith maintain and project an attitude and spirit of dialogue.

2. An Ongoing Dialogue: Interreligious dialogue should be completely built into our daily lives and not something to consider only when meeting people of other religions in formal or informal settings. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC)[222] has been to the forefront in placing huge emphasis on promoting interreligious dialogue as a new way of being the Church.

[222] Bira IV/12 Statement of the Assembly, "Dialogue thus calls us into a New Way of Being the Church", R. Gaudensio ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia , Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference Documents from 1970 to 1991,* (New York :Orbis Books, ,1992,332-333.

3. Incorporate Other than Religious Issues: All religions have to do with living in the world. Issues that are internal to religious institutions are much less important than those that affect human beings in their day-to-day lives. As a result, it is imperative that we, as a religious grouping and in encounter with other groups, consider our responses to a variety of topics such as peace, justice, war, racism, rights, equality, liberation etc. It is our duty to consider any topic which affects the lives of our people in an attempt to promote common good.

4. Systematic Co-ordination of Dialogue: We need to consider the agencies whose involvement in dialogue is essential. It is not to be left to the Magisterium to organise and conduct interreligious dialogue, or indeed even to the Church to do likewise. The fact is that if Dialogue is to realise its maximum potential, it is imperative that those in the lower echelons of society and those at the centre of daily human life become deeply involved. Dialogue at this level is hugely important and local and individual Church responses are even more important in countries like India, where such a variety of religions exist side by side. Proper co-ordination of the different dialogue commissions is vital to good progress. The insights by Henri de Lubac, as discussed in the following chapter will amplify this need.

5. Effective Formation: Systematic and proper formation of dialogue participants is of huge significance. They must be made aware of the basic guiding principles of interreligious dialogue and the scope, motivation and limitations of the task on hand. With regard to this it is essential that they have a sound knowledge of the convictions of both their own religion and that of the other. We also need to learn how to show respect for our dialogue partner, treating him/her with the dignity required in recognising his/her dignity, uniqueness and self-worth.

6. Insist on the role of the Laity: As already stated, dialogue must involve all groups, but especially those from the lower echelons. The involvement of the laity is absolutely vital as they can favour the relations which ought to be established with the followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities.

7. Read the signs of the time: The locus of dialogue must be the times and the circumstances of those involved. We need to be fully aware that contemporary society is changing day by day so we must constantly update ourselves on the ethical, social, cultural and religious changes taking place in the society. This awareness always enhances and supports the effectiveness of our dialogue. We need to think generally and act particularly, taking into account contexts and situations.

14 Observations of Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Indian Context

Firstly, this current study will broaden and deepen religious insights. Active dialogue and cooperation between Christianity and Hinduism will bring greater light and deeper understanding. Secondly, truth is many sided and our understanding of truth is fragmentary. Therefore, it is desirable to go deep into one's own religious tradition and adhere firmly to it, while keeping an open mind regarding the Truth that may be available in other traditions. Hindu-Christian dialogue has led to a stronger sense of the essential dignity of a human being as a human being. The caste system in India has considerably weakened. The integration of the 'untouchables' into the mainstream of Hindu Society, started by Gandhi, has recorded enormous success. Social obligations have assumed a greater importance. Thirdly, in as much as God is one, the world is one and humanity is one, it is possible for Hindus and Christians to meet and cooperate at these vantage points and reinforce the religious life of humanity. This is a core Principle of de Lubac.

Fourthly, Hindu-Christian dialogue is necessary to overcome misconceptions entertained about each other's' tradition, to achieve a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences between the two traditions; and to promote spiritual and moral goods in them. Fifthly, Hindu-Christian dialogue recognizes that religious indifference is bad and religious prejudice is worse; that proselytism is bad but conversion to a higher way of life is necessary; and that no religious tradition should present its message in a way that may lead to conflict and violence in societies. Finally, as the inhabitants of the world came closer due to rapid progress in science and technology, people became more appreciative and sympathetic towards others. Gradually people came to know that one has to admit and accept coexistence of religions. Existence of one's own religion alone is not the reality in the true sense; the co-existence of multiple religions is the reality. The role of religious leaders, writers and social leaders are very important in harmonizing the ways of dialogue.

15 Conclusion

Having considered Vatican Council documents that are of relevance to inter-faith dialogue, together with the writings of various authors on the subject, it is our view that the Church has moved resolutely away from previous exclusivist perspectives which would make membership of the Church a requirement for salvation. With regard to the remaining options – inclusivism or pluralism – we are of the view that in highlighting the uniqueness of Christ while positing the possibility of salvation for adherents of non-Christian Faiths, the Church's position is essentially inclusive and at fundamental variance with pluralist perspectives. But

there is an element of semantics in being required to choose between the rankings of religions in order of superiority or considering them to be of equal validity; it would seem to be an attempt to intrude into the mind of God with respect to His plan of salvation. Language has its limitations when it comes to 'God-talk' since the language of God is silence; all else is a translation.[223] This is not to deter us from seeking understanding.

The call of Vatican II to place dialogue alongside proclamation as equal components of the mission of the Church significantly changed the Churches understanding of mission. It demanded recognition of other religions, when previously they were assumed to be either obstacles or irrelevant. It also raised the issue of inculturation which had previously attracted little attention. All of this presented new dilemmas and challenges, at a global level but very specifically for the Church in India. We have tried in this chapter to name some of these and to explore efforts, until now to respond to them, including some approaches developed by Indian Christology.

We proceed from here, having recourse to the theological method developed by Henri de Lubac, believing that it will enable us to move forward. We also contend that his two principles will help us to ventilate points of *rapprochement* between Hinduism and Christianity specifically. The combination of his vision of inclusivity and of his research methodology seems to offer a path to devising a way of promoting mutual understanding and acceptance in a dialogue between the two traditions. The next Chapter will investigate the work of the aforementioned Henri de Lubac.

[223]The 13th century Sufi mystic Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi (popularly referred to as Rumi) is reputed to have remarked the above thoughts. See, Amin Banani, "Rumi the Poet," in Poetry *and Mysticism in Islam; the Heritage of Rumi*, eds Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28-43.

CHAPTER 2
INVESTIGATION OF HENRI DE LUBAC'S THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHOD AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE BETWEEN HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY

1 Introduction

Raymond Panikkar[224] and many others are calling for inclusive Christologies as a new theological model for dialogue with particular religions. In the first chapter we questioned the appropriateness of exclusivist theologies with which Christianity has been associated. The respectful recognition by the Church since Vatican II of the fact of great religious diversity in the world enables us to explore the presence of truths in other religions, specifically in Hinduism in the case of this particular study.

Towards making use of Henri de Lubac's theological method to further mutual understanding between Hinduism and Christianity in India, this chapter will first deal, briefly, with his biography, and with the state of theology as the young de Lubac first experienced it. It will then proceed to provide an outline of his method. His theology, an outcome of his method, will be summarized, with particular attention to its relevance to inter-faith dialogue. The chapter will include an exercise in conjecture as to how, consistent with his method, de Lubac might respond theologically to contemporary realities. De Lubac took a personal interest in the Buddhist religion; this chapter will consider his writing on aspects of Buddhism with a view to identifying and demonstrating how he himself applied his method to the development of inter-religious understanding.

1.1 Biographical Outline of Henri de Lubac SJ. (1896 – 1991)

He was born into a devout Catholic family in France at a time of hostility towards Church and religion.[225] His Jesuit studies took him to England but the rescinding of anti-church laws

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[224] See, Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man,* (Orbis: New York, 1973), 53.

[225] Tension had increased between the Catholic Church in France and the secularist policies of the Third Republic at the time of de Lubac's birth in Cambray in the North of France on February 20, 1896. He enrolled in law school in 1912, on completing his second level education. A year later he entered the Society of Jesus before being drafted into the Army in World War 1 in 1915. At this time, he suffered severe ear injuries which were only corrected by surgery in 1954. During the war years de Lubac began his serious theological reflections. He became friendly with an unbelieving primary-school teacher. Discussions relating to philosophy and religion often took place between them and these became the initial inspiration for his book, *The Discovery of God*.
For details see, Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 42.

in 1926 enabled him to take up ministry in France.[226] In September 1929 de Lubac was appointed Professor of Fundamental Theology at the University of Lyons, where resources were exceedingly limited:

> In the loft where I was lodged, which was lit by a little skylight, I had not a single book. The Fourviere library was scarcely accessible… two dusty rooms and in old shaky main building with a little bit of everything. Fortunately, I discovered a treasure in the attic of Saint Joseph's Day School, in the beautiful, old fashioned quarters located over the chapel; a library, particularly of literature which had long been neglected but which contained several tiers of theology well furnished with old books.[227]

This gives a strong indication that de Lubac did not confine his readings to works of theology but enjoyed the works of literature and philosophy in conjunction with both classic and modern theology.[228]

He additionally took on the Chair of the History of Religion there in 1930. His inaugural lecture in Lyons gave an indication of the seminal role he was to play in leading theology out of the cul-de-sac of apologetics into which it had drifted.[229] He very soon became a particular target of those resisting emerging theological approaches.[230] His Jesuit Provincial, in anticipation of criticism of de Lubac by the Vatican, (which in fact did not materialise), silenced him.[231] He made use of the period of exclusion from public ministry to engage in a rigorous study of the Fathers of the Church and also found time to explore

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[226] He was forced to study abroad, in Sussex and Cambridge, in 1919, due to anti clerical feeling in France at the time. During the next three years, he studied philosophy in Jersey, England (1920-23). As a student he engrossed himself in the works of Irenaeus, Augustine, and especially Aquinas. While there he also encountered great thinkers, such as Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), and Yves de Montcheuil (1900-44); these men had a major influence on his life. He drew encouragement from Blondel's rigorous defence of the relationship between human nature and the supernatural- between reason and revelation, philosophy and theology, and resolved to lend support and clarification to Blondel's position. See, John Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," in *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (London, New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark),8.

[227] Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*: De Lubac reflects on the circumstances that occasioned his writings, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 16.

[228] David Grummet "Henri de Lubac Looking for Books to Read the World," in *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. (Oxford University Press:2012), 236.

[229] His inaugural lecture in 1929 dealt with the necessity for classical apologetics to give way to fundamental theology and also marks his first publication. See, Henri de Lubac 'Apologetics and Theology,' in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 91-104.

[230] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What is Good* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 11.

[231] While the end of the World War II would have been a cause of celebration among many, for de Lubac it began a period of intense pain and suffering as his theology came under suspicion and he was accused of compromising the gratuity of grace. The Jesuit Provincial summoned de Lubac to a meeting in early 1950, in anticipation of an encyclical from Pope Pius XII, reprimanding de Lubac, Yves Congar, and others and he was forbidden to teach theology or publish his work. He had to leave Lyons-Fourvière and reside at their house in Paris and this ban lasted throughout the 1950s. See, Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac,"10.

aspects of Buddhism. During the German occupation of France in World War II he had further cause to stay secluded because of his having earlier voiced concern at the rise of National Socialism.

Fortuitously de Lubac's writing and thinking came to the attention of a French Cardinal. His rehabilitation was completed with his appointment by Pope John XXIII as consultor to the preparatory commission for the Vatican Council in the early 1960s. During the Council he was appointed by Pope Paul VI as adviser to the Theological Commission for non-Christians and non-believers. De Lubac received acknowledgement from Pope Paul VI who commended him for his literary work and teaching and expressed thanks on his own behalf and that of the Church.

> These cost you hard work, pain, and some hardships. In them your holy and awesome task was ever to seek the truth with utmost care, to follow the venerable footsteps of the Fathers, and to embrace the established traditions of our forebears…. The gifts you brought to your writing and the principles you followed are the sources of enduring freshness.[232]

He played a formative role in the outcomes of Vatican II, not so much perhaps in his direct input into the Documents as in the influence that his writings had on the Council Fathers. However, his hand can be seen in *Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes* and in particular *Dei Verbum*.[233] Although he may not have been personally involved in the writing of *Nostra Aetate*, it too can be considered to reflect his thinking. He was one of the *Ressourcement* theologians who brought about a new way of doing theology and was a significant inspiration to many of them, including Yves Congar (19014- 1995), Karl Rahner (1904 – 1984), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905- 1988). Sadly, de Lubac fell seriously ill in 1989, and spent two years in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor at their home in Avenue de Bréteuil. He was completely immobile and unable to speak- the great teacher and writer once again reduced to silence. Following his death on 4 September 1991 he was interred in the Jesuit plot in the Vaugirard cemetery in Paris.[234]

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[232] Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 147. French original: *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits* (Namur: Culture et Vérité, 1989; Paris: Cerf, 2006). This letter is included de Lubac's Appendices to ASC, 379-382.

[233] De Lubac was involved in revising the famous Schema,13, which served as the foundation for the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), and the influence of his theology is clearly evident in the dogmatic constitutions on revelation (*De Verbum*).See, Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," 22-23.

[234] See, Antonio Russo, *Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Brepols,1997), 43-56; Fergus Kerr, 'French Theology': Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac, in David F. Ford ed., *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.200), 105-17.

1.2 Theology in the Early Twentieth Century

Theology, as de Lubac first experienced it, was in defensive mode. In the wake of the Reformation, theology in the Christian Churches was marked by doctrinal contestations and differences of biblical interpretation. Then, during the 17thand early 18thcentury in the Western world there emerged a challenge to religious belief itself. During the Middle Ages there had been no real opposition to the Church's claim that the Bible was the ultimate determinant of what is true and that the legitimacy of philosophies and sciences of all kinds was conditional on their conformity to it. The philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment was a reaction to the claim of the Churches to virtual copyright of truth. The movement placed emphasis on science and reason over 'faith and superstition'. The period came to be known as the Age of Reason. The Churches felt compelled to provide an apologetic for Christian Faith, with an approach that has been given the title "Classical Apologetics" or alternatively "Neo-Scholasticism". It remained the dominant approach to theology.[235]

De Lubac's inaugural lecture in Lyons in 1929 was entitled "Apologetics and Theology." It was ground-breaking in its arguing for a move away from an emphasis on trying to 'prove' the rightness of Christianity. While recognising a role for apologetics, he advocated, instead, a focus on demonstrating the reasonableness of Christianity. He found classical apologetics, small-minded, defensive, and not 'working' or satisfying for the human spirit. Christ had got 'lost' in dogma; it had become a thing in itself, dissociated from nature and humanity. He sought to make Christianity both plausible and relevant to people in their time, culture and context. What he aimed to promote has come to be known as Fundamental Theology, which rose to the challenge of demonstrating the coherence of the Christian faith.[236] De Lubac expresses the mutual dependence of apologetics and theology when stating 'on the one hand, a theology which does not constantly have apologetical concerns becomes anaemic and false, while, on the other hand, to be fully efficacious apologetics must find its completion in theology.'[237]

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[235] Neo-Scholasticism was an attempt to revive the methods and conclusions of the medieval school men, and notably St Thomas, in a new age. See, Aidan Nicholas, *Catholic Thoughts since the enlightenment*: *A Survey* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1998), 70-71.

[236] Noel O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Uunderstanding the theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 90-99.

[237] Henri de Lubac, 'Apologetics and Theology' in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 103.

Two years later he published an article *Deux Augustiniens Fourvoyés* (1931) in which he sought to expose erroneous understandings of the teaching of St Augustine on grace.[238] When it was later developed into a book entitled *Surnaturel: Etudes historique (*1946), it triggered a virulent reaction. De Lubac was the particular target in this instance but it was part of a determined resistance to emerging new approaches to theology, perceived to be departures from religious orthodoxy, and derogatively termed "nouvelle theologie"[239]. Particular exception was taken to theological consideration of new theories of evolution, perceived to be in total contradiction of the Genesis account of Creation.[240] De Lubac also found conventional theology and the practice of Christian faith to have become reduced to a private matter – the individual obtaining salvation for his soul. As will be clear from our summary of de Lubac's theology, Christianity for him is social and is about the salvation of humanity.

1.3 Significance of de Lubac

De Lubac inspired a new generation of theologians, including Joseph Ratzinger. The importance of de Lubac's contribution to theological development can be gauged by Ratzinger's assessment of his first work, *Catholisme*. "This book was for me a key reading event. It gave me not only a new and deeper connection with the thinking of the Fathers but also a new way of looking at theology and faith itself."[241] De Lubac was central to the development of *Ressourcement*[242] – a mode of theologizing at variance with the forms of neo-scholastic theology and which had a strong impact on the theological development of the Vatican Council (1962-1995).[243] Ressourcement theology was essentially a patristic renewal and a return to the great traditions found in the scriptures. De Lubac takes us in to the heart of *Ressourcement*, which indicates how the past can be allowed to speak to the present and

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[238] Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism* and *Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Cross Road, 2000), 2-3,13.

[239] Henri de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 236;cited in Gerard Loughlin, "Nouvelle Theologie: A Return to Modernism," in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford University Press: 2012),45.G. Loughlin points out that de Lubac warned against this, while also insisting that the gratuity of God's grace.

[240] Henri de Lubac, 'On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the "Fourfold Sense" in Scripture, in *Theological Fragments*, 109-27.

[241] Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoires 1927-1977*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).14.

[242] The word *Ressourcement* was, according to Congar, first coined by the poet and social critic Charles Peguy. Congar adopted *Ressourcement* as a standard for Church reform understood as an urgent call to move from 'a less profound to a more profound tradition, a discovery of the most profound resources. See Gabriel Flynn and Paul Murray, *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford University Press:2012), 4.

[243] John Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," in Jordan Hillebert ed*., T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac* (London, New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark), 4.

how the Church might fulfil its mission.[244] He was one of the advisors to the Bishops as they collaborated in producing the Conciliar texts for the Second Vatican Council.[245]

The achievements of de Lubac have often been compared to those of his Protestant contemporary Karl Barth (1886-1968). John Milbank considered him to be 'a greater theological revolutionary' than his Swiss counterpart,[246] which has further enhanced his reputation as one of the outstanding Roman Catholic theologians of his era. Mansini asserts that the publication of his *Surnatural* was 'the most influential event in Catholic theology in the twentieth century.'[247] There is no doubt that de Lubac was to the forefront in setting the theological agenda of the time.

From his earliest days as a theologian, de Lubac adopted a stance from which he never varied throughout his working life. The first two books were ground-breaking: *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme* 1938; (*Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, 1988) and *Le drame de l'humanisme* athée (The Drama of Atheist Humanism). In his first work *Catholicisme,* de Lubac responded to the challenge that was levelled at Christianity at the time, viz. that it was too individualistic, concentrating on saving one's own soul. De Lubac insisted that Christian Faith is essentially social, and that Christ came to redeem humanity as a whole. In that first book too, de Lubac showed that Christianity is historical: revelation is historical. These are the two great pillars of his first published work; Christianity is of its nature both social and historical. The second published work, *Le drame de l'humanisme* athée (The Drama of Atheist Humanism) was essentially a defence of Christianity in the face of the militant philosophical atheism of the nineteenth century.[248] According to Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac's reading of the Fathers allowed him to consider the theological questions of the day in a 'new' way:

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[244] John McDade, "Epilogue '*Ressourcement*' in Retrospect" in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford University Press: 2012), 513-14.

[245] Gerald Collins "*Ressourcement* and Vatican II" in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds. *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford University Press: 2012), 372.

[246] John Milbank, 'The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,' in Laurence Paul Hemming, ed., *Radical Orthodoxy? -A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 35.

[247] Guy Mansini, 'The Abiding Theological Significance of Henri de Lubac's *Surnatural*,'*The Thomist 73* (2009), 593.

[248] *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* –a work that emerged before the liberation of Paris and which went through four editions by 1950. This atheism was promoted by Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Auguste Comte. De Lubac would have been completely opposed to this philosophy and he displayed his depth of literary knowledge in pitting the faith and vision of Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky, whose works he had read, against it. It displays both his courage and confidence in entering into the world of those who were totally opposed to his beliefs and adds further evidence to his faith in dialogue. See Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," 12.
De Lubac's view that atheism is a consequence of how Christians taught others to think about God is developed by Michael Buckley in *At The Roots of Modern Atheism* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 19870).

> What is it that makes the properly historical in studies like those of de Lubac or de la Taille so stimulating and to the point? Surely it is the art of reading historical texts in such a way that they become not just votes cast in favour of or against our current positions (positions taken up long ago), but say something to us which we in our time have not considered at all or not closely enough, about reality itself.[249]

Rahner's remarks indicate just how highly regarded Henri de Lubac's works were. De Lubac embarked on such studies so that he might establish the truths of the faith in a new and refreshing way that would be faithful to the Tradition. This statement highlights de Lubac's view of man in relation to God:

> For the Fathers of the Church, man, created in the image of God, that is with those divine prerogatives of reason, freedom, immortality, and the right of dominion over nature, is made with a view to the likeness of God, which is the perfection of this image. This means that he is destined to live eternally in God, to enter into the internal movement of the Trinitarian Life and to take all creation with him.[250]

This statement is highly significant. It suggests that, for de Lubac, the 'why' of Incarnation is to enable man, created in the "image" of God, grow in the "likeness" of God. Later in this Chapter we will explore whether, for de Lubac, incarnation was a necessity because of humanity's need for redemption as consequence of original sin or something that God had in mind from the beginning irrespective of the Fall. It would seem from the above statement that he favours the latter option.

De Lubac considers *Dei Verbum* to be the most important document of the Vatican Council. The Constitution clearly insists that Christ is always drawing us into the Trinity and that He continually points to the Father and not to himself. God is Trinitarian and man's destiny involves participation in the internal movement of the Trinity. He is pleased with the lack of Christomonism in *Dei Verbum* as it would have excluded the role of the Father and the Holy Spirit in salvation.[251] What is also clear from *Dei Verbum* is that creation is not a shell that is disposed of when man is finished with it. Creation too will be part of the resurrection of all things in Christ.

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[249] Karl Rahner, 'The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology', in *Theological Investigations* I, English translation of *Schriftenzur Theologie* I by Cornelius Ernst (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961, 1969), 9f.

[250] Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History*, Translated by Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 20.

[251] For de Lubac Scripture is not writing about history but the reading of history as proclaimed by God and delivered by Christ through the Holy Spirit in the world. He believes that Christian History and the entire world history run parallel to each other. These allied to human histories are recorded in Scripture as real concrete lived history. For details see, David Grummet, "Henri de Lubac; Looking for Books to Read the world" in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Ressourcement : A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford University Press:2012), 245.

De Lubac, this seminal, creative thinker, was ahead of his time in his belief that the Catholic faith should not be kept separate from the modern world. *Catholicisme* emphatically states that the challenge for the Church of *Aggiornamento* (bringing itself up to date) requires *Ressourcement;* theologians must work for the Church's renewal in our time taking due account of the insights bequeathed to us by the Church Fathers.

2 De Lubac's Theological Method

A copious body of writing was produced by de Lubac but of more importance for this study is the method that he developed for doing theology. While method and content cannot be separated, our primary focus is his methodology, which centres on a return to the sources.[252] *Ressourcement* refers to a movement in theology in the early years of the twentieth century when theologians such as de Lubac and Congar, 'urged a return to the great wealth of the whole previous Christian tradition, not only to retrieve it for the enrichment of the present-day Church but also to counteract the climate of hostility towards the Church which was fostering unbelief.'[253] Renewal in all its dimensions was to benefit from the patristic renaissance.[254]

Ressourcement represented a move away from apologetic arguments in support of professed doctrines or practices in the Roman Catholic Church. Its aim was, rather, 'to recover that which had been forgotten, or neglected, in the course of history.'[255] While the movement for a return to the sources was felt mostly strongly in Roman Catholic circles, especially in freeing it from neo-scholasticism, it was influential in liberating Protestants from 'tired liberalism or oppressive fundamentalism'.[256] Protestant theologians, most notably Karl

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[252] His first theology teacher, Joseph Huby was instrumental in leading him in this direction when he suggested to him that he should go back to the writings of Thomas Aquinas to find out what he had to say about nature and grace, so that he could complete a research project. This led him to realise how unreliable many of the textbooks were. He focused henceforth on accessing and researching the Fathers of the Church in their original form. This method, which has been given the name *Ressourcement,* has always been central to Lubacian methodology.See, Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," 6.

[253] The movement passed through various stages of development. The biblical renewal began in Germany in the interwar period and spread progressively to the rest of the Catholic world. The liturgical renewal, which was taking place in France before the First World War, flourished in Germany during the Nazi era when the Church came under pressure to renounce social action and focus instead on the lively celebration of the divine mysteries. See, Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief,* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 29.

[254] Flynn sees the movement towards fuller contact with patristic thought as "perhaps the most interesting and challenging of the various currents of renewal in theology in the early part of the twentieth century, as it provides an authentic witness to the faith in a way that is sensitive to the ever-changing needs of humanity." See Ibid., 29.

[255] Ibid., 29.

[256] See John Webster, "*Ressourcement* Theology and Protestantism" in Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 484.

Barth[257], also contributed to Catholic *ressourcement,* 'by showing Roman Catholics that it is possible to read the bible in ways that are faithful both to the historic faith and to methods of historical criticism.'[258]

De Lubac, along with other members of what came to be regarded derogatively as *la nouvelle theologie* began publishing from the 1940s, books and articles which would change the face of Catholic theology.[259] In order to appreciate what was so new about de Lubac's theological method, and why a new method was essential, it is important to understand what kind of theology had prevailed for the previous four hundred years; it had become sterile and lifeless. It is loosely called Neo-Scholasticism or Neo-Thomism and is associated with a wide spectrum of theologians from Thomas Cajetan (or Thomas de Vio 1465-1534) to Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance O.P. (1877-1964).[260] In the ensuing centuries theology became quite stale which was all the more reason for de Lubac to return to the sources.[261]

2.1 Return to the Sources

This is the hallmark of de Lubac's method. An initial exploration of the writings of Thomas Aquinas revealed to him that text books which were the product of Neo-Scholasticism - an approach to theology that had operated for 400 years - fell far short of being an authentic reflection of the works of Aquinas, or of other 13th century Scholastics such as Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus. He found them sterile, lifeless, and imbued with dogmatism. That

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[257] K Barth's break with Liberal Protestantism was only brought to completion, when, in the early 1920s. He immersed himself *Ressourcement*-style in the writings of 16th and 17th century Calvinist Divinity. For details see Karl Barth, *The Gottingen Dogmatics Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 40f.

[258] See George Lindbeck, 'Ecumenical Theology', in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century',* ed. David F. Ford, 2 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989),255-273.

[259] In September 1946, Pope Pius XII expressed his concerns regarding *la nouvelle théologie* to representatives of the Dominican and Jesuit Orders, believing that the fundamental tenets of the Catholic faith were being undermined. De Lubac's book *Surnaturel*, *Études historique,* which appeared in 1946, became one of the important catalysts for the difficulties that he faced in 1950. His journey towards understanding the 'supernatural' and hence 'nature' and grace' was made more difficult by neo-scholastic forces in his own Jesuit Order which brought him under papal suspicion. See Gabriel Flynn, 'The Twentieth Century Renaissance in Catholic Theology' in *Ressourcement*, 1-19.

[260] Nicholas M. Healey, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Aldershot/ Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003).

[261] It is important to distinguish between the terms 'scholastic' and 'neo-scholastic'. The scholastic tradition which developed in the twelfth and through the thirteenth centuries under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy is of immense value, whereas the neo-scholasticism, which consisted of commentaries on the *Summae,* led to a certain sclerosis of theology. It tended to neglect the writings of the Fathers. Much of de Lubac's contribution to theology was in rediscovering the true teaching of the Scholastics. *Ressourcement* theologians were mainly responsible for the demise of scholastic neo-Thomism and among them were: the French speaking Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990) and Yves Congar (1904-95), both Dominicans; Jean Daniélou (1905-74) and Henri de Lubac, Jesuits. In German the parallel names were Karl Rahner (1904-84) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88). See A.N. Williams, 'The Future of the Past: The Contemporary significance of the Novelle Theologie,' *IJST*, 7 (2005), 347-61 (353-4).

led him further back - to a search for the original teachings of the Fathers of the Church and to learn about their approach to interpreting the Scriptures. The result was a recovery of the real voices of scholars such as Thomas Aquinas and of the richness of the insights of the Fathers of the Church. That in turn led to a new understanding of Church, of Scripture – of who is God and who is man – all of which found full expression in the Vatican Council.[262]
De Lubac returned to a form of theology that gave pride of place to the Scriptures and the writing of the Fathers as a means of combatting the encrustation of theology which had followed the medieval period. This restored a spark to the subject and allowed it to become alive and meaningful again. For de Lubac it signalled an end to the legacy of dull and empty theological practice. In his review of *Gaudium et Spes,* de Lubac stressed the importance of tradition in the practice of theology.

> Nothing solid can be constructed in theology except with proven materials, which the long history of Christian reflection provides. All research must first of all be a recovery through the tradition. All renewal assumes continuity, even when we are faced with new situations.[263]

He refers to this aspect of his method as 'retrospective theology.'[264] He was convinced that the Fathers of the Church were the main source of renewal of thought and Christian life in the West. He declared that Móhler and Newman exemplified this belief. Central to the renewal of theology, and of the Church, is a greater knowledge of the patristic and medieval period. He pointed to the evidence of positive results already arising from: "A better –but still imperfect –knowledge of the patristic period, in conjunction with medieval theology in its golden age, studied in continuity with one another."[265] He is undoubtedly referring here to noted thirteenth century theologians such as Saints Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. It is worth noting that it was through returning to St Thomas and to the Fathers that he was able to speak so assuredly of the relationship between nature and the supernatural. De Lubac confirms in

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[262] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 8.
[263] De Lubac was one of the principal drafters of Gaudium et Spes SS 19-21. In *Catholicism* he presents quotation from contemporary atheists and free thinkers, giving their misunderstanding of Christian doctrine. *Catholicism*13; cited in Stephen Bullivant, "Atheism, Apologetics and Ecclesiology: Gaudium et Spes and Contemporary Unbelief" in *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*, ed. Andrew Davidson(London: SCM Press, 2011),88-89. Henri de Lubac, *Atheisme et Sens de l'homme* : *une double requite de Gaudium et Spes*, (Paris : Editions du Cerf,1968),10f ;cited in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac, trans*. Joseph Fessio and Michael M. Waldstein, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991),34.
[264] During his seminary formation he had great difficulty with the lack of continuity with the tradition and its dependence on particular philosophical systems. It was through de Lubac's appreciation of the Fathers that he came to make such a major contribution to the renewal of theology. See de Lubac, *Atheisme et Sens de l'homme*,10; cited in O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 51.
[265] De Lubac, *Catholicism,* 277.

his writings, post Vatican II, that the Conciliar *aggiornamento* had its roots in the Fathers, declaring: "To a great extent, in all the areas affected by the Council, this *aggiornamento* was made possible by the patristic renewal of the last fifty years."[266]

De Lubac is more likely to have initial recourse to 'proofs from the Fathers' than to 'proofs from Scripture' to validate his arguments. It is when he considers that the authority of the Fathers may be open to question that he has recourse in the first instance to Scripture. This is evident when he is considering Platonist and Socratic influences on the patristic understanding of the unity of humanity. While acknowledging the likelihood of such influences, he stresses that the Fathers' main inspiration was always the Gospel of Christ: "It was very much less the tenets of philosophy, whether Platonist or Stoic, which guided the reflections of the Fathers - indispensable as these were to their work- but rather a keen perception of Christian requirements."[267] But to underscore that the patristic sources on which he relies are primarily Christian, de Lubac draws on the work of Saint Paul and Saint John to underline what he had already cogently argued for with his 'proof from the Fathers'[268]

Some further precision is required to describe how De Lubac 'used' the Fathers. He warns against rushing to the writings of the Fathers to find a ready-made solution to contemporary issues; their writings do not dispense us from reflection.[269] Freedom and depth are two characteristics of this return to traditional sources. It frees us to see things as they are, not blinded by the encrustation of stale philosophical or theological systems. Commenting on the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, in his work on Origen, de Lubac describes the positive elements as well as the negative temptations that must be avoided:

> It matters to take things both with greater depth and freedom. Without being an archaic return nor a servile imitation, often involving entirely different methods, it is a spiritual movement which must be reproduced above all. And it is the struggle of Jacob with the angel of God which must begin again incessantly.[270]

Commenting on *Dei Verbum,* de Lubac insists that renewal is not about innovation. On the contrary, it is about the rediscovering of the strength, and, at the same time the simplicity, of

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[266] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 103-104.
[267] *Catholicism,* 15-16.
[268] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 104.
[269] Ibid., 104.
[270] Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit : The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen.* Translation from French by Anne Englund Nash; Greek and Latin translation by Juvenal Merriell (San Francisco Ignatius Press, 200), 394.

the ancient tradition.[271] He goes on to insist that if the Council seemed revolutionary, 'it is because it had first of all to break with certain recent habits, which were narrowing the most traditional Christian thought and risked drying up its sap.'[272] The latter image evokes a return to the Fathers as an irrigation of theology; the neo-scholastic mind-set had cut the well from its source. Karl Rahner pays particular tribute to de Lubac for the methodology that he employs in relation to historical texts, Biblical and otherwise. He says about him that he read historical texts in a way that enabled him to "say something to us which we in our time have not fully considered at all, or not closely enough, about reality itself."[273] De Lubac emphasises the literal sense of the spiritual interpretation of Scripture throughout his study as it historically grounds all later spiritual interpretations. This insistence on the historical foundation of spiritual exegesis emanates from his interpretations of Origen. The relation between spiritual exegesis and theology must include the essential principle that theological discussion and reflection must proceed from the literal meaning, thus negating the possibility of basing theological proofs on the allegorical sense. This principle respects the historical character of Christianity, which highlights the difference between Christian allegory and historical allegory.[274]

2.1.1 The Two Companion Principles of Lubacian Methodology

De Lubac's methodology encompasses two companion principles: Auscultation and the Catholicity of Truth. As already indicated in our General Introduction, despite the fact that contact between the two religions is positive and fruitful from a social and political point of view, there is a major gap in regard to serious theological encounter. The theological method of Henri de Lubac, especially the two Principles that can be gleaned from his inaugural theological lecture in 1929, the Principle of Auscultation and the Principle of the Catholicity of Truth has been a source of inspiration. It is worth noting that the Principle of Catholicity of Truth is the basis for the Principle of Auscultation. In his wide-ranging *corpus,* he used these Principles to dialogue with religions and philosophies that were opposed to Christianity. That is exactly what he did in his encounter with Buddhism and we intend to employ these same Principles in this study to explore the theological relationship between Hinduism and

[271] (R D) La Revelation divine,165; cited in O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*,106.
[272] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 106.
[273] Karl Rahner. 'The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology' in Theological Investigations 1. English translation of Schriftenzur Theologie 1, by Cornelius Enrnst (London. Darton, Longmann & Todd 1961, 1961), 9.
[274] Susan K Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Edinburg. Wm.B Eerdmans Publishing Co & T&T Clark Ltd,1998),36-37.

Christianity. In doing so we are carrying out the intention of Vatican II, especially in its decree on other religions, *Nostra Aetate*.

In his inaugural lecture he suggests that, just as it would be wrong to try to "adapt dogma" to suit contemporary narratives, so too, it is right, and necessary, to "constantly auscultate successive generations, to listen to their aspirations and to respond to them, to hear their thoughts in order to assimilate them."[275] De Lubac's approach is a far cry from any notion of customising Christian faith to make it fit contemporary discourse. He refuses to allow the dogma of faith to be left 'to the whims of intellectual fashion.'[276] However, it is predicated on listening not just to the Scriptures but to the other ways through which God also speaks to humanity.

2.2 The Principle of Auscultation

For de Lubac the term "auscultation" (from the Latin *auscultare*) is about deep, attentive and non-judgemental listening to humanity in every age and culture, and responding to what is 'heard'.[277] As the quote above makes clear it is about much more than a study of psychology or philosophy. In theological terms it is explained as an attentive listening to the context and culture in which the theologian is working. This entails a) attentive listening without prejudice, b) diagnosis and c) seeking a solution to the problem.[278] It is about engagement with human beings in their daily lives. Since change and the variety of human contexts are a constant, auscultation is a never-ending and trans-cultural task. This core principle seems to have proved a powerful incentive to de Lubac himself to delve not only into the thoughts and writings of his Western world contemporaries, but into contexts and cultures and religious beliefs far beyond Europe.[279] It is evident also in the rigour with which he sought out the authentic voices of the Fathers of the Church.

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[275] For details see, De Lubac's inaugural lecture in 1929; cited in O' Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 113-14.
[276] Henri de Lubac . 'Apologetics and Theology', 103.
[277] The term "auscultation" derives from the Latin auscultatio (verb, auscultare), which refers to the action of attentive listening. The dictionary definition of Auscultation is usually given in medical terms 'the action of listening to sounds from the heart, lungs or from the other organs, typically with stethoscope as part of medical diagnosis. See *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998,), 105.
[278] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*: 115.
[279] We believe that it is essential that auscultation precedes dialogue to avoid the production of monologue without mutual listening. De Lubac's desire to find truth through auscultation led him to peruse the works of a wide variety of writers such as Feuerbach (1804 - 1872), Comte, (1798 – 1857), Marx, (1818-1883), Nietzsche, (1818-1900) ; Proudhon (1809 and Dostoevsky (1821-1881). This gave him a basis for analysing their influence on the twentieth century.

De Lubac's initial use of the term related to culture and context but, not surprisingly, he comes to apply it to how we ought to read Scripture.[280] He recruits Origen into support for an approach to Scripture that takes care to miss nothing, that is open to the possibility of uncovering hitherto hidden truths and that, at the end of all the searching, we find ourselves still at the edge of mystery. For both Origen and de Lubac it is about listening with heart. Respectful listening to Scripture and to the world are not two separate engagements. The Spirit speaks through the scriptures but also through the present.[281] De Lubac proposes that we auscultate culture within the parameters of the Word of God It is when the ear of the heart is turned to God. The closer we maintain contact with the scriptures, the better we understand ourselves and discover there the thoughts and design of God for us. [282]

De Lubac's method is as important as his content and his search for a new vision for theology arose out of the inadequacies of classical apologetics and of the inability of neo-Scholasticism.[283] At the heart of 'doing theology', de Lubac believes that all people have something of the truth in them and that truth can be found in the most unlikely of places.[284] In this way we can understand this principle in universal terms, perhaps, in the broadest possible landscape. For a Church that had (to some extent at least) lost the significance of the Jewish identity of Jesus, his highlighting of the historical as well as the spiritual dimension of the Old Testament must be seen as ground-breaking. His Christology presents Jesus and his mission in the context of the culture, folklore and history of his ancestors. Jesus cannot be properly understood otherwise. We will see more clearly the cohesiveness of the concept of auscultation when we consider the second principle of de Lubac's fundamental theology, viz., the catholicity of truth.

2.3 Truth is Catholic

No institution, or time or place, has copyright on Truth. It will not be confined; it keeps breaking out over the walls of systems - into mystery. Truth is catholic.[285] The significance

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[280] Auscultation for de Lubac is about more than listening attentively to people in their cultures and contexts; it is about listening to the word of God. De Lubac urges us to read the Bible with great care and with respect. He explains that no word should be ignored in scripture as it is the entire product of Divine Inspiration through the Holy Spirit. He asks that we scrutinise and search for meaning in every word as we auscultate the scriptures with the attention of the heart so that we miss nothing. See O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*: 118.

[281] *History in Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen,* trans. Anne Englund Nash with Juvenal Merriell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 19-22.

[282] *History and Spirit*, 57-8.

[283]Noel O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the key to understanding the theology of creation in the works of Henri de Lubac*,(Oxford: Peter Lang,2009),136.

[284] Ibid.,120

[285] To describe anything as catholic is to assert its universality. The description of truth as catholic is an assertion that it is not in the exclusive ownership of any group or institution but is to be found in humanity in

of this principle for de Lubac is profound; it both frees and motivates him to search for truth in places where, according to the narrative of his time, it is assuredly not to be found, e.g. in the philosophies of atheistic humanism or in non-Christian religions. A good example of his application of this principle is to be found in *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism,* which was his response to the militant philosophical opposition to religious belief that was prevalent. But it is clear from the text that it was produced on the back of his courageous engagement in dialogue with some of Christianity's fiercest opponents. He conducted rigorous study of the work of those who opposed him.[286]

Importantly for de Lubac of course the principle is not new. He would have been familiar with its affirmation by Thomas Aquinas, who, also drawing on Tradition, locates the catholicity of the truth in its origin – the Holy Spirit.[287] In terms of this study what is of most significance is how, doubtless under the influence of de Lubac, it finds expression in the documents of the Second Vatican Council with their assertion that the Holy Spirit does not confine revelation to the pages of the Hebrew and Christian Testaments or to those who have access to these. The implications for the Church are beyond exaggeration; the boundaries, not least those between itself and other religions are blurred. Openness and dialogue are mandatory. *Gaudium et Spes*[288] following on from chapter two of *Dei Filius,* of the First Vatican Council, affirms:

> Methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are. [289]

It follows from all this that for de Lubac dialogue is not optional. We have in de Lubac's methodology a process that leaves no stone unturned in the search for understanding. The

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every place and time; all people have something of the truth in them. But besides the fact of Christian faith not being the preserve of any human structure, for de Lubac its catholicity has to with it being the 'locus of universal light. See, 'Apologetics and Theology' in *Theological Fragments*, 104.

[286] Balthasar in turn, when referring to *Catholisme, points* to the perspective of totality and fullness which de Lubac brings to all considerations of truth. De Lubac's only interest, throughout his works, is in the totality of truth. Indeed he commits himself to the search for truth across the range of possible sources, even those which appear to be in direct opposition to his prior assumptions or to contradict Tradition. See,Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac,*54.

[287] *Christ and Creation,* 122.

[288] *Dei Filius,* DS 3004. See Romans 1:20; cited in *Christ and Creation,*122. English edition edited by Fastiggi, Robert and Nash, Anne Englund. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

[289] *GS*,36.

starting point is the topic in question, approached with due respect and without prior judgement.[290] For a theological investigation the lens of the Scriptures, interpreted against the background and contexts from which they emanated, is applied; the wisdom of the ages and of contemporary thought is sought to further inform the process. There is openness to finding truth anywhere, but successful searching is contingent on a depth and quality of listening that goes far beyond merely hearing.

De Lubac suggests an attentive listening to the word of God and to history because truth is Catholic. At the same time, he is saying that truth is not unique to any institution or individual but universal and can be heard even in the most unlikely sources. This is in line with the tradition of the Church. There is an inseparable connection between the principle of auscultation and the catholicity of truth. If this world is created by God, then there is a unity in that creation leading to openness to all knowledge even that which is contrary to truth. All that is being claimed is that to listen attentively and dialogue with difference is a genuine act of faith. This means that 'the truth is one and is to be found in the depth and the universality of humanity; this is its Catholicity.'[291] This informs de Lubac's inclusive vision which anticipates the thinking of Vatican II to a large extent on inter-religious dialogue.

The relevance of this methodology to investigations in the area of inter-faith dialogue is self-evident. It challenges the investigator to come with a clear sense of and conviction with regard to his own religious belief, but without arrogant claims to superior knowledge or status. It enables him to search in and around, and behind the religion being examined, being all the while open to being taught new things about God, humanity, oneself, and one's own religion. We have in de Lubac's own study of Buddhism a model of how to approach such investigations. We will look in some detail at his treatment of Buddhism towards the end of this Chapter.

The philosophical, social, political and historical issues of de Lubac's time are not precisely those of now, but it can be said that his method is timeless. It offers us a way to do in our time what he was trying to do in his, to look for Truth wherever the Spirit blows and bring it to bear on the world today. De Lubac reinforces his argument by defining what is meant by the term 'Catholic':

> it is a symbol of integrated Christian fidelity; it is about shared responsibility; it is every person, a Church in miniature. The Church is not a series of 'either /or

[290] Lewis Ayres, 'The Soul and the Reading of Scripture: A Note on Henri de Lubac,' Scottish Journal of Theology, 61(2008), 173-90.
[291] *Christ and Creation,* 120-21.

> statements', it is 'both/and'; It is never, as with Protestantism a religion of antitheses; it is comprehensive, welcoming with arms outstretched, "far reaching like the works of God a term of wonderful richness, filled with the echoes of the infinite.[292]

Religious dialogue is intrinsically connected to our commitment to justice and peace. We strive to build bridges across barriers by dispelling prejudice of hate and to face frankly the tensions and conflicts and diffuse them by handling difficult issues with sensitivity and humility. We seek to become more human and make the world a better place for living together. Confronting and reflecting upon the theological significance of the fact that of a religious other/others dialogue enables realistic considerations of Christian theology of religions or of religious diversity. Dialogue does not vitiate distinctions, the other remains the other yet we are called to take into account the otherness and our relation to it theologically for even these others are part of God's creation. De Lubac hopes that "the Church walks it in broad day light, making her presence known to all and claiming her rights. She is everywhere interwoven with the social fabric, as one of the determinants of its texture."[293]

3 Henri de Lubac's Theology

It is de Lubac's method that most concerns us in this study and there is no doubt that his theology deeply influenced the outputs of the Vatican Council, and not least the Constitutions and Declarations that dealt with the Church in its relationship with the world and with other religions. On that account it merits mention, in particular as regards aspects of it which relate to our study. He wrote on a range of subjects including, Anthropology and creation, Scripture and the Church, atheistic humanism and socio-political issues, and on Buddhism.

De Lubac's Christological insights are at the core of his theology. He never got to write a systematic account of Christology as he points out:

> I cannot help thinking that it is a certain spiritual superficiality rather than the feeling of my intellectual deficiencies or even than the conviction that I am far too unequal to such a subject to dare ever to approach it head-on, that has always made me postpone undertaking that work on Jesus Christ that would have been dearer to me than all the others, and in view of which I did much reading and recorded many reflections.[294]

It can, however, be assembled from his writings. Christ is the Word that "was in the beginning" (Jn1:1). He is the one "through whom all things came into being". (Jn1:3). He is the Word that "became flesh". (Jn 1:14). So, creation and incarnation 'meet'; they are

[292] De Lubac, *Catholicism,*315-16.
[293]Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, (Ignatius Press: San Francisco,1956),161.
[294] Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 147.

inextricably linked. Creation of course includes humanity. All creation (not just humanity) will be taken up onto God. According to de Lubac " the very form of humanity is always a teleological orientation towards the beatific vision: 'My finality, which is expressed by this desire [for the vision of God], is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God."[295]

De Lubac interprets the Genesis statement on the creation of man and then supports his interpretation with reference to the Fathers. In this case (in *Catholicism*), he draws attention to the dignity of man which is due to his creation. This in turn is quickly followed up with a strong emphasis on the unity of humanity. God created man as a whole, rather than as a multiplicity of separate individuals. This affirmation is buoyed up by several references to the Fathers of the Church, but, in particular, to Irenaeus: they 'delighted to contemplate God creating humanity as a whole.'[296] He takes the New Testament reference to the story of the lost sheep[297] and interprets it, in the light of the Fathers, as referring to humanity as a whole. Several Fathers give weight to this interpretation: Irenaeus[298], Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor and Hilary. The Word left the ninety nine sheep in heaven to go in search of the lost sheep here on earth, viz. humanity.

In the first chapter (of *Catholicism*) entitled 'Dogma,' de Lubac proceeds to tease out the consequences of the image of the lost sheep. He does so by interpreting the Fall and Redemption in the light of his foundational principle, that humanity was created as one and was not the sum total of unconnected individuals created separately: 'With the first sin it was this being, whole and entire, which was driven out of Paradise.'[299] Original sin is seen as a fragmentation of what was intended to be a unity: 'Where there is sin there is a multitude'.[300] In addition to Origen, de Lubac supports his interpretation by referring, principally, to Maximus the Confessor, Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine.

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[295] Henri de Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 54-55
[296] *Catholicism, 25.*
[297] Lk 15: 4-6; Mt 18: 12-14.
[298] De Lubac does not give a precise reference to Irenaeus in regard to his use of the image of the lost sheep. In Book V of AH, the theologian of Lyons says it is the one hand of God who created us at the beginning and later came in search of the lost sheep,' Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses* V, 15, 2 (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 615.
[299] *Catholicism,* 26-7
[300] *Catholicism,* 33.

If sin divides, redemption unites. By his incarnation, the Word unites what has been divided by sin: 'And when Christ at last appeared, coming as the "one bridegroom", his bride, once again, was the "whole human race".[301]

As to whether, for de Lubac, incarnation was a necessity because of humanity's need for redemption as consequence of original sin or something that God had in mind from the beginning irrespective of the Fall, it would seem that he favours the latter option. Aquinas alluded to the latter possibility and Rahner, with reference to Duns Scotus, posits the incarnation as "the summit of the divine plan of creation."[302] For Rahner, incarnation is the high point in the history of salvation rather than a turning point, Christ is not the 'efficient cause' but the 'final cause' of our salvation.[303] At the same time, de Lubac too keeps both options open. We conclude therefore that the Scotus position is at least sustainable. Indeed, it has a powerful resonance with de Lubac's hypothesis that man, created in the "image" of God, needed Christ to enable him to grow in the "likeness" of God. Likeness is the blossoming of the image. Image is what was established in embryonic form at creation. Likeness is its perfection. That, suggests de Lubac, is the 'why' of Incarnation. Christ enables the human person to grow from "image" to "likeness". Considerable energy is expended by de Lubac on the distinction[304] between "nature" (sometimes meaning 'creation in general' and sometimes 'human nature') and the "supernatural".

It is sufficient in this study to remark that his goal and purpose in all of this was to establish the transcendence of Christ, as well as to highlight the inseparability of the human and divine natures of Christ. Jesus is no phantom from heaven; he is son of the woman Mary. The christology of de Lubac is a descending christology[305] which takes the incarnation as its starting point. The Word became flesh. If this is not so then God hasn't come into history, but if he was Divine as well as human how could he at the same time experience any of the limitations of being human? De Lubac insists "As there was no ignorance in him, he always knows what is best and he does it."[306] St Thomas, while not compromising on the perfection of Jesus, recognises that there were moments of indecision in his life, and lack of clarity regarding the future, and that he had to struggle in the face of evil – but only in an

[301] *Catholicism,* 27.
[302] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations,* Vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966),64.
[303] Karen Kilby, Karl Rahner (London: Fount, 1997), 27.
[304] Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural*, 2nd.·ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014),70.
[305] The New Testament provides several instances of a descending christology: Galatians4:4-7; I Corinthians8:6; Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-18: cited in *Christ and Creation*, 307.
[306] 'La Liberte du Christ', Archives Chantraine no.23422; cited in *Christ and Creation*, 307.

external way – he suffered temptation but he couldn't have sinned. De Lubac basically follows Aquinas.[307]

The divinity/humanity of Christ is of particular relevance for this study. De Lubac was particularly concerned about attempts to see Christianity as 'just another religion'.[308] He saw such attempts as more insidious than atheistic humanism. Christianity in such perspectives is just an evolutionary phenomenon; there is nothing supernatural about it. For de Lubac, Christianity is not just a follow-up to what went before (although what preceded it is of utmost importance) but is the transformation of everything that went before. Something totally new has come about. The coming of Christ, while it is an event in history, transcends it. It happened in history, but history cannot explain it. Christ reveals the Trinity and through the Cross he makes it possible for humans to enter the Trinitarian life.

De Lubac is utterly clear about the possibility of salvation for all human beings of every age. His conviction emerges from a Christology which asserts that every human being has an organic link to Christ. That link precedes the Incarnation; it has its origins in creation; it cannot therefore be lost.[309] It belongs to people who subscribe to non-Christian religions or to no religion, people who have, or have not, heard about Christ; all of humanity is connected to Christ. It is a position that he and Rahner share, but de Lubac distances himself from the latter in not accepting the concept "anonymous Christianity". The difference between them would seem to be more than semantic. De Lubac's insistence that it is in the Church that salvation is attained means that there cannot be a Christianity that is functioning autonomously beyond it. Everyone in a sense 'belongs' to the Church. On that basis he is prepared to accept their being referred to as "anonymous Christians".[310]

We cannot understand de Lubac's theology in an individualistic manner, but rather in a social, historical and spiritual way. 'The work (*Catholicism*) tries to show the simultaneously social, historical and interior character of Christianity, this threefold mark conferring on it that character of universality and totality best expressed by the word "Catholicism".[311] De Lubac is rejecting narrow-minded Catholicity and in its place he proposes the notion of the mystical body of Christ and its emphasis on the union of all of humanity. For him, narrow,

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[307] *Christ and Creation*, 308-309.
[308] Christianity is not one of the great things of history; it is history which is one of the great things in Christianity. See, John Hillebert, *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (London, New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark), xviii.
[309] *Christ and Creation*, 438.
[310] Ibid., 437.
[311] Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 27.

individualistic Catholicism is not the essence of authentic Catholicism. He re-conceptualizes the word Catholicity by emphasizing its spiritual rather than geographical or statistical dimensions. The Catholicity of the Church which "Jesus Christ spread and communicated" is an intrinsically spiritual entity.[312] De Lubac sees the Church's historical dimension as being linked to the social dimension. Catholicism is essentially social.[313] Although he begins *Catholicism* with an attack on the individualistic notion of Christianity, and he sees the church as the society of believers, the individual is not unimportant for him. Sacraments are a means of salvation and instruments of unity and they have, as a consequence, a social dimension. The Eucharist is a sacrament of unity.[314] The unity signified by the Eucharist does not stop with internal, church unity. Those gathered are sent out on a mission of charity to a larger world.

De Lubac goes on to make clear the relationship between distinction and unity, personal and universal. He says "the distinction between the different parts of a being stands out the more clearly as the union of these parts is closer.[315] This pilgrimage of the church leads to the importance of history in de Lubac's theology. For him, "the stages of history... are in reality stages of an essentially collective salvation."[316] De Lubac discusses the true nature of the catholicity of the Church. He says the Church does not already contain the final unity that is its goal in Christ. But he reminds us that a Christian must never confuse the church with the kingdom of God. History provides the stage for the drama of salvation, and, consequently, for de Lubac, the church, as the temporal vehicle by which humans travel to that natural reunification with God and each other, is also extremely important as the channel to salvation.[317] The right understanding of the clear idea of difference between nature and the supernatural and of the unity is also needed for an understanding of the Church and her role.[318]

4 De Lubac's Theology Revisited.

Theology in every age has attempted to speak of God in the context of its time. De Lubac was driven by the desire to relate to the world as it was then (mid-20th century). Our times are not the same. This is not to suggest that his theology is now redundant but, consistent

[312]Catholicism, 48.
[313]Ibid.,15.
[314]Ibid.,82.
[315]Ibid.,328.
[316]Ibid.,148.
[317]Ibid .,236.
[318] De Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*,109.

with the method which he developed, for it to have contemporary relevance, it needs now to be viewed through the lens of the present.

The Genesis depiction of humans as "created in the image and likeness of God" Gen 1:27 is for de Lubac central to his understanding of humanity as unique. One could surmise that today, amidst the gross inequalities among humans across the globe and within every locality, he would also wish to draw on this passage to argue for the absolute equality of every single individual with every other human being. Were he to be writing about Hinduism it is to be expected that he would engage with the Caste system in that context.

Proceeding to the next verse of Genesis, it can be conjectured that de Lubac today would be concerned that the idea that humans "have dominion" (Gen. 1:28) over the earth could be used to justify what humanity has done and is doing to creation. Pope Francis writes in his Encyclical *Laudato Si*: "Nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."[319] Pope Francis describes human life as "grounded in three fundamental and closely interrelated relationships, with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself"[320]. He seems less concerned with humanity's location 'at the top' of creation than with our relationship to and responsibility for it. These relationships are also primary for de Lubac. More than that he sees creation as destined to be taken up in God, and not just a stage on which humanity does its living until it moves on. He provides here a basis for a theology of the environment. On the theological debate about whether the Incarnation was necessary as consequence of original sin or was in the plan of God from the beginning, de Lubac may have been somewhat ambivalent. Today it might be assumed that he would take the latter position more forcefully.

5 *Nostra Aetate* at the Centre of Inter-Faith Dialogue

Before dealing with de Lubac's writing on Buddhism, the Conciliar document entitled *Nostra Aetate* merits specific attention. It is clear that de Lubac had a profound influence on the Second Vatican Council.[321] Paul Mc Partlan states: 'Joseph Ratzinger pays a remarkable

[319] Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (England: Catholic Truth Society Veritas), 39.
[320] Ibid, 39.
[321] The first two drafts of the Second Vatican Council's declaration on Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, failed to mention Buddhism. It was introduced only once the text reached its third version in November 1964. Buddhism was identified solely with the experience of *nirvana*: abnegation and purification of the self as a path to freedom and permanent peace. The fourth and final version echoes, however, de Lubac's more positive and nuanced appraisal, referring to Amida Buddha in its reference to a "higher source" of illumination beyond that of the self, as distinct from more self-centred paths of enlightenment. See, Mikka Roukanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden: Brill,1992),124-128;

tribute to de Lubac when he affirms that: "in all its comments about the Church {Vatican II} was moving precisely in the direction of de Lubac's thought."[322] It is beneficial, therefore, to consider the Council's teaching in the light of *Catholicism* and de Lubac's radical inclusivity. In the context of a discussion on the "Theological Foundations of the Missions," de Lubac had a strong response to 'the brutal objection' to the Church's mission based on race in which he challenged the principal Nazi theoretician of race.[323] His thought illuminated the Council's teaching on the Church's missionary activity and the possibility of salvation for those who have not encountered or heard the Gospel message.

It has profoundly enabled inter-faith dialogue, and for the first time there was an acceptance by the Catholic Church that we should consider the possibility of the truth being found outside the Church. Credit is due to all of the authors of *Nostra Aetate,* but special gratitude is due to de Lubac; for his methodology and for the Principles of Auscultation and the Catholicity of Truth it is beyond dispute that he played a part in its emergence.

Nostra Aetate[324] promoted inter-religious dialogue and mutual understanding between Christian and non-Christian religions. It is surely the wish of the Creator that all of humanity be redeemed. We are tasked with promoting unity and love among people and nations and God is with us in this task. Practically all religions share a common belief that we are created by a God, a father or a Supreme Being of some type. Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism in particular have so much in common with regard to origin, practices, teachings, beliefs, goals, and ultimate aims. We have common answers to many questions. In *Nostra Aetate* we are all exhorted to dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions carried out with prudence and love in witness to the Christian faith and life, (to)… recognise, preserve, promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values among these men."[325] That is exactly what de Lubac did in his inter-religious study of Buddhism and it is what we are attempting to do in our search for an inter-religious understanding with Hinduism.

6 De Lubac and Buddhism

The period in the 1950s, during which Henri de Lubac was effectively silenced, turned out to be a particularly fruitful time in his journey of exploration of other religions, as he embarked

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cited by David Grumett, "De Lubac, Christ and the Buddha," New *Blackfriars* Vol. 89, no. 1020 (March 2008): 217-18.

[322]Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 8.

[323]Ibid.,15.

[324] *Nostra Aetate*, no,1.

[325] Ibid., no 2.

on an intense study of Buddhism. In his assessment of this work, de Lubac believes that not every spiritual or religious manifestation is equally graced, he is far more accepting of non-Christian religions than many of his contemporaries.[326]

In our search for a theological method that illuminates the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism we are having recourse to the approach taken by de Lubac in his study of Buddhism. As indicated earlier in this Chapter, his methodology encompasses two companion principles: Auscultation and the Catholicity of Truth. We will pay particular attention to his fidelity to these principles in our exploration of his study of Buddhism. Auscultation for de Lubac is about deep, attentive and non-judgemental listening to the contexts and cultures which have a bearing on the subject under review. With the affirmation of Thomas Aquinas, he asserts the catholicity and transcendence of truth above institutions, times and places.

De Lubac had an intense interest in Buddhism.[327] Of its two main branches the *Hinayana* and the *Mahayana* (the Great Vehicle)[328] it was the latter which de Lubac focused on, and specifically Pure Land Buddhism[329]/Amidism,[330] a broad branch of Mahayana

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[326] Henri de Lubac considered Buddhism to be, after Christianity, the greatest fact of History. For details see, David Grumett, "De Lubac, Christ and the Buddha," New *Blackfriars* Vol. 89, no. 1020 (March 2008):217-18, accessed May 14, 2008. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43251219. See also, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac, trans*. Joseph Fessio and Michael M. Waldstein, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 54-59.

[327] Buddhism, a religion of reason and meditation has its origin in India. According to Siddhartha, better known as Gautama the Buddha (560-480 BC), the founder of Buddhism, the centrality of suffering in human life is something that lies at the root of all human problems. He taught that all suffering was due to the greed of the individual. The content of all his preaching was deliverance, which he calls *nirvana*: the victory over death, the end of all suffering, the perfect and incomparable bliss. Hinayana and Mahayana are the two major sects of Buddhism. The idea of Bodhisattva was a basic feature of Mahayana. The concept of Bodhisattva is very similar to that of Christ who suffered and offered his life for the redemption of the world. There are many scholars who find the influence of Christianity in this new concept. Christianity certainly influenced the development of Mahayana Buddhism at the later period and was influenced by Buddhism to some extent. There were several channels of communication between Buddhists and the Countries of Western Asia, Africa and Europe. See, Har Dayal, The *Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, (New Delhi: Motilal Banrasidass Publishers, 1999), 40-41.

[328] Mahayana, which has developed chiefly in the Far East, has been richer in developments and more receptive to outside influences. "Mahayana" means the Great Vehicle, depicting this form of Buddhism as a raft or ship that carries one across the world of suffering to a better world. Mahayana Buddhism, which is foundational for the traditions of Zen and Ti- betan Buddhism, to which most Buddhists engaged in Buddhist-Christian dialogue belong. For details, see, Ernest M. Valea, Buddhist-*Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology* (Oregon: Pick Wick Publishers, 2015), 27.

[329] The primary development of Pure Land teachings occurred in China, where it was transferred with Indian monastic Buddhism in the early centuries of the Buddhist transmission from India. See, Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: History and Orientalism in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 2.

[330] Amidism is a school of Mahayana Buddhism, which was taught by Nagarjuna. The school is based on the teachings found in the Pure Land sutras, which were propagated by Shan Tao in China. See Royal Tyler, "The Japanese Transformation of Buddhism" in Takeuchi (ed.), *Buddhist Spirituality Later in China, Korea, Japan and the Modern World* (London: SCM Press; 1999), 156-60.

Buddhism, and one of the most widely practised traditions of Buddhism in East Asia. He was very well versed in the works of leading French Buddhist scholars of his generation.[331] De Lubac's study continued over a period of twenty years. His monographs on Buddhism, published during the 1950s, drew on lecture notes, a chapter, and an article produced over the course of the previous twenty years, alongside Christian theology. Nor did his interest in Buddhism cease upon his rehabilitation in the late 1950s. His final published paper was presented in 1971, with a shorter piece produced two years earlier. His study constitutes an early exercise in comparative theology. This critical appraisal of another faith was a key resource for de Lubac himself in considering his own faith in a new light.

De Lubac's study of Buddhism helped to enhance his understanding of his own Christian faith and in particular his evolving understanding of the grace-nature relationship.[332] More dialectically, his study reinforces the necessity of a theological anthropology grounded in the incarnation because of the consequences of its absence. Adherents of Shin Buddhism, the school of Pure Land Buddhism, which is considered the most widely practised branch of *Buddhism* in Japan, would no doubt dispute de Lubac's critiques of Buddhism. However, we will see that he was equally critical of elements of Roman Catholic tradition. Honest self-examination and criticism can lead to a deeper self-understanding and create positivity both within and between faiths. De Lubac's study of Buddhism serves as both an encouragement and a guide for our research.[333]

[331] See, John Milbank, "Henri de Lubac" in David F. Ford ed., *The Modern* Theologians (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 84.
[332] John Milbank, "Henri de Lubac", 84-86.
[333] Henri de Lubac produced three separate books on the study of Buddhism; *Aspects du bouddhisme* (1951*), La Rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (1952) and *Amida* (1955). See Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 33. The available English translation is the following book. Aspects of Buddhism, by Henri de Lubac SJ, Translated by George Lamb (London & New York :Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1953). See also, O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac*, 22-23.

6.1 *Aspects of Buddhism*

It is typical of the man that in introducing his writing on aspects of Buddhism he merely claims to have sought "to enter a little more deeply into its spirit."[334] The rigour with which he explores the religion is more than impressive. In the context of our study of how de Lubac's theological method can be used to further mutual understanding between Hinduism and Christianity, we have chosen some sections of his study of Buddhism with a view to identifying and demonstrating his approach. Of particular significance throughout is his respectful description of Buddhist teaching, and his search in pre-Buddhist history for seeds of its richness.[335] There is his identifying both seeming convergences with Christianity and radical differences between the two religions. There is also his wide-ranging perusal of what previous writers have said, positive or negative, about Buddhism and his sincere analysis of such findings. And not least he has recourse both to Scripture and to the wisdom of the Fathers of the Church[336] as his guides.

6.2 Buddhist Charity[337]

Chapter one of de Lubac's "Aspects du Bouddhisme" is entitled (in the available translation) "Buddhist Charity". [338] He opens the chapter with the following quotation:

> The person with a hundred different loves has a hundred different pains.
> The person with ninety different loves has ninety different pains.
> The person with eighty different loves … etc.
> The person with one love has one pain.
> The person without love has no pain.[339]

This quotation would seem to justify the opinion of those for whom there can be no possible question of charity in Buddhism. The complete insignificance of the individual in Buddhism would seem to rule out any notion of love for another person for that person's sake. The ego

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[334] *Aspects of Buddhism*, 15.
[335] See, Takeuchi Yoshinori (ed.), *Buddhist Spirituality Later in China, Korea, Japan and the Modern World* (London: SCM Press; 1999), viii.
[336] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri de Lubac*,
[337] One of the Buddha's many names was the Good Physician. What he prescribed is something that required one grain of faith in another and a better world, one grain of love, or, as he called it, pity for those who are our neighbours, one grain of nobility to feel that the hoarding of unnecessary wealth is mean, and one grain of wisdom to see that a bow bent too far will snap. The medicine that he mixed out of all these ingredients was called Charity. For details, see, F. Max Müller "Buddhist Charity" in "The North American Review, Vol. 140, No. 340 (Mar. 1885), pp. 221-236 Published by: University of Northern Iowa Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25118466 Accessed: 06-05-2020 16:52 UTC.
[338] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 16.
[339] The remark was made by Shakyamuni to some parents crying for their child: "Whatever you love only brings you trouble and pain." Cited by de Lubac in the notes of "Aspects of Buddhism", 131. For Buddha charity meant, not simply giving of alms, not simply giving out of our abundance, but a readiness to give up everything. For details see, F. Max Müller "Buddhist Charity", 2.

is illusory; it is to be eliminated. But de Lubac is much less dismissive of the Buddhist term *ahimsa* and while he concludes that "pity" rather than "charity" might be a more appropriate translation of the term, he endeavours to enter more deeply and respectfully into the matter. He favours translating *ahimsa* as "doing no harm" and "respect for all living things". He then proceeds to point out that *ahimsa* is only the beginning of the Buddhist's duty to his neighbour and to all living creatures; there is:

- ✓ *Maitri*, "loving kindness"
- ✓ *Dana*,"giving" "generosity"
- ✓ *Karuna*, "compassion" "tenderness"

De Lubac's rigorous research confirms that these three virtues preceded Buddhism in Indian culture; the Buddha *Sakyamuni* (c. 558 – c. 491 BCE, or c. 400 BCE) was simply repeating teachings already at least partly contained in the oldest *Upanishads*. At the same time he acknowledges the likeness of these values with what Jesus preached: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you".[340] He discovers Milarepa, the Tibetan poet and mystic,[341] writing in his "Spiritual Testament":

> The person who only thinks of his own salvation harvests samsara.
> The person who does not distribute what he has gathered Meditates in vain, he will remain without virtue.[342]

In de Lubac's judgement *Ahimsa* merits at least the description "altruistic". However, he goes on to defend the use of the word "charity" to translate *maitri*. It means not simply the act of someone liking another but "a universal feeling which fills him with loving-kindness towards men and in general makes him always ready to help them. This ... one of the characteristic features of Buddhist morality, is the virtue which seems to me to be signified by the word maitri."[343]

Having defended Buddhism against those who would demean it, de Lubac also challenges those who, following the scientific discovery of Buddhism in the last century,

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[340] Mt 7:12. Dharma-Pada to Buddhism is, what the New Testament to Christianity is. Dharma -pada is a subsection of the voluminous *Sutta-pitka* (Code of Context for Buddhist Community). It embodies the important moral teachings of Buddha who lived in North India from 563-483 B.C. Dharma- Pada is a subsection of the voluminous *Sutta- pitaka* (the other two *pitakas* or *volumes* are; Abhhidharma and Vinaya-pitakas).
See, Jacob Kattackal, *Dharma- Pada: Sri Buddhha's Moral Teachings, The Sacred Book of the Buddhists* (Vadavathoor: ORISI Publications, 2009). 1-9.
[341] Andrew Quintman, *The Yogin and the Madman: Reading and Biographical corpus of Tibet's great saint Milarepa* (New York: Columba University Press, 2013), 2-4.
[342] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 27.
[343] Ibid., 30.

were taken in by what seemed at first sight to be obvious analogies, and were inclined to see illusory similarities between Buddhism and Christianity. He found that some analyses seem based on misunderstandings of Christian charity. His own thoughtful analysis led him to conclude:

> Buddhism, even in its highest and most admirable forms, is entirely different in inspiration from Christianity. It corresponds to a different idea. It has a different place, in a different scheme of salvation. By making a comparison, only slightly exaggerated, between the two, we may manage to bring out into the full light of day the utterly different spirit informing the two religions.[344]

A fundamental axiom of Buddhism is the insignificance of the individual. "How then" asks de Lubac "can anyone really be loved… another's personality can never be the object of any serious love". He contrasts the fragility of the Buddhist concept of love for others with the Christian foundation for loving one another, namely the fact that "the Word became flesh" and showed a love of which there is no greater – by dying on the Cross. Here he has recourse to St Augustine to point to the distinction between pity and love.[345] Going deeper yet, he observes that:

> Here, as everywhere else in Buddhism, the absence of a real God, a living God, a God of Charity, makes itself felt most painfully. For the Christian the commandment to love God is founded upon God's love for man, and this love of God for man expresses the very Being of God: Deus est Caritas.[346]

The second commandment, to love one's neighbour, is based on the first, which in turn is based on the love of God for man, who is created in God's image and likeness. "There is nothing of this in Buddhism."[347] De Lubac concludes his exploration of *Ahimsa* with this assessment of the Buddha.

> We should not criticise him unduly more than any other man who has ever lived, perhaps, he grasped the problem of human destiny, and led a whole *pars purificans* towards the good, for which Christians can be grateful to him. He avoided the deceptive ways—always so tempting—of superstition or automatic asceticism. He saw the need for a spiritual deprivation beyond the might of the senses. No doubt he failed to achieve his aim.… (but) we should not criticise him unduly…. (what is missing is) … the divine Word, Jesus Christ, by whom today we live.[348]

In his study of Buddhist charity, de Lubac has engaged on a most sincere and respectful assessment of the Buddha. He has examined the pre-Buddhist tradition of *ahimsa*, the

[344] Ibid., 32.
[345] Ibid., 34.
[346] Ibid., 41.
[347] Ibid., 41.
[348] Ibid., 52.

writings of Buddhist scholars, and of the scholars of Buddhism who preceded himself. With these, and with attentiveness to the Scriptures and to the Patristic inheritance, he has provided a model of adherence to the principle of auscultation. The result is a significant service to both religions.

6.3 Buddhist and Christian Iconography: shared symbols

In his Chapter in "Aspects of Buddhism" entitled "Two Cosmic Trees" de Lubac introduces readers to a sculpture on a pillar at one of the gateways of an ancient Buddhist monument at Sanchi. It incorporates, in a single entity, a symbolic representation of the Buddha combined with a pillar and a tree. It is without doubt an attempt to depict The Buddha, not the Buddha Sakyamuni in his mere individuality but in his highest essence, as being at once the Cosmic Pillar and the Tree of Life. Both concepts are pervasive, and overlapping, across much of Asia. They pre-date Buddhism. They symbolise the uniting of sky with earth; they are metaphors for wholeness. Buddha's body is ultimately the 'Dharma body', its location is "a place where an absence is present."[349]

While searching, from a Christian perspective, for possible convergences between Christian and Buddhist iconography de Lubac came across a Christian text, a passage taken from a homily on Easter. It has been linked to a treatise by St. Hippolytus on Easter that is mentioned by Eusebius in his History of the Church, but its authorship remains in doubt. The following passage occurs in its description of the Cross:

> This wood is provided for my salvation ... I establish myself in its roots, 1 lay myself down under its branches. Under its shade I set up my tent.... Its fruit provides me with perfect joy... This tree goes up from the earth into the heavens; it is the plant of immortality, rising in the middle of heaven and earth—the firm prop of the universe, joining all things together, the support of the whole inhabited earth, twining the cosmos together and including in itself the whole medley of human nature. Nailed down by the invisible nails of the Spirit, so that he will never waver in his fidelity to the divine, touching the sky with the crown of his head, establishing the earth with his feet, and in the space between heaven and earth embracing the innumerable spirits of the earth with his immeasurable hands.[350]

Given the similarity between the Buddhist symbolisms referred to above and those of the Christian tradition as expressed in this text, it is understandable that de Lubac felt drawn to it. He notes further that this is only one amongst many in which the Cross is referred to explicitly as the axis and prop of the world, the nexus of the whole creation, the solid pillar

[349] Malcom David Eckel, *to see the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the meaning of Emptiness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 65.
[350] Cited by de Lubac in *Aspects of Buddhism*, 54-55 and the reference no, 3. (Charles Martin, (1926) pp. 14-163; "Fragments palimpsestes d'un discours sur la Pique attribud i saint Hippolyte de Rome).

around which the four quarters of the universe are arranged and organised. Furthermore, de Lubac feels prompted to link the Tree and Pillar symbols to what is in effect an identical symbol, namely the Ladder of Jacob, the stairway leading to heaven that features in *Genesis 28:10–17. To the delight of this writer de Lubac notes that this has been a very popular symbol in the Syrian Christian tradition and quotes Jacob of Sarugh speaking of Christ on the Cross standing on the earth: "*as on a ladder of many rungs".[351]

As to whether there might be an historical link between the sculpture at Sanchi and the Christian homily being considered – specifically whether one was influenced by the other in either direction, de Lubac suggests that any conclusion would be premature. He is quick to stress the predominant role of Jewish Wisdom literature in the identification of Christ with the Tree of Life. Wisdom "is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her", (Proverbs 3:18). For Jews this Wisdom was the Law; for Christians, the Son of God is Wisdom. At the same time, he acknowledges that neither religion "invented" the images but rather found them "ready to hand" and utilised them for their own purposes. In the same way as the ancient symbol of the Tree of Life found in the Vedas and Upanishads was chosen to represent the Buddha, so too the Christian religion has drawn on Hebrew symbols to speak of the Christ.

Such comments convey a profound respect for Buddhism – to the point of granting it a share of the space with Christianity in the search of human beings for meaning - for the whence of their lives and the whither of their striving. More than that, the search for answers to the fundamental 'religious question' presents both of them with the problem of finding a language to speak of the transcendent. De Lubac has no hesitation in showing how both resort to the same 'solution' – in the metaphors, symbols and images "from the accumulated stock of centuries" of the human environments from which they came to birth and developed. It is in the context of de Lubac's commitment to respectful non-judgemental listening (auscultation), and to Truth as beyond confinement, that he succeeds in creating the basis for meaningful conversation between Buddhism and Christianity.

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[351]De Lubac cited Jacob of Sarugh, Homily on the Vision of Jacob ai Bethel, n. 95 (Zingerte-Mosinger, Monumenta Syriaca, vol. I, Eniponte 1869, p. 26) in Aspects of Buddhism, 61. Jacob of Sarugh, perhaps the finest Syriac poet after Ephrem the Syrian, was born at Kurtam on the river Euphrates, sometime in the middle of fifth century; he received his education at the Persian School in Edessa but reacted against its Christological teaching. His fame rests chiefly on a very large number of surviving memre in the 12-syllable metre; some 225 of these have been edited so far, but many more still remain unpublished. Six prose homilies also survive, concerned with the Nativity, Epiphany, the Great Fast (Lent), Palm Sunday (Hosh'ana) the Passion, and the Resurrection. For details, see, Sebastian Brock *Moran Etho, A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam: SEERI, 1997), 37-38. See, also Thomas Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Sarugh: Select Festal Homilies* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1996), 21.

From that position, de Lubac is then able to insist that a similar utilisation of symbols and myths from their respective traditions does not imply fundamental similarity of doctrine or spirit between the two religions. Similarity does not equate with sameness. De Lubac concludes the Chapter entitled "Two Cosmic Trees" as follows:

> In Christianity the whole value of the Cross comes from the divine fruit hanging on its branches. ln Buddhism, the tree of salvation is the tree of knowledge, acquired by man himself by means of mental concentration, and which of itself, by removing his thirst for being, dries up the source of becoming: its fruit is a jewel, brilliant but sterile. In Christianity, it is the sap of the Tree which enables man to share in the "Living God"; it is the Tree which procures eternal life, the Tree of fruitful suffering, the Tree of hope, at whose foot the springs of life gush forth… In Buddhism, the 'unique fig-tree' is still a tree, one of an infinite number like itsel… In Christianity, the Tree of the Cross is unique… It alone deserves to be called unique — because it alone bears, uniquely and finally, the Salvation of the world: 'Behold the Wood of the Cross on which hangs the Saviour of the World.'[352]

We have journeyed with de Lubac through Buddhist and Christian iconography, through the traditional inheritances of each, through their shared struggle to find a language to express the transcendent. He has demonstrated a method for all inter-faith engagements, one that allows for bringing to the surface sometimes remarkable convergences while at the same time avoiding assumptions of there being doctrinal connection between the two.

6.4 Different Manifestations of Christ and the Buddha

The above is the title of Chapter Three of de Lubac's work "Aspects of Buddhism". Here he is considering the respective writings of both great religious systems. He considers it inevitable that there should be many points of comparison, some of them "quite startling". But he is clearly uncomfortable with "far-fetched conclusions" that he has observed; he describes some of these as "superficial, vague, arbitrary and even fantastic". He is particularly concerned with seeming analogies between Christian writing and Buddhist passages concerning the doctrine of the *Trikaya* (Three Bodies)".[353]

The Christian writings under review are mostly from the region of the port city of Alexandria in Egypt. There is evidence of substantial trade being conducted during the first

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[352] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 74.

[353] Ibid., 86. Trikaya is the concept in Mahayana Buddhism of "Three Bodies", or modes of being of the Buddha, - the earthly body, the mind-body and the more ethereal. The category "Buddhas" proceeds from the idea that Buddha has three bodies: Dharma, Enjoyment, and Manifestation. Thus, the singularity of Buddha becomes a multiplicity, and many Buddhas appear in iconographic manuals as Buddha. For details, see, Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan, "Buddha's Bodies and the Iconographical Turn in Buddhism," in Takeuchi Yoshinori, ed., *Buddhist Spirituality Later in China, Korea, Japan and the Modern World* (London: SCM Press; 1999) 391-402.

century A.D. between Alexandria and the coast of India, and there may even have been a Buddhist colony there. De Lubac finds it necessary therefore not to arbitrarily dismiss the possibility of some kind of historical connection between respective writings that contain apparent similarities. That includes the possibility of reciprocal cross-fertilisation having occurred. Because of the work of contemporary historians on this issue, de Lubac felt obliged to recognise both the possibility of Western Gnostic[354] influences on the development of Buddhism, and of Buddhism (which is gnostic in perspective), together with Alexandrian Gnosticism, having influenced various writings from the disputatious during the early centuries of Christianity.

Evidence of such possible reciprocal influences required of de Lubac that he engage in an extensive perusal of writings, whether orthodox or heretical, towards comparing these with writings of Mahayana Buddhism, the focus of his research. He identifies some quite clear convergences between Gnostic writing and the theory of the *Trikaya* (the Buddha's 'Three Bodies).[355] But, aside from Gnostic writing and passages from apocryphal Christian texts, de Lubac had to face the issue of whether Origen of Alexandria, (184-253 AD)[356] one of the most influential figures in early Christian theology, might have been reflecting, across a broad spectrum of his writings, belief in a concept not dissimilar to that of *trikaya*. In his exploration of Logos in the Prologue of John's Gospel, Origen seems to imply that there were manifestations of Logos between when "The Word was in the beginning" (Jn 1.1) and when "The Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14). These include appearances as an angel, for

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[354] *Aspects of Buddhism, 87*. Any hypothesis about the origins and development of Gnosticisms must include its origin within a Jewish milieu. Thus, it has a pre-Christian origin, became a heretical movement of the 2nd-century Christian Church. It taught that the world was created and is ruled by a lesser divinity; the supreme being would never have created a world of such imperfection, tragedy and evil. In the Christian era it asserted that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being. It further taught, in its doctrine known as Docetism, that Christ's body was not human but of a more celestial substance, and that therefore his sufferings were only apparent. For details, see, Pheme Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 19-38.
In ancient Greece the East was viewed as a place of wonder, and the naked philosophers of India 'gemnosophist' were objects of considerable interest in the Hellenistic world. Marco Polo's expedition to China is perhaps the best-known prologue to the long story of imaginative construction of Asian cultures in the minds of Europeans. In the nineteenth century, Buddhism with its powerful spiritual message combined with an outlook that appeared to be remarkably in tune with empirical science, which proved an attractive proposition to a number of Western intellectuals. The twentieth century has witnessed an extradentary proliferation of orientalists interest, ranging from the well-known impact of Zen non the beat and hippie generations, and the dispersal of esoteric Buddhist wisdom from Tibet among eager recipients in the West - the luxuries fascination for the east. See, J.J Clark, *Oriental enlightenment: The encounter between Asian and Western thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 16-17.
[355] For *kaya* as a physical body and as a collection or combination, and *sarira* as a physical body as well as remnant or relic. See, Malcolm David Eckel. *To See Buddha* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 99.
[356] Aspects of Buddhism, 88-89. Eusebius whose Ecclesiastical History provides most of the information about his life, had access to Origen's extensive correspondence in his library at Caesarea.

example to Abraham in the Book of Genesis. But more than that, in his Eighth Homily on Genesis,[357] Origen implies that, parallel to the intervention of Logos in human affairs, there was a similar engagement in "the angelic order", which involved the Logos appearing "as an angel". As he appeared among men as a man "In the same way when he appeared amongst the angels he was recognised as an angel by his appearance." He elaborates on this is his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, suggesting that, "as he the Word made flesh, appeared to those who are in the flesh", so too the Logos "behaved similarly towards the other heavenly orders, appearing to each of them in their own particular form and proclaiming peace to them".

De Lubac acknowledges that there are many passages of this kind in Origen's writings. He accepts the possibility of his being influenced by Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish Platonist philosopher (born c 20 BCE) who frequently refers to appearances of the Divine which are graduated according to the nature of the beings to whom He wishes to appear. But de Lubac, concerned as he is with analogies with the Buddhist theory of *trikaya,* merely alludes to that possibility, and focuses on his concern that "theologians like Irenaeus and thinkers like Origen… present us with passages whose wording is often identical" not just to that of Gnostics but, with concepts of different manifestations of the divine, similar to those "which the Buddhists apply to the manifestations of the Buddha".[358]

Of particular concern to de Lubac is Origen's writing in relation to the Transfiguration. A plethora of apocryphal writings depict Jesus being transfigured before his disciples into a form corresponding to that of the *sambhogakaya* – the celestial body of the Buddha as per the notion of *trikaya*. As with *sambhogakaya* Jesus is visible only to those chosen to do so, i.e. Peter, James and John.

But it is not just apocryphal and Gnostic texts that speak like this of the Transfiguration, many of which pre-dated Origen by a long time, as did the writings of Philo. What is significant for de Lubac is that Origen also speaks in similar if not identical terms, and without any apparent scruples. In fact, he claims the support of "tradition":

> A tradition has come down to us, that there were not only two forms in Christ, one being the form in which everybody saw Him and the other the form into which He

[357] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 89-90, (Genesim, Homily VIII, n. 8: From Baehrens, 1920, p. 83). In the homilies on Genesis, portions of Homily 2.1-2 have been preserved in Procopius and Catenae. Origen's Eight Homily on Genesis was translated anonymously into English in 1565 (Crousel.H, *Bibliographie Critique de' Origene*: Instrumenta Patristica 8 (La Haye: Nijhoff, 1971). For details, see, *Origen Homilies on Genesis and Exodus: The Fathers of the Church vol. 71,* translated by Roland E. Heine (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 36.
[358] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 96.

> was transfigured before His disciples on the mountain, when His face shone like the sun; but He appeared to each person in the form that they were worthy to see Him[359]

De Lubac refers to several apocryphal passages that have sufficient resemblance to Buddhist theories to raise the question of a common source or of a borrowing by one or the other, and an indication of real contact and exchange of ideas. Interestingly, he goes on to suggest that "Breathing the atmosphere of Alexandria, Origen may have received from it some curious ideas, some of which may have come from the heart of India; he expresses these just as they came to him and may very well have taken them literally."[360]

He later remarks that it is not entirely irrelevant to note the similarity between Buddhist phrases used in apocryphal writing and the phrases used by Origen. He seems therefore to accept the likelihood that Origen was not unaffected by the Gnostic thinking that flourished in the same atmosphere. At the core of Gnosticism was the doctrine of Docetism, which viewed Christ as celestial (while appearing to humans as human). De Lubac cites The Acts of John, as especially Docetist in tone. This perspective is so commensurate with Buddhism that de Lubac is led to suspect that under the influence of Gnostic Docetism "The germs of Docetism which Buddhism carried within itself developed to a prodigious extent…. The deeper one delves into the history of Buddhism, the more one finds it invaded by a radical, universal Docetism."[361] It would be instructive, he suggests, to pursue the parallel between the various forms of "Christian" and Buddhist Docetism; the explanations, sometimes even the very words, are identical on both sides.

De Lubac's treatment of Docetism is preliminary to his dealing with accusations of a concealed Docetism which have been levelled against Origen. It is true that the Council of 543 AD found it necessary to pronounce an anathema against the "Origenism" of Palestinian monks of the day:

> Anathema on whoever says or holds that the Word of God assumed the appearance of all the heavenly orders, became a cherub amongst the cherubim, a seraph amongst the seraphim.[362]

However, de Lubac cogently defends Origen himself against such allegations. Rather he argues that:

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[359] *Aspects of Buddhism, 103*. (Koetschau, vol, I, pp, 185-186l). De Lubac is quoting from St Maximose of Turin.
[360] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 112-3.
[361] Ibid., 119.
[362] *Aspects of Buddhism,* 97. De Lubac cited The following footnote in the end note section of Third chapter in de (Trans. Przyluski, Le Concile de Rajaghra (1931), p. 102,)

> In him the Gnostic heritage is purified and transposed into an order of spiritual significance, so that, filtered, softened, spiritualised, and interiorised, it is then ready to enter into the mainstream of Christian tradition. In proof of this we need only quote here the names of two great figures, who were both undoubtedly influenced by Origen, St, Gregory of Nyssa and St. Bernard.[363]

For his own part de Lubac insists that one must be suspicious of any attitude from which the universe tends to be regarded as nothing more than one vast illusion: such an attitude would be a remarkable betrayal of Christianity. Salvation is not about an awakening of consciousness. Conversion, 'metanoia', is not a purely intellectual thing: it is an act, an effective movement from one state to another, demanding a personal decision, a personal adherence, an effective "yes".

The researcher has sought, in his perusal of Chapters One and Two of "Aspects of Buddhism" to demonstrate de Lubac's commitment to the principles of auscultation and of the catholicity of truth. These are evident also in Chapter Three, but it also demonstrates the particular relevance of de Lubac's methodology to inter-faith dialogue in our time. The early centuries of the Jesus movement were a time of religious and philosophical disputation. Alexandria in the time of Origen merits being classified as religiously pluralist, particularly if it included a Buddhist community. It was an interface between western and eastern cultures. In short it was a forerunner of the maelstrom of today's global village, the setting in which relationships across religious and cultural diversities are of crucial importance. This writer is impressed by the integrity and rigour with which de Lubac engages with the turbulence that he uncovers. He is not afraid to critique the Christologies, or the theologians, of the Patristic era in his search for truth beyond historical definitions of it. The meaning and interpretation of Logos, and of other titles attributed to Jesus, are issues also for our time, not least in respect of Hindu-Christian dialogue, as much as they were in the first centuries. The Vatican Council's recognition of religious pluralism in the Divine plan of salvation for humanity requires the development of a Christology which accommodates this new understanding. This task demands the integrity and courage that de Lubac demonstrated.

It has been noted above that de Lubac's critique of another faith was a key resource for him towards enhancing his understanding of his own Christian faith and towards critically assessing elements of the Roman Catholic tradition. It is our hope through this study and through engagement in dialogue with Hinduism to enrich our own understanding of Christian

[363] *Aspects of Buddhism*, 113.

faith. We intend to keep asking: What does our exploration of Jesus in relation to Hinduism tell us about the person of Jesus? What can we as Christians learn from this exploration – and from dialogue with Hinduism?

7 Conclusion

De Lubac's methodology enabled him to speak to the particular period in history in which he was writing. It was a time of increasing awareness of the limitations of defensive apologetics and of the inadequacy of neo-scholasticism to respond to the needs of his time. It was a time that called out for a new way for doing theology. Ours is a time of different questions seeking different answers. De Lubac would assuredly expect us to engage, in the light of Christian faith, with the signs and needs of these times, rather than those of his time. Theology, Scriptural exegesis, and the range of sciences have all evolved since then. Many of the assumptions - religious, social and cultural - that prevailed in de Lubac's time are no longer tenable. His methodology, his principles of auscultation and of the catholicity of truth, and so much else, remain as valuable now as when first developed. His exercise in comparative theology with respect to Buddhism is a specific resource for this particular engagement with respect to Hinduism.

De Lubac's two main principles, auscultation and the catholicity of truth are key resources in the pursuit of mutual understanding between these two religions in India. These points are developed in the following chapters. Suffice it to state here that they offer a foundation for a more practical and precise understanding of the requirements of both religions. They underscore the need for a mutually attentive listening ear, a leaving aside of past prejudices and not being content with mere social and political cooperation. In India especially, the major locus of encounter, this needs to happen at all levels of society. The points of convergence will be examined in detail in chapter four and should indicate that the ground is fertile. There is a profound connection between Hinduism and Christianity that has yet to be fully appreciated. They converge in the shared desire for peace and search for salvation. We will proceed from there to suggest ways of moving the process forward and outline what shape our mission and dialogue may take in the future.

CHAPTER 3
FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS OF HINDUISM

1 Introduction

In this chapter we will endeavour to explore what is believed to be the world's oldest faith, Hinduism, highlighting some of its salient features, while attempting to establish its origin and meaning. This will indicate how ancient and complex it is and how closely it is linked to Indian culture. We will then concentrate on its sacred scriptures, their importance and how they are divided and classified. This should enable us to understand the richness of Hindu thinking, and how it emphasises the absolute reality of the divine with particular attention to the Hindu titles which are central to our deliberations. We will also attempt to come to a better understanding of such figures as *Guru*,[364] (teacher) *Avatar* (a manifestation of a deity which has descended to earth; an incarnate divine teacher) and *Prajapati* (the creator, lord and protector of the universe). These titles have emerged as being of particular significance in the exploration of convergences between Hinduism and Christianity.

There is no intention here to provide a comprehensive description of the fundamentals of Hinduism but only to outline what relates to our purpose, namely the advancement of Hindu- Christian dialogue. That does require a substantial knowledge of Hinduism and not least of its important titles. In chapter one we explored relevant aspects of the research that has taken place on the issue of inter-religious understanding among the diverse religions and cultures in India. In this chapter we seek to provide a chronology of Hindu development, its scriptures, texts and commonalities, sufficient to support our pursuit of Christian-Hindu dialogue. When treating its sacred scriptures, we will deal with their divisions and classifications. It is important to be aware of the philosophical background, with specific reference to the school of Vedanta,[365] so as to view the Hindu titles in context. We will then elaborate on the Hindu vision of God, man, world and history, the principles of *dharma*,[366] the concepts of *karma*, *samsara* and rebirth and the caste system. Finally, we will consider the Hindu view of liberation and its essential paths.

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[364] Paul Vellarackal, *Darsanas Classical Indian Philosophy* (Vadavathoor: OIRSI Publications, 2016), 131-32.
[365] Scholars all over the world are evincing increased interest in Advaita-Vedanta. See, Jacob Kattackal, *Religion and Ethics in Advaita Vedanta* (Vadavathoor: OIRSI Publications, 1985).14.
[366] *Dharma* is a very complex concept in the philosophic literature of India. Hinduism is Sanatana Dharma or Eternal Law. The word *Dharma* is derived from Sanskrit root *dhr-dharati*=to hold fast, uphold, bear, keep in due order. See, Kattackal, *Religion and Ethicks in Advaita Vedanta*, 43.

1.1 Hinduism: Religious and Social Context

Hinduism, which is considered to be the oldest of the world's existing faiths can hardly be called a religion as Christianity. R. Panikkar states, "it is a bundle of religious traditions."[367] Besides not having any single historical event as a starting point, it does not possess any particular institutional structure capable of deciding questions of religious boundaries or formulating standards of doctrine and practice.[368] It is generally described as an immense socio-religious phenomenon defying all definitions; it is more a way of life, a culture, a set of philosophies than a religion in the strict sense. Hinduism is conceived by many of its students as a "parliament" or "league" of religions. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan remarks:

> To many it (Hinduism) seems to be a name without any content. Is it a museum of beliefs, a medley of rites, or a mere map, a geographical expression? Its content, if it has any, has altered from age to age, from community to community. It meant one thing in the *Vedic* period, another in the *Brahmanical*…. The ease with which Hinduism has steadily absorbed the customs and ideas of peoples with whom it has come into contact is as great as the difficulty we feel in finding a common feature binding together its different forms.[369]

It has no central figure as that of Jesus Christ in Christianity. On the other hand it has a plurality of symbols. Whether one is theist or atheist, sceptic or agnostic, all can find a place in Hinduism. It is all-embracing and its accommodating spirit is well known. Jawaharlal Nehru states:

> Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. It embraces many beliefs and practices, from highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other. Its essential spirit seems to be live and let-live.[370]

Hinduism can be better called a phenomen that takes the form of a religion, a philosophy and a social system. Not surprisingly then the concept of god in Hinduism varies across its range of traditions. Some theist traditions would appear to come close to the concept of God in other major world religions, but in the main the Hindu conceptualisation of the Supreme Being is much more abstract. At the outset therefore it must be stressed that the predominant Hindu term "Brahman" (or even "Para Brahman") can in no way be considered

[367] R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*,38.
[368] See Donald S. Lopez ed., *Religions of India in Practice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.
[369] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1949), 11-12.
[370] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India,* (London: Meridian Books, 1951), 71.

commensurate with the concept of God in other major world religions.[371] The Hindu religion emphasizes the absolute reality of God. He is the Absolute and the supreme spirit without name or form. His all-pervading presence is acknowledged by the Hindu believer. As a result, God considered in Himself is Impersonal.[372] "Brahman, free from space and location, attributes, motion, fruition and differences, Supreme Being, without a second, seems to the slow of mind no more than non-being."[373] Brahman is a key concept found in the Vedas and extensively discussed in the early Upanishads.

The *Rig* Veda states, "Though men call it by many names, it is really One."[374]

The term is perhaps best rendered in English as "Universal (or Cosmic) Principle" or "Ultimate Reality". While it carries connotations of "infinite" and "eternal", Brahman is perhaps more a metaphysical than a theological concept; it is that which is 'behind' all that exists in the universe; it is that which finds expression or realisation in the whole world. While Hinduism takes a religious form, it can equally be described as a philosophy, and yet again as a social system.[375]

In light of the above it has been decided not to the use the word "God" in this chapter, and to use the words 'god' and 'divine' with caution. This is not to diminish the truly religious character of Hinduism but so as to avoid confusing Hindu concepts with the monotheist concept of God as portrayed in the Abrahamic Faiths.

This one Supreme, Absolute reality, without name and attributes, is given different names and attributes by devotees according to different sects and groups.[376] S. Radhakrishnan says "Religion for the Hindu is an experience or attitude of mind; it is not an intellectual proposition but a life of conviction. Religion is consciousness of ultimate reality, not a theory."[377] It is acknowledging the all-pervading presence of God. Salvation for a Hindu means the discovery of the Supreme in oneself, finding out the identity between the

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[371]It is impossible to prove the existence of Brahman by interference. The attribute of Brahman is meaningful only in the context of its relation to the world. See *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions*, ed., Peter Koslowski (Munic:Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1985), 35-37.

[372] The modern Hinduism accepts both the metaphysical notion of the Impersonal Brahman and the religious concept of the Personal Isvara. See Cyril C. Papali*, Hinduism Religion and Philosophy* (Alwaye: Pontifical Institution of Theology and Hinduism, 1977), 236.

[373] Cankara-bhasya, Chan. Upanisad, VIII, i, 1.

[374] Hindus in general call Him Ishwaran. But among them the Vedantists call Him Brahman;the Saivites call Him Siva and Vaisnvaites call Him Vishnu. For details see, Josef Neuner, *Hinduismus and Christentum*, (Basel: Herder, Freiburg, 1962), 17-37.

[375]C.Papali, *Hinduism Religion and Philosophy*, 237.

[376] Josef Neuner, *Hinduismus and Christentum*, (Basel: Herder, Freiburg, 1962),17-37.

[377] S. Radhakrishnan, "Hinduism", in A.L Basham,ed. *A cultural History of India,*(London: University Press, 1975),60-82.

Brahman and the self, between the Being and being. For a Hindu the sense of holy or sacred is something pervading the whole order of nature. For the Hindu every God is but a manifestation of the one and eternal absolute Being, and every idol is but the sacramental presence pf the one infinite Spirit. [378] All-important Hindu Scriptures teach that there are several pathways to God.[379] According to the Hindu faith, the Supreme Being manifests himself through *avatars* (incarnations), either in the form of human beings, or animals or half human being and half animal.[380] Hence Hindus find it difficult to believe the absolute claim of Christ as the unique way to God;[381] this will be addressed later in the study. The law of Karma and re-birth are central tenets of Hinduism. To this, one may add the *varna-asrama-dharma*, i.e. the law of life according to one's caste and condition. Hinduism is a religion of castes. It is hereditary; one cannot get rid of it.[382]

1.1.1 Origin and Meaning of Hinduism

To speak about Hinduism's origin is very difficult, because, unlike other major religions such as Christianity or Islam, it has neither an individual founder, nor any particular divine revelation, nor a single text that can serve as a doctrinal point of reference. The word 'Hinduism' itself is a geographical term based upon the Sanskrit name of the great river, known as the Sindu, that runs across the northern boundaries of India.[383] The word "Hindu" derives from the Indo-Aryan word for sea, s*indhu*, which was also applied to the river Indus. Persians to the west of the Indus picked up the term, modified it phonologically to *hind*, and used it to refer also to the land of the Indus valley. From the Persian, it was brought into Greek and Latin, where "India" became the geographical designation for all the unknown territories beyond the Indus. Meanwhile, Muslims used Hindu to refer to the native peoples of South Asia who did not convert to Islam. Much later, in the nineteenth century the colonial British began to use the word Hinduism to refer to a supposed religious system

[378] Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India, Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*,67.
[379] Radhakrishnan, "Hinduism", 73-77.
[380] One of the contributions of Hinduism is the concept of avatar, the descent of God on earth taking the form of creature to establish *dharma* and save the good. The doctrine of avatar is typical of *Vishnuvism*, and it is Vishnu who descends as avatars. Exceptionally there are a few avatars existing outside this tradition. For example, we can find avatars in *Saivism* and *Saktism*, but they are not generally recognised. See, Noel Sheth, "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison" I, & II" *Vidhyajothi*, *Journal of theological reflection*, Vol. 67, No 3, 4 Delhi, March, April, 2003,182.
[381] See Jn 14:6, Jn 17:3, Mt 11:27, Acts, 4:12 etc. Hindus accept that Jesus is one of the incarnations and the gospel is another way to God.
[382] There are four castes: Brahman (priestly, Ksatriya (military noble),Vaisya (plebeian), and Sudra(servile). For details see John Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature. Function and Origins* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1973), 32.
[383] Karan Sing, *The Sterling Book of Hinduism* (New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 2007), 10.

encompassing the beliefs and practices of the Indian people not adhering to other named religions such as Islam, Christianity, or Jainism.[384]

It is supposed that Hinduism is the fusion of three currents: Aborigine, Dravidian dating back to 3000 B. C, and the later Aryan.[385] The groups of nomadic *pastoralists* who originally migrated from the steppes of south-central Russia around 4000 B.C called themselves "Aryans", meaning the noble ones" or "those who observe the religious rites".[386] It is their language that formed the basis for Greek, Latin, German, English, Persian, Sanskrit and most of the modern languages of north India.[387] We call those peoples Indo-Europeans, and those who migrated south into the Iranian plateau and the Indian sub-continent, Indo-Aryans. About 2000 B.C. the Indo-Aryans began to move towards the Indus river valley in small groups from the Iranian plateau. In 1200 B.C. they were still located mainly in Punjab, the fertile area drained by the five rivers of the Indus system. Later, about 600 B.C. they gained dominance over the plateau of river Ganges, and most of the north Indian regions.[388] Only later did the name "Hindu" take on a religious signification.

In fact, from about 2500 to 1700 B.C. a complex, urbanized, centrally organized civilization flourished in the Indus Valley, with two main cities, Harappa and Mohanjadaro, as well as other smaller towns.[389] According to the archaeological findings, this culture was Dravidian in nature, and the language found in the Indus valley script belonged to the Dravidian language, which is also the language of southern India.[390] Evidently, the Indus valley civilization was only a part of pre-Aryan, i.e., Dravidian, culture in the Indian sub-continent, which largely contributed to the development of Hinduism. Historians hold that the urban civilisation of the Indus Valley had collapsed prior to the arrival of the Indo-

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[384] Donald S Lopez ed., *Religions of India in Practice*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press,1995) 7-8.

[385] It is considered as an Indo-European race settled in Iranian plateau from 3000 B.C. and later on started to penetrate into Indian region, especially in north India and formed a civilisation. They present themselves as Aryans which means "superior", "excellent" or "noble" in order to establish their supremacy over the inhabitants. Their language was the ancient form of Sanskrit or Pali mixed with Avestic (Iranian language). For details see, Cyril Bernard Papali, *Vedism and Classical Hinduism* (Alwaye: Pontifical Institute Publications), 8.

[386] Burjor Avari, *India: The Ancient Past, A history of the subcontinent fromc.7000 BCE to CE 1200, Second Edition,* (New York: Routledge), 16.

[387] See, Donald S. Lopez ed., *Religions of India in Practice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 7-8.

[388] Ibid., 8.

[389] The Harappan civilization, the world's fourth great civilization after those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China flourished in the valley of the Indus three thousand years ago. As yet little is known about it, but one enormous town - Mohenjo-Daro - has survived. In Indus urban sites, monumental buildings (with famous exceptions such as the 'Great Bath' at Mohenjo-Daro or the 'Granary' at Harappa) are often difficult to distinguish from surrounding constructions, and their functions remain quite uncertain. For details, see, J. M. Kenoyer, 'Wealth and Socio-economic Hierarchies of the Indus Valley Civilization', in *Order, Legitimacy and Wealth in Early States*, eds., J. Richards and M. Van Buren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90–112.

[390] Kenoyer, "Wealth and Socio-economic Hierarchies of the Indus Valley Civilization", 110

Aryans. A more stable population and greater food resources led in turn to larger settlements, and the tribal organizations of the Indo-Aryan nomads began to give way to an incipient class society based on occupational specialization and status distinction. Those outside the Indo-Aryan race were increasingly incorporated into society as labourers or social inferiors, as servants (*dasas*) and later called Sudras in their social system.[391] Thus, Hinduism is made mainly of Aryan and Dravidian religious cultural elements, together with aboriginal elements which are not clearly distinguishable. Hinduism's cultural heritage is rich in writings in Vedic literature[392] which are considered today as its sacred scriptures. These sacred writings are the main sources of Hindu titles.

2 Scriptures of Hinduism

The corpus of the sacred scriptures of Hinduism is enormous. It is divided into two main groups: *Sruti* and *Smrti*.

2.1 *Sruti*

Sruti literature is perhaps more commonly known as *Vedic literature; Sruti* and *Vedas* are used synonymously. The *Vedic* period is generally understood to date from 2000 to 600 B.[393] *Sruti* means "what is heard", by the seers (*rshi*) as the 'divine revelation' in their deepest contemplation and transmitted to humanity. *Sruti* is considered the supreme authority concerning the Reality. The term "Reality" in this instance encompasses; Brahman, *atman* (the individual soul/self) and the world.

The *Vedas* are the "oldest literary records in Indo-European languages."[394] The word *vedas* is derived from the Sanskrit root *vid* which means "to know", "to see intellectually", and literally means "sacred knowledge". It refers to the knowledge of the highest sort, i.e., religious knowledge.[395] There are four *Vedas*: *Rig-Veda,*[396] *Yajur-Veda,*[397] *Sama-Veda,*[398]

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[391] This social system is called the caste system of which together with its division of labour. See,Kenoyer, "Wealth and Socio-economic Hierarchies of the Indus Valley Civilization",10.

[392]James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology. Enroute to dialogue with K Barth,H.de Lubac, K Rahner and R.Panikkar on Christocentric inclusivism* (Kozhikode: Premier Prints,2008), 15-17.

[393] Jacob Kattackal, *Religion and Ethics in Advaita*, (Vadavathoor: ORIS Publications 1985), 52.

[394] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 15.

[395] Lopez ed., *Religions of India in Practice*, 8.

[396] Derived from the root *Rk* means 'sacred verse' or 'praise' (to god). *Rig-Veda*, therefore means wisdom contained in sacred verses.

[397] Derived from the root *Yaj* means 'to sacrifice'; *Yajus* means sacrificial formula or sacrificial prayer. *Yajur-Veda is* the *Veda* of sacrificial formulas.

[398] *Saman* means melody; *Sama-Veda* thus means the *Veda* which contains melodies and chants of praise and sacrifice.

and *Atharva-Veda,*[399] which are considered to be eternal (*nitya*) and immemorial (*sanatana*), for they contain the eternal truths which are always in the mind of the divine, are breathed out by him, and are visualised by the seers who spoke out of their illuminated experience.[400] Regarding the authorship of the *Vedas*, there is no certainty but they are invariably attributed to Veda-Vyasan, the *Brahmin* sage whose original name was Krishna Dvaipayana.[401] The *Vedic* literature (*Sruti*) is divided into four parts, namely *Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*.

2.1.1 *Veda-Samhitas*

Samhita means "collection"; *Veda-Samhitas*, the original parts of the four *Vedas*, are the collections of hymns addressed to gods in the form of praises or supplications.[402] These hymns were composed over a period of several hundred years by different lineages or families of poet-priests and then compiled later into a single large collection.[403]

2.1.2 *Brahmanas*

To the *Samhitas* of *Vedas* were later added in about 1000 – 700 B.C. the sacrificial texts called *Brahmanas*.[404] This prose section is characterised by dogmatic assertions and flimsy symbolism rather than serious reasoning. Brahmanic literature emerged from and reflects a period when there was a movement away from a simpler Vedic religion to one that emphasised ritual and sacrifice. The original *Vedic* religion was replaced by a rigid and mechanical form of religion and sacrificial rituals came to be regarded as having a magical

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[399] *Athar* is an obsolete form which means fire. *Atharvan* probably was the name of an ancient priest who is said to have instituted the worship of fire or it could also be the name of the compiler of this *Veda*. *Atharva-Veda* is the *Veda* of incantations and of sacred spells. See, J. George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 18.

[400] Here the term "God" is used not to denote a particular God, but the Reality called Brahman. Bruce M. Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Vision Books, 2003), 212.

[401] He is the son of famous seer Parasara and Satyavati. But as the very name Vyasan indicates, he is the one who divided and codified systematically the *Vedic* hymns and formed the four *Vedas*. The word Vyasa is derived from the verbal prefix and root "vi" + "as" and it means to divide or classify. It is assumed that the second *mandala* (volume) was composed chiefly by Gritsmada, the third by Visvamitra, the fourth by Vamadeva, the fifth by Atri, the seventh by Vasishtha, the first, eighth, ninth and tenth by various poets. See Motilal Pandit "Vedic Hinduism", *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies*, no. 1, 1974, 122-123.

[402] The *Rig-Veda-Samhita* consists of ten *mandalas* (volumes), which are divided into *suktas* (hymns), and again to *riks* (verses). There are 1028 *suktas* and 10,500 *riks* for *Rig-Veda-Samhita*. See S. Randhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, (New Delhi :Harper Collins Publishers, 1996).44.

[403] They are addressed firstly to god *Agni* (Fire), then to *Indra*, *Soma*, Prajapati – who draws our special attention – and other gods. *Yajur-Veda-Samhita* is divided into *Yajnavalkya* (Black *Yajur-Veda*) and *Yajasaneyins* (White *Yajur-Veda*). The chief sacrifices connected with this are *Asvamedha* (the horse sacrifice) and *Purushamedha* (human sacrifice). Then comes *Sama-Veda* which treats the performance of the sacrifices in which the juice of the soma plant was the main ingredient. The *Samhitas* of *Sama-Veda* are *Ranayaniya* and *Kauthuma*. The *Atharva-Veda-Samhita* rests as one text which mainly treats the magical formulas.

[404] But the exact period of *Brahmanas* is still in dispute, and some authors attribute the period as 800 – 700 B.C. For details see P. Johanns "General Historical Survey: Part I (B.C. 1200 – A.D. 700)" in R. De Smet and J. Neuner eds., *Religious Hinduism*, (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 1997), 31-48.

inherent power to bring about anything the *sacrificer* wanted. Consequently, the *Brahmins*, the priestly class, being the official performers of the rituals, acquired substantial dominance in society; their authority could not be questioned. *Prajapati*, the great figure of *Vedic* sacrifice is presumed to have emerged in this period.[405]

2.1.3 *Aranyakas*

This departure from the original Vedic religion and a general degeneration in the Brahmanic tradition, occasioned a rebellion; in reaction to the exaggerated focus on the sacrificial and ritualistic system, the *rshis* (sages) withdrew themselves to forests to contemplate the meaning of the *Vedas* and began to formulate the *Aranyakas*,[406] which means "forest treatises".[407] The period of *Aranyakas* is placed at about 800 to 700 B.C.[408] They can be understood as a set of *Vedic* texts composed as commentaries on the *Vedic Samhitas*. They played an intermediary role between the exaggerated ritualism of the *Brahmanas* and the intellectualism of the *Upanishads*. The official religion led by the *Brahmins* (Priestly class) considered the hermits as rivals who denied the efficacy of sacrifice and focused instead on *tapas* (extreme mortification and contemplation in forests). Nevertheless, they found a compromise and combined the *Vedic* sacrifice and *tapas* by formulating four *asramas* in Hindu life.[409]

2.1.4 *Upanishads*

Upanishads are generally considered the culmination, the end of *Veda*, and thus are also called *Vedanta*.'[410] They form the closing part of the *Vedic* collection, and purport to present the hidden meanings or the real message of the *Vedic* verses.[411] They are dated between 650 and 400 B.C. Though there is no unanimity regarding the number of *Upanishads*, many are agreed that the principal ones are fourteen in number.[412] The authorship of these texts is

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[405] *Rig-Veda* has two *Brahmanas*: *Aitareya-Brahmana* and *Kaushitaki-Brahmana*. Likewise, *Yajur-Veda* also has two *Brahmanas*: *Taittiriya* and *Satapata*. The *Brahmanas* of *Sama-Veda* are eight in number:[405] *Praudha, Shadvimsa, Samavidhi, Arsheya, Devetadhyaya, Vamsa, Samhita-Upanishad* and the *Chandogya-Upanishad*, whereas *Atharva-Veda* has only one *Brahmana* part, called *Gopatha-Brahmana*.[405] Considering our present study, especially the *Vedic* sacrifices and Prajapati, these *Brahmana* texts bear supreme importance seeing that they are the first and the main sources of *Vedic* sacrifice, and the sacrifice of *Purusha*-Prajapati.

[406] Bruce M. Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism*, 26-27.

[407] The word *aranyam* means forest. James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,*28

[408] For details see S. Radhakrishnan *The Principal Upanishads*.

[409] The four *asramas* are *brahmacharya* (student, celibate life), *grahastya* (family life), *vanaprasta* (forest dwelling) and *sannyasa* (hermitage). By adopting this to life, Hinduism could find a compromise between priestly and mystical movements. See, P. Johanns, "General Historical Survey: Part I, 35-36.

[410] See Lopez ed., *Religions of India in Practice,* 12.

[411] Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism*, 228.

[412] Of these, six *Upanishads* are the most ancient, formed in about the 7th Century B.C., namely *Aitareya, Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Kausitaki, Kena, Taittiriya.* The other six, formed later on, are *Katha, Mandukya,*

attributed to various sages.[413] In addition, because of their subtlety, the *Upanishads* are taught only at the end of the *Vedic* course, and are called *Vedasya antah* (end of *Vedas*).[414] According to S. Radhakrishnan,

> the *Upanishads* are the highest and purest expression of the speculative thought of India. They embody the meditations on great matters of a succession of seers who lived between 1000 and 300 B.C. In them…we have the earliest attempt at a constructive theory of cosmos, and certainly one of the most interesting and remarkable.[415]

The positions and functions of the guru are very vivid in the *Upanishads*, and hence they are of particular relevance to our current study. The word *Upanishad* is rendered by some Indian writers as 'that which speaks of mystery'; its literal meaning is "sitting down near", which implies that these teachings were transmitted secretly by gurus to selected pupils who sat around them in forest retreats.[416] But an alternative etymology proposed by Sankara, one of the great Indian philosophers, together with other scholars, suggests that *Upanishad* means "that which destroys ignorance", and signifies the knowledge of Brahman by which ignorance is destroyed or vanished.[417] Overall it signifies those texts that are rooted in the essentials of Vedic teachings and that were developed by sagacious vision. *Upanishads* are mystical in nature; they are not very logical in their presentation of ideas, or in conveying the nature of the Absolute, the soul and the world. *Upanishad*s propose a certain relationship between Brahman, (the Absolute), with the *atman*, (the individual soul), and with the created world. The main function of a guru is to teach these truths and lead disciples to this reality, for he is the one who knows this existential truth.

The Upanishads, though not systematic treatises, contain between them all the fundamental doctrines of higher Hinduism, and are the only portions of the Vedas that constitute to influence the Hindu mind. For this reason, as well as because they come at the close of Vedas, they have been given the title *Vedanta* (end and purpose of the Vedas). *Vedanta* system is an enquiry into the meaning of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, especially

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Mahanarayana, Isa, Mundaka and Prasna. The third category, latest in origin includes two, namely, *Svatasvetara* and *Maitrayaniya*. There are also other opinions about the numbering of *Upanishads*: some consider thirteen while others count sixteen. See Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism,* 228). Each one is attached to one or other *Samhita* of *Vedas*; altogether there exist 108 *Upanishads*.

[413] The authors of *Upanishads* remain unknown although some names of *rshis* like Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka, Aruni, Svetaketu, Sandilya. See Johanns, "General Historical Survey: Part I", 36.

[414] S .Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, 24.

[415] Ibid., 947-948.

[416] According to Swami Nityabodhananda, *Upanishads* signifies 'teachings given intimately or in secret.' See Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism*, 228.

[417] S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, 19-20.

concerned with knowledge of, and the relationship between Brahman and *atman*. It is called thus because it was an attempt to re-interpret the basic truths of the *Vedas* in the light of the *Upanishadic* revelation. *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad-Gita*, and *Vedanta-sutra* are the triple canons or basic texts of the *Vedanta* school. There emerged three main interpretations in the *Vedanta* school.[418]

2.2 *Smrti*

The root word of *Smrti* is *smr,* meaning "to remember". *Smrti* means that which is remembered. It is used to refer to those scriptures which, unlike Sruti, are not divinely revealed. While *Sruti* is viewed as eternal truth revealed to humanity by inspired seers (*rshis*) in the ancient past, *Smrti* literature is regarded as authored by human beings, and therefore subject to errors. Generally speaking, according to the scholars, when the *Sruti* period ends, the period of *Smrti* starts; when the 'revelation' closes, the tradition starts.[419] Yet, we can see the articulation between these two periods is varying. But practically, some of the *Smrti* texts have an equal importance with *Sruti* among some particular groups in Hinduism, due to their 'revelatory' character together with their accessibility and relevance to a particular group. Bhagavad-Gita, though later in origin, is considered as Sruti by various groups. In principle, *Smrti* holds its authority in as much as it accords with *Sruti,* which is the ultimate source of authority. *Smrti* includes *Ithihasas*, *Puranas, Vedangas,*[420] *Agamas,*[421] *Tantras,*[422] *Sutras* and

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[418] There are also the other schools of *Vedanta* like *Dvaitadvaita* (dual-non-dual) of Nimbarka (1162), and *Suddhadvaita* (pure non-dualism) of Vallabha (1479 A. D.). But they are not very significant because they go along with other schools.

[419] In Sanskrit tradition, scriptures are divided into two types: Revealed Texts (Sruti – what is heard) and Remembered Texts (Smrti – what is remembered). The four Vedas and 108 Upanishads come under the Sruti category and Bhagavat Gita, 18 Puranas, Sastras, Tantras, Agamas and many others, come under Smrti category. These classifications, date back to Max Muller. It is advisable to stick to the division adopted by Max Muller as it follows the Indian tradition, conveys the historical sequence fairly accurately. See, Axel Michaels, *Hinduism Past and Present*, trans., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 51.

[420] *Vedangas* literally means "limbs of *Veda*", and are formulated in order to make the cryptic and obscure words of the *Vedas* clear and meaningful. *Vedangas* are six in number: *Siksha* (science of phonetics), *Chandas* (study of the rhythm and length of each verse), *Vyakarana* (study of grammar), *Nirukta* (study of etymological explanation), *Jyotisha* (astrology), *Kalpa* (ceremonial explanations). For details, cf., Motilal PANDIT, *op. cit*., pp. 126-128; Donald S. LOPEZ (ed.)*, op. cit*., p. 8.

[421] The word *agama* is derived from the root '*gam'* with the prefix '*a'* and it means 'to come', and the noun form, *agama* means 'coming'. In the particular context, it refers to 'the coming' or 'handing down' of true knowledge from the teacher to the pupil. Technically Agama means traditional religious teaching. In general, the term is applied to the scriptures and theological manuals of the principal Hindu sects.

[422] Texts called *Tantras* which began to appear in India about the 9th century A.D., present a system of ritual practice (*Sadhana*) or spiritual discipline like *yogas* leading to liberating knowledge. Through practising the *tantras,* several *tantric* groups or sects developed in all major branches of Hinduism, including the Vaishnavists, Saivists, Saktas, Buddhism and Jainism. Though a few may wish *Tantras* to be seen as an extension of the *Vedic* heritage, they are extra-*Vedic* and esoteric.

Bhashyas,[423] and various other writings, among those *Ithihasas* and *Puranas* being the main sources of Hindu avatars have much importance in our present study.

2.2.1 *Ithihasas*: *Mahabharata, (Bhagavad-Gita),* and *Ramayana*

Ithihasa is the term used in Sanskrit for writings about history, and it means "thus indeed it was". The *Bhagavad-Gita* is contained within *Mahabharata*, the most important *Ithihasa* in Hinduism. Together with *Ramayana these are* considered to be the *Vedas* of the common people; they speak of the great avatars: *Krishna* and *Rama*.

a) *Mahabharata*: The written version of the *Mahabharata* in the Sanskrit language is cited as the world's longest poem.[424] Its reputed author is Vyasa (Krishna Dvaipayana or Veda-Vyasa). The period of its composition is placed between the third century B.C. and the third century A.D. The title *Mahabharata* is a compound word of *Maha* (great), and *Bharata*[425] which is the name of the royal family whose members are the central characters of the story, and thus it means "story of the great *Bharata*".

b) *Bhagavad-Gita*:[426] The sixth book of *Mahabharata* called *Bhagavad-Gita*, is "one of the finest gems of world literature, a short poetical composition of exquisite beauty, philosophically mystical in character and a perennial source of inspiration to the Hindu intelligentsia"[427] *Gita* is the ellipsis of the essentials of the whole *Vedic* teaching as contained in *Upanishads*. Although it is part of *Smrti* it is venerated as *Sruti* literature. It is often

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[423] Etymologically, "*sutra*" means thread. As discussions took place orally and were passed down by teachers to students, the need was probably felt to link together or "thread together" the main thoughts in the minds of students by brief statements, questions, answers, and possible objections and replies to them. In this context "*sutra*" means a brief mnemonic statement. Thus, a *Sutra* text consists of a collection of many such *Sutras* or aphorisms of this kind arranged into different chapters according to different topics. Since *Sutras* were brief, their meanings were not clear so the necessity of elaborate explanations arose, and thus formulated *Bhashyas*, the interpretations of *Sutras*. For the same *Sutra*, there can be more than one *Bhasyas*, given by different authors having different interpretations. For example, the *Brahma-sutra* (Sutra of *Upanishads* formed by Badarayana) is interpreted by Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbarka, and Baladeva in different ways and formed various *Bhasyas* which later became various schools of *Vedanta* itself. See Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1984), 8- 11.

[424] It runs to 100,000 *slokas* in 180, 000 lines, in 18 volumes, *A sloka* is normally a stanza consisting of either two or three phrases or lines in a poem.

[425] *Bharata* refers also to India, or India got this name because it was ruled by the emperor Bharatan, the head of the royal family called *Bharata*.

[426] According to many scholars *Bhagavad-Gita* probably was another text inserted later into *Mahabharata*. It is also generally known in its short form *Gita*. The main content of this work is that exhortation given by Krishna to Arjuna to continue the fight, because it is his duty, and also that all human beings are nothing but only instruments in the fulfilment of God's eternal designs. So for the law of *karma*, and universal *rta*, he had to fight. Thus *Gita* is also known as *Gitopadesam* (*Gita*-exhortation). For details, see R. De Smet and J. Neuner, eds., *Religious Hinduism* (Bangalore: St. Paul's Publications, 1997), 279-290.

[427] Cyril B. Papali, "Vedism and Classical Hinduism", in Secretariatus pro non-Christians ed. *For a Dialogue with Hinduism*, Roma, 1970.

referred to as the "New Testament of Hinduism".[428] It is mainly here that we find the teachings on avatars, given by Krishna, and thus it is important in our study.

c) *Ramayana*: This is the story of Rama, the prince of Ayodhya and one of the principal avatars in Hinduism. It is written by the sage Valmiki and is also called *Valmiki-Ramayana*. It is considered the first example of *kavya* (poetic genre), in the literary history of India. Valmiki is known as *adi-kavi* (the first poet).[429] Although Rama has not been proven to be a historical person, many consider that he lived in the 8th or 7th century B.C.[430] The composition of *Ramayana* is dated between the 2nd century B.C. and the 2nd century A.D.[431] This book is very popular among Hindus, and many nationalist Hindus envisage the establishment of *Ramarajya*[432](Kingdom of Rama) in India.

2.2.2 *Puranas*

Puranas means "ancient", and thus in Hinduism it signifies ancient stories sometimes taken to be historic. The term is used to refer to a group of texts dated from about the fourth century A.D.,[433] but in many cases the material contained in these texts are thousands of years old. *Puranas* contain vast amounts of mythology, besides which they refer to certain kings, and places of historical interest. They also include religious teachings on *dharma*, and liberation,[434] and narrations on various avatars of Vishnu, one of the three principal gods of Hinduism. One of the most popular *Puranas, Bhagavat-Purana,* compiled between the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. gives many details about avatars. *Vishnu-Purana,* composed in the sixth century A.D., is also rich in description about avatars. Some *Purana* texts have even gained the status of *Vedic* literature among some particular traditions of Hinduism.[435]

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[428] For details see Mathew Vekathanam, *Christology in the Indian Anthropological Context* (New York: ATC Publication, 2004), 13-15.
[429] It can be considered as an attributed authorship. See Sullivan , *The A to Z of Hinduism*,234.
[430] Camille Bulcke , "The Ramayana", in De Smet and J. Neuner ed., *Religious Hinduism*, 252.
[431] Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism* ,176.
[432] *Rama-Rajya* is the envisaged goal of certain Hindu nationalists. Mahatma-Gandhi was one of the greatest proponents of this ideology. It is a reign of peace, harmony, equality and truth. A few Indian Christian theologians tried to compare the ideal of *Rama-Rajya* (kingdom of Rama) with that of the Kingdom of God.
[433] There exists a great disagreement regarding the date of *Puranas*. Some hold the view that *Puranas* began to develop at least around 600 B.C. But some of the *Puranas* are even of later origin, for example the date of composition of *Bhagavata-Purana* is considered as not before the 10th. century A.D. See Pierre Fallon, "The *Bhagavata-Purana* and the great *bhakti* currents" in R. De Smet and J. Neuner ed. *The A to Z of Hinduism* 292.
[434] For details about the religious teachings in the *Puranas*, see Johanns, "General Historical Survey: Part I, 40-44.
[435] For example, among the *Vaishnava* devotional groups, *Bhagavata-Purana* has got the pre-eminent status. See Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism*,165.

3 The Hindu Philosophical Systems (*Saddarsanas*)

Indian-Hindu philosophy is not a single system of thought but must be a collection of various philosophical schools known as *saddarsanas*.[436] Of these, the school of *Vedanta* requires our special attention since it explains many of the concepts we are going to deal with. *Vedanta* system is an enquiry into the meaning of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, especially concerned with knowledge of, and the relationship between, Brahman and *atman*. It is called *Vedanta* because it was an attempt to re-interpret the basic truths of the *Vedas* in the light of the *Upanishadic* revelation. *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad-Gita*, and *Vedanta-sutra* are the triple canons or basic texts of the *Vedanta* school. There emerged three main teachings in the *Vedanta* school.[437]

4 Concepts of 'God' in Hinduism

In Hinduism there is no single unified idea of god; on the contrary, we find innumerable gods and goddesses and also widely differing, and even contrary, ideas about them. There exists, at least apparently, primitive, superstitious and polytheistic conceptions of god, side by side with a highly philosophical and monotheistic idea of a Supreme Being. Archaeological excavations in Harappa and Mohanjodaro (cities of the Indus Valley in pre-*Vedic* periods inhabited by Dravidians and aborigines) show that there existed the worship of many gods. Two of the main cults featured phallic worship and sacrifices to a mother goddess.[438] The Indus valley's religious and cultural tradition reached its zenith about 2500 B.C. But it underwent drastic changes due to Aryan invaders who introduced the *Vedic* gods; these were mainly personifications of the power of nature.

The significant gods in *Vedic* times are 33 in number, and are classified into three groups of eleven each: i) gods of heaven (*dyuloka*)[439] ii) gods of mid-region (*antariksha*)[440] iii) gods of earth (*bhuloka*).[441] Later, from *Puranas* and *Ithihasas* writing there emerged a plethora of gods; it is said that the number of Hindu gods reaches 330 million. Certain gods rose to pre-eminence within the polytheism of the *vedic* tradition. The important gods were *Agni*, (god of fire), *Indra* (god of lightning and thunder), *Varuna* (god of universe who

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[436] *Darsana* means vision, *sad* means right / true; *saddarsana* means right vision.

[437] There are also the other schools of *Vedanta* like *Dvaitadvaita* (dual-non-dual) of Nimbarka (1162), and *Suddhadvaita* (pure non-dualism) of Vallabha (1479 A. D.). But they are not very significant because they go along with other schools.

[438] Pierre Fallon, "Image Worship", in De Smet and J. Neuner eds., *Religious Hinduism*, 172.

[439] *Surya* or *Savita* (Sun), *Maitra, Varuna,* the *Asvins* (Stars), *Pusan*, and *Usha* (Dawn) are the main ones.

[440] *Indra, Rudra, Parjanya* (Rain), *Vayu* (Air), *Apah* (Waters), and *Maruts* (Winds) are the main ones.

[441] *Agni* (Fire), *Prthvi* (Earth), and *Soma* (Sacrificial plant) are the main ones. See Fallon,"The Gods of Hinduism" in De Smet and Neuner ed., *Religious Hinduism*, 117-129.

upholds sky and earth), *Mitra* (god of laws, orders, and treaties), *Surya* (sun-god) and Prajapati (the creator, lord and protector of the universe).[442] Eventually, however the idea developed that these various gods were actually different forms of a single divinity. This is variously expressed in *Rig-Veda*: "*Ekam sad vipra bahuda vadanti"* (what is but One, the wise call by diverse names);[443] and "*Ekam santi bahuda kalpayanthi"* (the sages imagine the one to be many). [444] The *Upanishadic* sages understood that the Reality that lies behind the tide of temporal change is One, though we speak of It in many ways. To that Reality, the sages give the name *Brahman*.

4.1 Brahman: *Nirguna* and *Saguna*

The word *brahman* is neuter in gender, and means to grow or burst forth, or become great. Many authors equate *brahman* with terms such as "sacred" and "divine". Sankara sees the word *brahman* as coming from *brhati*, to exceed, and signifies eternity, whereas for Madhva, Brahman is the one in whom all qualities dwell in fullness. The *Upanishads* deal imaginatively with the fact that the divine is beyond definition.[445] Since Brahman is beyond all multiplicity, change, division, relation or qualities, no amount of qualifications or attributions would be adequate to the total absoluteness of the Supreme Reality. Indeed, they would only limit Brahman*;* they would contradict the truth. Nothing can be predicated of Brahman.[446] The *Upanishads* therefore resort to employing negative terms *neti*, *neti* (not this, not that) to convey this understanding:

> Not gross, not subtle, not short, not long, not growing, not shadowy, not dark, not attached, flavourless, smell-less, eye-less, ear-less, speech-less, breath-less, mouth-less, not internal, not external, consuming nothing, consumed by nothing.[447]

Brahman is *parama* (supreme, transcending all qualities) and *purna* (perfect, plenitude of being). There are no *gunas* (qualities/attributes) in Brahman so it is *nirguna*, the perfect being to which nothing secondary can belong. It "has" nothing because instead of "having", it "is" whatever infinite perfection we are inclined to ascribe to it. As Brahman is Absolute, there cannot be in it a distinction of having and being, and so Brahman is *nirakara* (without any bodily form) and *nirupadhika* (free from all determinations, conditions and characters), and transcends our limited words and concepts: "It is that wherefrom words turn back,

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[442] Ibid*,* 118.
[443] *Rig-Veda,* I. 167. 46.
[444] *Rig-Veda* III. 55.
[445] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology*, 26.
[446] Ibid., 27.
[447] *Brhataranika-Upanishad* II. 8. 8; II. 3. 6; III. 9. 26; IV. 2. 4.

together with the mind, not having attained it."[448] "There no eye can penetrate, no voice, no mind can penetrate; we do not know, we do not understand, how one should teach it."[449] *Kena-Upanishad* again says:

> That which cannot be spoken by speech, but by which the speech is made possible; that which cannot be thought by the mind, but by which, they say, the mind thinks; that which cannot be seen by the eye, but by which the eye is made to see; that which cannot be heard by the ear, but by which the ear is made to hear; that which does not breath, but by which the breath is made possible, know that alone to be the Brahman, not this which they worship outside.[450]

This can never be an abstraction as it is "real in the most excellent way (*Paramarthatah Sat*) but not concrete in the manner of a physical person characterised by limited attributes but it is more objective than any such person."[451]

One should not however be misled by the negative approach into thinking that Brahman is a nonentity. The negative indications mean only that Brahman cannot be defined by empirical and accidental features, for they do not belong to its essence. Since it is, however, difficult to breathe at such metaphysical height, the *Epics*, *Puranas* and numerous *Upanishads* also employ a positive, affirmative approach to speak of Brahman, using anthropomorphic language Brahman is depicted as *saguna* (with attributes). Ramanuja considers the *saguna* presentation as the ultimate, but for Sankara, it is only to help our mind fix itself and meditate upon it, but we must reach beyond such aids to our understanding so as to embrace true *nirguna* Brahman.[452] The only way to describe Brahman positively according to *Taittiriya-Upanishad* is: *Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma* (Brahman is Reality, Knowledge, and Infinite).[453] Since Brahman is the Reality of the real (*Satyasya satyam*),[454] Absolute Reality and source of all existing beings, *Sat* (Being/Reality) is the most suitable designation for it. As Ultimate Being it is the sole knower and includes all knowledge and its essence itself is *jnanam* (knowledge) and we can rightly call it *Cit* (Consciousness), and there can be no limitation for Absolute so it is *Anantam* (Infinite). *Brahadaranyaka-Upanishad* says: *Vijnanam anandam Brahman* (Brahman is pure knowledge and bliss).[455] Brahman is

[448] *Taittiriya-Upanishad* II. 4. 9.
[449] *Kena-Upanishad* I. 3.
[450] *Kena-Upanishad* I. 4-8.
[451] Fallon, "God in Hinduism…" in De Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 112.
[452] Ibid., 112.
[453] *Taittiriya-Upanishad* II. 1. 1.
[454] *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* III. 7.
[455] *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* III. 9. 28.

viewed here by the sages as *sat-cit-ananda*, using an affirmative approach.[456] Radhakrishnan observes the *sat-cit-ananda* as the different phrases for the same being: "Self-being, self-consciousness and self-delight are one. It is absolute being in which there is no non-consciousness. It is absolute bliss in which there is no suffering or negation of bliss."[457] *Upanishads* depict Brahman as *param* (supreme) and *purnam* (plenitude).[458] *Nirguna* Brahman is god in his absolute transcendence, while *saguna* Brahman designates His immanent aspect. The description of god as *saguna* is more pedagogical and relational, whereas *nirguna* is more metaphysical; they are not contradictory, but complementary.

4.2 God as *Paramatman*, *Bhagavan* and *Isvara*

Hinduism also speaks of god in relation to creation, to the individual self (*atman/purusha*) and to nature (*prakrti*) various terms such as *Paramatman, Bhagavan,* and *Isvara* are employed. The name *Paramatman* (Supreme *atman*), is used mainly to show Brahman in relation to *atman* while at the same time distinguishing between them. God as *Paramatman* is not only the absolute principle of the universe, creative cause, but also inner Ruler who dwells in every body (*antar-yamin*) and illumining each one (*saksin*), always in relationship with *atman.*[459] The role of the guru is to lead disciples to attain the knowledge of this relationship.

Bhagavan is another term for Supreme Being. It is he who is *bhaga* which means fortune *Bhagavan* signifies the dispenser of good fortune, giver of gifts. Prosperity, fortune, dignity, excellence, majesty, blessing, divinity, and beauty are connected with the term *Bhagavan*.[460] *Bhaga* also means "part" or "share" and thus Bhagavan signifies the one who agrees to share himself.[461] *Isvara* is a very common designation for god. It comes from the root "*is*" meaning "to own", "to be powerful", or "to rule." *Isvara* signifies lord, master; it refers especially to the sovereign power of god.[462] *Upanishads* like *Isa* and *Katha* employed the term *Isvara* with a theistic accent and a monotheistic overtone. *Isvara* is depicted as a personal God understood as being capable of having a loving relationship. In his absolute

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[456] In the context of Indian Christian theological studies, there developed a Trinitarian theological thinking based on the concept of *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. Although found to be enlightening, it doesn't come under our present topic of discussion. For details see Abhishikanada, *Saccidananda, A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997).
[457] S. Radhakrishnan , *The Principal Upanishads,* 69.
[458] *The opening prayer of Isavasya-Upanishads*; *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* V. 1.
[459] Ibid. 113.
[460] Ibid. 115.
[461] Ibid., 92.
[462] Mariasusai Dhavamony, Classical Hinduism, Documenta Missionalia no.15, Universita Gregoriana Editrice, Roma, 1982, 36.

transcendence He is not however in total distance with the created world. Divine transcendence is imminent in the world. *Isvara* stands for the *saguna* of the Absolute through which It manifests Itself. *Isvara* is Brahman Himself considered in His power of manifestation.[463]

4.3 *Trimurti* (Forms of the Divine): Brahma, Vishnu and Siva

Trimurti - *tri* (three) and *murti* (forms) refers to three forms of the divine.[464] God, manifested in relation to the world, has three functions: creation, protection, and destruction.[465] Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the protector and Siva is the destructor. The Supreme Being considered in His three-fold function is *Trimurti*.[466] Besides these functions, they are also the controllers of *gunas*.[467]

Brahma: The origin of Brahma is variously depicted in Hindu scriptures. Brahman, according to one depiction, created the cosmic waters and deposited in them a seed which became a golden egg, *Hiranya-garbha* from which was born itself as Brahma, the creator of the universe. The first being was *Purusha*, the cosmic man, also known as Prajapati. *Purusha* became lord of beings. In another legend, Brahma emerged on a lotus flower from the navel of Vishnu. *Brahma*'s vahana (vehicle) is the swan.

Vishnu: *Vishnu* comes from the root, *vi,* meaning "to pervade", and denotes "all-encompassing" or "all-pervading". *Vishnu* is also viewed as one who takes various forms.[468] Vishnu is very commonly represented as a young man of dark blue colour with royal clothing, having four hands holding a conch shell (*sankha*), a club (*gadha*), a lotus flower

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[463] S. Radhakrishnan , *The Principal Upanishads,* 84. It is this concept of *Isvara*, interpreted by Sankara, which is taken by Raymond Panikkar in his famous work *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.

[464] Sullivan, The *A to Z of Hinduism* ,225.

[465] S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads,* 66. According to the *Vaishnava* tradition, pre-eminence goes to God Vishnu and it is He who reveals Himself in three subordinate forms: He is the supreme God, but in order to create the world he appears as *Brahma*; in order to preserve it as Vishnu; and in order to destroy it as Siva.

[466] S.Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads,* 66. According to the *Vaishnava* tradition, pre-eminence goes to God Vishnu and it is He who reveals Himself in three subordinate forms: He is the supreme God, but in order to create the world he appears as *Brahma*; in order to preserve it as Vishnu; and in order to destroy it as Siva. For details see Johanns, "General Historical Survey: Part I" in De Smet and Neuner, ed. *Religious Hinduism*, 41.

[467] *Brahma* becomes the controller of *Rajas guna*; Vishnu is that of *sattva guna* and Siva is the controller of *tamas guna*. *Guna* means quality or string, and according to the traditional Hindu view there are three *gunas* in created beings, and in each being *gunas* vary in proportion, and as a result of that the quality and aptitude of the individuals differ from one another. *Rajas guna* signifies energy, force, and evolving principle of nature, and it is predominant in those who belong to the caste *Ksatriyas* (warriors). *Sattva guna* means purity, which is the principle of preservation and liberation; the people of *Brahmin* caste having the predominance of this *guna*. The third one is *tamas guna*, meaning inertia, and stands for the dissolving principle and low-caste peoples are constituted predominantly of this quality. *Trimurti* is symbolized also by three vowels of Sanskrit, namely, A, U, M which constitute 'OM', the sacred syllable. Johanns, "General Historical Survey: Part I" 42.

[468] Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism," 123.

(*padma*) and a discus (*cakra*), reclining on *Sesha* (the serpent which is also called *Ananthan*),[469] attended by his consort *Lakshmi* who is the goddess of good fortune and prosperity.[470] Vishnu is shown in this position when Brahma is presented as the one seated on a lotus which issues from his navel.

Siva: Siva or *Mahesvara* was worshipped in India even before the arrival of the Aryans. *Sivam* in its neutral gender signifies spirit or *atman*.[471] Siva represents the natural forces of destruction and also of fertility. Siva, "the great god of the Himalaya mountains, inaccessible, transcendent, absorbed in sublime contemplation, is enthroned on mount Kailas. Ganges came down from the heaven because Siva bore on the matted locks of his head the forceful impact of her falling torrents."[472] Siva is very commonly presented as a dancer,[473] dancing either in the sheer joy of creation or in a mad frenzy, as the god of destruction.[474] He is presented also with five faces signifying his five-fold activities.[475] Siva is also pictured with one face having three eyes, denoting his insight into the past, present and future.[476] The third-eye, situated in the centre of his forehead possesses a fiery glance which is capable of

[469] *Sesha* is the cosmic serpent that floats on the primeval waters, which literally means 'remainder', with the indication that this serpent is shaped out of the remains of the universe after its destruction. Vishnu is thus also called *Seshan*, one who has the last remainder of Time. It is also called *Ananthan* which means endless or the infinite one; it has 1000 heads. It coils itself, representing the endless evolution of time, and makes the bed (*saiya*) for Vishnu, the upholder and preserver of the universe, to recline. A.Mathias Mundandan "Hindu and Christian Views of History" in A.Mathias Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, (Aluva: Jeevas Publications, 1997), 52.

[470] Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism…"122.

[471] Here *sivam* doesn't signify any personal God, but only as spirit or *atman* which lives in the human body as the fundamental life principle. The death of a person is viewed as the departure of *sivam* from the human body.

[472] Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism,"119.

[473] Thus the Indian classical dances are inseparables from Siva the dancer, *Nataraj*.

[474] Siva's dance is also interpreted as the source of all movements, the origin of five cosmic acts (*pancakrtya*): production, preservation, destruction, embodying, and liberation. See Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism…"120.

[475] Siva, who creates, destroys and sustains the world, obscures by his power of illusion (*maya*), and offers grace to the suffering world; sometimes also presented with four faces, or even one face. He is constantly engaged in battle using his three famous arms (*trisula*): a bow (*ajagara*), a thunderbolt (*vajra*), an axe, and also a noose (*pasa;* to bind his enemies) against mighty demons such as *Pura*, *Tripura* and *Andhaka*, all of whom he fought and slew. Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism,"128.

[476] This picture has also got other features: there is a moon's crescent on his head (so he is also called *Chandrasekhara*, one who wears the moon) which shows the measuring of time by months and the serpent (*naga*) on his head signifies the endless cycle of time by months and the serpent coiled around his neck denotes the endless cycle of recurring years. The necklace of skulls and the many serpents about his person also symbolise the eternal evolution of ages and the successive generation and dissolution of mankind. He wears the skin of a tiger and sits alone on the mount Kailasa, high in the Himalayas as an arch-ascetic or divine *yogi*. He carries the river Ganges on his head in his attempt to save the world from the destructive flow of this river, which was sent by god Vishnu from heaven to water the earth at the intervention of the sage *Bhagiratha*. And so he is also called *Gangadharan*, the upholder of the Ganges. See De Smet, "Saivism", in De Smet and Neuner ed., *Religious Hinduism*, 316-317.

destroying everything.[477] Siva's vehicle is a white bull called *Nandi* which symbolises the creative aspect of Siva.

One of the contributions of Hinduism is the concept of avatar, the descent of god to earth, taking the form of a creature to establish dharma and save the good. The doctrine of avatar is typical of *Vishnuvism*, and it is Vishnu who descends as avatar. Prajapati, viewed as the lord of creatures,[478] is found in *Vedic* literature as the creator and protector of the world.[479] The world is created by Prajapati through *tapas,*[480] the concentrated force of his creative powers, according to the *Brahmana* texts. At birth itself he is ordained as the only-protector and sustainer of all the creatures he created in the universe.[481] Hinduism speaks of many other gods and goddesses;[482] but they are not related to our present study. We move now to another important topic the concept of man and his relationship with Supreme Being.

5 Concept of Man and his Relationship with Brahman

The traditional Hindu view recognizes three different states of consciousness in human existence: the waking, the dreaming, and the dreamless sleeping states. The question is asked: 'am I, in my waking state, not living in a kind of cosmic illusion, from which I shall one day awaken? When I sleep dreamlessly, I do not have any experience of individual existence, or any impression of external objects, but I continue to exist in a state when there is no pain, no worries, no sorrows, no desires or regrets.' This indicates that, deep beneath my usual consciousness there lies a changeless principle which is never involved in the

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[477] This eye is represented by three horizontal lines, a mark (*tilaka*) worn today by his devotees.

[478] Sullivan, *A to Z of Hinduism*, 159-160.

[479] Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism…"118.

[480] The word *tapas* literally means heat, and refers to any form of austerity. In *Rig-Veda* X. 129 and X. 190 present *tapas* as the creative force, by means of which chaos becomes cosmos. *Vedic* deities such as *Agni* and *Surya* have *tapas* as one of their qualities. God *Indra* generates *tapas* in the battle. The myths and rituals both attribute to *tapas* the power to create a new reality. The celibate (*brahmacarin*) is seen as generating *tapas* by his ascetic practices (*Atharva-Veda* 11. 5; 17. 1. 24; *Satapata-Brahmana* 10. 5. 3. 1); The *Upanishads* and later literature considered ascetic practices like celibacy, fasting, silence, breath control, vigilance at night, difficult postures, various other physical and mental mortifications, and various forms of meditations as capable of producing *tapas* or even as part of *tapas*. Ascetics who practise *tapas* can become more powerful than gods. And gods even send *apsaras* (celestial nymphs; four in numbers: Urvasi, Menaka, Rampha, and Thilothama), to disturb the ascetics from their concentrated *tapas* in order not to lose their position. Among Hindu gods, Siva excels in *taps*, living in the icy solitude of the Himalayas. J. Neuner, "Yoga", in De Smet and Neuner ed., *Religious Hinduism*, 232.

[481] Abraham Koshy , *Prajapati, the Cosmic Christ,* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 13.

[482] For example, *Sakti* and *Durga*, the goddesses of power and victory, *Laksmi*, goddesses of good fortune, *Sarasvati*, also called *Vani-Mata*, the goddess of wisdom are the famous ones. Besides, there also exists syncretistic formulation in god-concepts such as *Harihara* (Vishnu and Siva considered as one), *Kali-Krishna* (*Kali* together with *Krishna*), and *Ardhanarisvara* (deity half-man, half-women who symbolises the identity of *Hara-Siva* and *Gauri-Durga*). In addition to these gods, each village can have its own village deity (*grama devata*), and each tribe its own tribal god (*kula devata*). Certain rivers, animals, mountains and stones are also venerated as sacred. Animism, polytheism, pantheism and artistic symbolism have all contributed their share in the creation of the Hindu pantheon (Fallon, "The Gods of Hinduism…", 125).

vagaries of worldly perceptions, desires and pursuits.[483] For example, *Bhagavad-Gita* teaches:

> There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor those kings, and there is no future when we shall cease to be. Just as this body-dweller passes through childhood, youth and old age, so at death, he passes to another body. That which does not exist can never come into existence, and that which exists can never perish. Know that the principle by which this universe is pervaded is indestructible. Bodies can die, but the indwelling principle is eternal, undying and unlimited…. Just as a man, discarding worn out clothes, puts on new ones, so the indwelling one, discarding worn out bodies enters into new ones.[484]

What is most true and permanent in man is the one and the absolute spirit, which seems to wander in a world of forms (*rupa*) and names (*nama*). The *Katha-Upanishad* affirms and re-affirms clearly that the self is that permanent reality: "unborn, undying, eternal, seated in the captivity (i.e., in the deepest recess of man's spirit), spiritual, all-pervading."[485] Man and all creatures, according to *Rig-Veda*, are emanated from the *Purusha*, the primeval man.[486] In *Rig-Veda*, *atman* indicates the animating principle or the essence.

In the Hindu vision, the ultimate principle is Brahman. Man (*atman*) and creation are subsidiary. Brahman is *Paramatman* the supreme *atman.* The born part of man is the body (*deha*) which is subject to death and decadence; the role of the body is to give a dwelling place to *atman*. The individual (*jivatman)* is destined to rejoin *Paramatman*, of which it is only a part, and so the death of the individual is viewed as the attainment of its end, *Paramatman*. *Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita* and each school of philosophy give their own specific explanations on *atman*.[487]

The relationship between Brahman and *atman* is viewed in two ways in Indian theistic traditions: 1) Brahman-*atman* identity, and 2) *atman* as part of Brahman. The former affirms that there cannot be any distinction between the essence or inner reality of the cosmos, the

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[483] Robert Antoine, "Hindu Ethics: 1 General Ethics", in De Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 149-150.
[484] *Bhagavad-Gita* II. 11-22.
[485] *Katha-Upanishad* I. 2. 18-22.
[486] His body is cut into various pieces: three-fourth of him is the immortals in heaven, one fourth of him are the living beings on earth. According to *Purusha-sukta*, the hymn of man, *Purusha*'s head became the sky, his navel became the atmosphere, his feet the earth, his mind the moon, his eyes became the sun and his breath the wind. See *Rig-Veda* X. 90. *Purusha-sukta* 1-4. In *Brahmanas*, the primeval man is called Prajapati.
[487] For example, the *Samkhya* philosophy, atheistic in nature, follows strict dualism in interpreting the totality of reality. *Purusha* and *prakrti*, self and non-self are the basic components of reality. In brief it proposes a matter-spirit dualism; whereas *Gita* considers these two principles as subordinates to God, and as the very nature of God. *Purusha* in man can be understood as *atman* in him and *prakrti* as the body, the born part of man. *Gita* holds that every man is powerless and made to work by the three constituents born of Nature: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, of which any one will be predominant in each human being. *Sattva* is goodness and purity; *rajas* is energy and passion; *tamas* is darkness or dullness. See M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian*, 225-336.

Brahman and that of *atman* this is well expressed in numerous famous *Upanishadic* sayings.[488] The latter sees the *atman* as a part of Brahman. Many *Upanishads,* while speaking about the Brahman-*atman* relationship, try to maintain a distinction between them. *Atman* is one with Brahman in so far as, at its deepest level, it is a part of Brahman and has its being outside time, but *atman* is distinct from Brahman in that it does not share Brahman's creative activity in time. *Atman* partakes of the Absolute Being but is not for that reason Brahman Himself. *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad*, for example, speaks: "As a spider goes out (of itself) by means of its threads, as tiny sparks leap out of the fire, so from the Brahman issue all life-breaths…"[489]

Bhagavad-Gita deals in various places with the relationship of *atman* with Brahman: "In the world of living things, a minute part of Me becomes a living self (*atman*)".[490] It is to be noted that according to *Bhagavad-Gita, atman* is a part of Brahman because it shares His mode of being, but at the same time it is not identical with Brahman, for it is only a minute part of Supreme Brahman. The philosophical school of Ramanuja holds this position in respect of the Brahman-*atman* relationship.[491] Though there exist diverse approaches regarding the Brahman-*atman* relationship, most of the Indian philosophical system agrees that *atman* is eternal, that by its nature it is divine – either as identical with Brahman or as part of Brahman – and that *atman* is different from man's physical body (*deha*); the physical body is merely the dwelling place of *atman*.

Further, in this worldly existence, *atman* is not fully independent in the sense that it depends for its existence on the material body. In other words, at present, *atman* is in a "state of bondage" in the body, and in need of liberation. This human existence can be explained only through certain notions such as *karma, samsara*, and rebirth.

6 Concept of World and Principle of *Maya*

How can one comprehend this world? Is it eternal and as real as Brahman? Or is it an emanation or evolution of Brahman sacrificing His immutability? Or again, is the world unreal, while given that Brahman is the only real and absolute perfection? These questions are raised in the context of Brahman, outside of whom there can be nothing real.[492] How can we explain the undeniable fact of this world, since this world cannot be Brahman, for it is

[488] *Chandokya-Upanishad* VI. 8. 7; VI. 9. 4; VI. 10. 3.
[489] *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* II. 1. 20.
[490] *Bhagavad-Gita* XV. 7; cf., also II. 20-21; IV. 10; VIII. 5; XIII. 18; XIV. 19.
[491] See Chatterjee, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy,* 412-417.
[492] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 32.

limited, while at the same time there can be nothing other than Brahman? *Upanishads* try to explain this paradox by stating that Brahman alone is real, and all the rest is unreal; whatever exists owes its being to Brahman.[493] It is not by creation that the world came into being; it is not the production of something out of nothing. It is the self-projection of the Supreme. Everything exists in the secret abode of the supreme. The word *Maya* is used to express the absolute dependence of the world on Brahman, and the power by which Brahman made this world.[494] As S. Radhakrishnan explains:

> While the world is dependent on Brahman, the latter is not dependent on the world. This one-sided dependence and the logical inconceivability of the relation between the Ultimate Reality and the world are brought out by the word, '*Maya*'. The world is not essential being like Brahman; nor is it mere non-being. It cannot be defined as either being or non-being.

For Ramanuja, the universe is nothing but the body (*deha*)[495] of *Isvara*; the universe is real but depends on *Isvara* and is nothing apart from Him.

7 Important Hindu Concepts: *Asrama*, *Dharma*, *Rta, Karma,* and *Samsara.*

A brief mention of these concepts is warranted because of their links to the Hindu concept of liberation. ***Asrama*** refers to the four phases of the ideally conducted life. The first of these is education, (*brahmacharya);* it is followed by second, work and third, family life phase *(grahstha).* When parents grow old the ideal envisages their retirement from the world to meditate and pray and practice austerity *(vanaprastha)*. The fourth phase is *sannyasa* when the individual renounces everything; he leads a wandering mendicant life, in the state of total detachment.

> Wishing neither for death nor for life, the *sannyasi* should wait for the appointed time as a labourer for his wages. His feet guided by his eyes, the water he drinks strained through a cloth, his speech purified by truth, his conduct governed by reason. Let him endure insult without retaliation.… Truthful in speech, he should find his delight in the Supreme and be indifferent to all pleasures. Having no friend but the self, let him wander here upon earth in quest of true happiness.[496]

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[493] Cyril B. Papali, "Vedism and Classical Hinduism", in Secretariatus pro non-Christians ed. *For a Dialogue with Hinduism*, Roma, 1970, 14.
[494] Sullivan, *A to Z of Hinduism,* 134.
[495] Even though *deha* is translated as body, it is different from *sarira* (body). *Deha* emphasises the material aspect. Its root is *dih* meaning the composites of elements or matter. *Sarira* or *sarira*m (*sru+iram*) is body considered in its relation to the soul; it is supported by soul and ordained to serve the purpose of the soul. While Ramanuja explains the world as the body of *Isvara*, he takes body or *deha* in this particular sense of *sarira*. For details see Chatterjee, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*.118.
[496] *Manusmrti* VI. 45-49.

Related to *asrama* is *Dharma* the cosmic law underlying right behaviour and the social order. This law operates in accord with Ṛta, the principle of the natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it. With respect to virtuous behaviour, different people have different obligations and duties according to their age, gender, and social position. Mention of social position leads us to *Varna*. *Varna* relates to the class system which in the Rigveda (the oldest surviving Indian text) is considered fundamental to the social order.[497] In hierarchical order the classes are as follows:

- The *Brahmans* or *Brahmins* - the intellectuals and the priestly class who perform religious rituals
- The *Kshatriya* - the nobles or warriors; traditionally these held power.
- The *Vashya* - the common people, the cultivators and the traders.
- The *Shudra* - the laborers; they live in service to the other three.

Historically a fifth class, the *Pancama*, was mooted but never accepted officially. It was to include the 'untouchable' classes and tribal groups considered outside the system. But in modern times, traditional Hindus insist on the four-varna system as fundamental to the good of society. In these terms the *Dalits* 'untouchables' today are outside the *varna;* they are *avarna* - classless.[498]

The concept of *Karma* is concerned with behaviour. It has its origins in the Sanskrit root *kr* to create, to make, to do, or to act. Every human act, good or bad, has its corresponding effects and the one who does the act bears the consequences, whether in this life or in a succeeding one. The law of *karma* is explained as follows in *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad*:

> As man acts, as he behaves, so does he become. Who so does good becomes good; who so does evil, becomes evil. By good works a man becomes holy; by evil (works) he becomes evil. But some have said: 'this person consists of desire alone. As is his desire, so will his will be; as is his will, so will he act; as he acts, so will he attain.[499]

The principle of *karma* is the explanation for all that occurs in daily life: good and evil, happiness and suffering, fortune and misfortune, and richness and poverty; they are the natural consequences of past actions whether done in the present life or in a former one.

Closely connected with the concept of *karma* is that of *samsara*, rebirth.[500] The word *samsara* literally means "stream" or "current", and it signifies the cycle of life - birth, life,

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[497] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 34.
[498] Ibid., 36.
[499] *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* IV. 4. 5-7.
[500] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 36-37.

death, and rebirth. Since according to the law of *karma* all actions have consequences, if the duration of one lifetime proves insufficient to accommodate those consequences, one has to pass through to a further life. The life cycle continues until the impressions of karma are concluded. *Samsara* continues until the total liberation of *atman* (the soul) is achieved. For as long as the impressions of *karma* remain, the *atman* will be in the bondage (of the body) and rebirth becomes necessary. *Samsara* can be viewed as the process through which a person reaches his final goal, of total liberation. The goal of liberation (*moksha*) is to free him from the cycle of rebirth.

Samsara however does not necessarily mean rebirth in a human body; it can be in that of any creature. A superior body can be expected in consequence of previous good acts but the opposite also applies. This cycle of life, death and rebirth dictated by the inexorable law of *karma* is called *samsara*. We read in *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad*:

> The self, after reaching the end of this body, finds another place of support and then draws himself towards it. As a goldsmith, after taking a piece of gold, gives it another, newer and more beautiful shape, similarly does this self, after having thrown off this body, and dispelled ignorance, take another newer and more beautiful form, whether it be of the man's or demigod's or god's.[501]

8 The Concept of Caste (*Catur-varna*)

There are two Sanskrit words: *varna* means "colour", and *jati* means "species", used to designate caste. *Catur* means four; *catur-varna* is the term employed to designate the social system we call today the caste system, according to which society is divided mainly under four sections basing on colour. The English word "caste" might have been derived from the Portuguese word *casta* meaning "colour" or "race", and refers to the social class.[502] The word *jati* forms the word *jatan*, to be born and *jatya,* by birth, and signifies that the caste status is not acquired by individual actions or qualities, but determined by birth. The exact origin of the caste system is unknown to historians. It is traced back even to *Rig-Veda* where it is mentioned.[503]

There existed mainly four castes, *catur varna* which denotes the role played by colour in this system, as the Aryans are fairer than the other Indian races. Aryans admitted the inhabitants in their society as servants who were then named *Sudras*, the servile caste, mostly of black colour, which occupies the lowest status of social order. The Aryans themselves were divided mainly into three groups, on the basis of labour: the priestly group comes at

[501] *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* IV. 4. 3-5.
[502] Donald S. Lopez, *Hinduism*,11.
[503] *Rig-Veda* X. 90. 11.

first, which was meant for studying, teaching, sacrificing, giving alms and receiving gifts, is called *Brahmins* having white colour; then the warriors and nobles called *Kshatriyas*, who are red coloured; thirdly, the traders and peasants formed *Vaisya* caste, who are blue coloured. The heredity alone is the determining factor of the caste: one belongs to the caste into which one is born, and so nobody can change it. Even for naming a child, *Manusmrti* gives directions:

> A *Brahmin*'s name should have an auspicious meaning, a Kshatriya's name should indicate strength, a Vaisya's name should denote wealth while that of a Sudra should be despicable. A *Brahmin*'s name should have the suffix 'Sarma' (auspicious), a Kshatriya's name, the suffix 'Varma' (armour), a Vaisya's name, the suffix 'Gupta' or 'Datta', and a Sudra's name, the suffix 'Dasa' (servant).[504]

The doctrine of *dharma, karma* and *samsara* has strengthened the theological foundation to the caste system. Even the avatars are the proponents of castes and *dharma* attached to caste, as we see in *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna implores Arjuna to fight against the enemy advocating him from the view point of caste-*dharma*:

> Look at it from the point of view of your caste duty (*svadharma*). Why hesitate? For a *Kshatriya*, is there any thing nobler than a religious war? Happy are the *Kshatriyas* to whom such a battle as this comes: it opens a door to heaven. Were you to refuse to fight, you would spurn your duty and incur disgrace and sin. All beings will speak ill of you in the future. For a man of honour, that kind of disgrace is worse than death.[505]

The dharma which is the principle of universal system forms the fundamentals for the caste system. The text, Law of Manu, Manavadharma-sastra or Manusmrti, the teaching of Manu, the first man directly issued from Brahma, is very enlightening in this respect. Manu developed his vision basing it on the Rgvedic Purusha-sukta hymn. In fact, the Hindu explanation of world order is elaborated, rather than pointing to the individual identity, by the *catur varna*. The ancient concept of *Varna* with its four levels of class prevails today but variations throughout history and not least in recent times mean that its current format in Indian society differs somewhat from the traditional one. But the doctrines of *dharma, karma* and *samsara* serve to ensure its continuation; one's *karma* in the former life is the determinant of one's status in the present one. That includes the possibility, in consequence of bad *karma,* of rebirth at a level below and outside *varna*.

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[504] *Manusmrti* II. 31-32 as cited in R. Antoine, "The Hindu Samskara" in De Smet and J. Neuner, 212. The term *dasa* is used in *Rig-Veda* to refer to the black-skinned non-Aryans people encountered in India, and later in the post *Vedic* period, this Sanskrit word acquired the meaning 'servant'.
[505] *Bhagavad-Gita* 2. 31-34.

9 Hindu Understanding of History

The Hindu view of history (*charitra*) and time (*kala*) is interwoven with numerous myths. Time for the Hindu is cyclic, a never-ending repetition of creation, preservation, and destruction of which each cycle consists of one hundred -divine years.[506] Within each cycle there are four periods (*yugas*) *Krta-yuga, Treta-yuga, Dvapara-yuga and Kali-yuga.* Today we live in the final period of the present cycle.[507] It is the period of total anarchy and moral decadence. It has 1000 divine years, and it started around 3102 B.C. The four *yugas* together with their intervals, calculated as 12 000 divine years (equal to 4, 320, 000 human years) constitute one *maha-yuga* (great eon). 2000 *maha-yugas* are reckoned as a *Kalpa* which is a day and a night in the life of Brahman (equal to 8, 640, 000, 000 human years).

The Western and Christian world owes its linear concept of history to the Hebrew tradition. The two widely divergent perspectives create problems for any dialogue. The fact of history being seen in Hinduism as an unending series of alternating periods of activity and intervals, would seem to preclude the concept of dynamic progress towards a particular final goal. When history is seen as a continuous circle, the Christian concept of salvation may seem incomprehensible, but there is perhaps the possibility for dialogue in the Hindu concept of the moral degradation of human beings being necessary for liberation. In Hinduism, human history is to be viewed in its relationship with divine time, and with the eternity of Brahman. History is the projection of eternity of the divine and it falls back into that eternity.

10 Hindu Understanding of Liberation

According to Hinduism, liberation includes both *mukti*, the liberation from the *samsara*, (rebirth circle), and *moksha*, the union with Brahman. The concept of liberation is significant in our present study since the role and function of *guru* is mostly related with liberation.[508] We need to consider the meaning and significance of liberation as well as the paths of liberation proposed by Hinduism.

The *Vedantic* as well as the *Upanishadic* concepts say that man is divine in essence, as is expressed by the famous saying *aham brahama asmi* (I am Brahman), but at the same time he is under the *karma-samsara* (vicious circle) where he is in bondage, in need of liberation. Hence, getting rid of the bondage of *karma-samsara* is necessary for the attainment of one's inherent harmony with Brahman, and 'salvation' necessarily consists of liberation *(mukti)* from all bondages. The unending thirst for liberation from bondages, and the longing for

[506] A. Mathias Mundadan , *History and Beyond*, (Aluva: Jeevass Publications), 1997,52.
[507] A. Huart, "Hindu Calendar and Festivals", in De Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 182.
[508] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 40.

union with God, overflow from the hearts of sages in the prayer: *Asatoma sad gamaya, Tamasoma jyotir gamaya, Mrtyoma amrtam gamaya: "*Lead me from the unreal (untruth) to the real (truth), from darkness to light, from death to everlasting life."[509]

The term *moksha* is used to denote specifically the state of infinite bliss. It is union with Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, a state of unlimited being, awareness and bliss in which the limitations of the individual and personality are transcended so that one merges with Brahman.[510] *Upanishads* emphasize the liberation from the cycle of *karma-samsara* as reaching the highest *Purusha*. As *Mundaka-Upanishads* explains, "As the flowing rivers disappear in the ocean, quitting name and form, so the knower, delivered from name and form goes to the heavenly *Purusha*, higher than the high."[511]

According to *bhakti* tradition, especially the Vaishnava tradition, there are various degrees in attaining God in proportion to the intensity of one's devotion. The first and the lowest level is *salokya* which means 'same sphere', and refers to the fact that the devotee is in *swarg*a, (heaven), the world of god. Higher than that is the second level called *samipya* meaning 'proximity', and refers to the direct presence of god. The third stage is *sarupya*, meaning 'similitude', and refers to the conformity to the likeness of god. The final stage is *sayujya* which means being one with the divine essence, *Bhagavata-Purana*.

10.1 Three Paths (*Margas*) of Liberation

To attain liberation, Hinduism proposes different paths (*margas*). There are three traditionally accepted *margas*. They are: *jnana-marga* (path of knowledge), *karma-marga* (path of deeds), and *bhakti-marga* (path of devotion).

Jnana-marga is the intellectual path to *moksha. Upanishads* give prime importance to the acquisition of knowledge of the Supreme Reality.[512] They hold that without this one cannot attain union with Brahman. A distinction is made between *jnana*, which is mere academic, intellectual knowledge about the material world, and *vijnana,*[513] true spiritual knowledge derived from *anubhava* (experience.[514] The removal of *avidhya* (ignorance), is the first aim

[509] *Brhadaranyaka-Upanishad* I. 3. 28.
[510] Sullivan, *A to Z of Hinduism,* 137.
[511] *Mundaka-Upanishads* III. 2. 8.
[512] See *Mundaka-Upanishad* III. 1. 8.
[513] *Vijnana* comes from the root *jnana* added by the prefix '*vi*' and thus signifies '*jnana*' of a superior quality, not ordinary as cited in James George *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian* Christology,62.
[514]The distinction between *jnana* (knowledge) and *vijnana* (wisdom) is remarkably put by S. Radhakrishnan: "Wisdom, pure and transcendent, is different from scientific knowledge, though it is not discontinuous from it. Every science expresses, after its own fashion, within a certain order of things, a reflection of the higher immutable truth of which every thing of any reality necessarily partakes. Scientific or discriminative knowledge prepares us for the higher wisdom. The partial truths of science are different from the whole truth of spirit.

of *jnana*, because man in ignorance is motivated by worldly desires (*kamas*), and thus performs his *karma* (duty) out of *kamas,* and hence he falls all the more into bondages and cannot be freed. Radhakrishnan puts it as follows:

> At the human level action is caused by desire or attachment, *kama*. The root cause of desire is *avidhya* or ignorance of the nature of things. The roots of desire lie in the belief in the individual's self-sufficiency, in the attribution of reality and permanence to it. So long as ignorance persists, it is not possible to escape from the vicious circle of becoming…. Whether we are bound by good desires or bad desires, it is still a question of bondage. It makes little difference whether the chains which bind us are made of gold or iron".[515]

The role of an authentic guru is pre-eminent in the process of acquiring knowledge.

Karma-marga, the path of deeds, is considered to be the way meant for the common people. It consists of the performance of one's duty and thus being in conformity with *dharma*. Proper performance of one's duty enables a person to be liberated and thus to obtain *moksha*. *Dharma*, the universal principle of righteousness, as we have seen already, demands that each human being perform his duty, according to each one's *varna* (class) and *asrama* (stages of life*).* *Chandogya-Upanishad* speaks of different kinds of *dharma* which lead to immortality, namely, sacrifice and study of *Vedas*, practising austerity, and guidance of a guru. There are three branches of *dharma*. The first consists of sacrifice, study of the *Veda* and the giving of alms. The second is austerity. The third is to dwell as a student of sacred knowledge in the house of a teacher and to behave with utmost control of himself in his house. All these gain the worlds allotted to the virtuous as their reward. He who stands firm in Brahman wins through to immortality.[516]

***Bhakti-marga* (Path of Devotion) :** The word *bhakti* gets its origin from the root *bhaj* meaning "to participate in", "to share with", or "to distribute" and refers to the participation of the one who offers sacrifice with the deity to whom the oblation is offered. It denotes also "to serve", "to venerate" or "to adore". Thus in In the popular religious context, the word *bhakti* signifies the devotional attitude of the devotee (*bhakta*) towards the deity. Though the word *bhakti* is generally translated as "devotion", it includes the elements of faith, love,

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Scientific knowledge is useful since it dispels the darkness oppressing the mind, shows the incompleteness of its own world and prepares the mind for something beyond it. For knowing the truth, we require a conversion of the soul, the development of spiritual vision". S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavad-Gita*, 52.

[515] S. Radhakrishnan., *Bhagavad-Gita*, 54.

[516] *Chandogya-Upanishad* II. 23. 1.

surrender, personal attachment, and piety.[517] It is "the ambrosia, that divine drink or nectar, which confers immortality".[518]

By *bhakti* one can please the divine, who will dwell in the heart of the devotee, and he can finally attain to the divine; as Krishna exhorts: "Think of Me, be devoted to Me, Sacrifice to Me, adore Me; thus shalt thou reach Me, I promise thee in every truth, for thou are dear to Me".[519] The *bhakti-marga* underwent substantial development in the theistic traditions of *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism*. The *bhakti* (devotion) group of Vishnu is known as *Vaishnavism* which had a great influence on South India, and it is mostly in this tradition that the devotion to various avatars, especially to Rama (Rama-*bhakti*)[520] and Krishna (Krishna-*bhakti*)[521] flourished.

11 Role of Guru in the Path of Liberation

Guru, the teacher or spiritual guide, according to Hinduism, is crucial for everybody especially in the initial stage of his searching for experience of the divine. Without a guru no one can become a "twice-born" (*dvija*), for it is the guru who hands over the sacred thread and whispers the *mantra* (sacred formula) in the initiation ceremony, and the disciple has to live with the guru for a minimum period, (theoretically 12 years, but not strictly observed), for his *Vedic* studies. The one who undergoes spiritual training under a guru is called *sishya*. Guru should be a *jivanmukta*, one who has obtained liberation in this worldly life itself before his death, which means concretely a liberated person, having total detachment from any kind of worldly affairs.

As we have mentioned, the figure of guru has great significance in present Indian Christological thinking where Christ is presented as a guru by various Indian theologians. For a Hindu the sense of holy or sacred is something pervading the whole order of nature. We cannot simply brand Hinduism. polytheist or idolatrous. For the Hindu every god is but a manifestation of the one and eternal absolute Being and every idol is but the sacramental

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[517] Fallon, "Doctrinal Background of the *Bhakti* Spirituality", in De Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 304.
[518] Ibid., 304-305.
[519] *Bhagavad-Gita* XVIII. 65.
[520] Some of the famous figures of this *bhakti* current are Tulasidas, Kabir, and Nanak, Ramananda. Fallon, "The Bhagavata Purana and the Great Bhakti currents", in De Smet and Neuner ed., *Religious Hinduism*,300.
[521] The devotional songs of Alvars in Tamil sing praises to Krishna. The *Harivamsa*, the celebrated poem containing 16000 verses praise the Lord Krishna, and the *Vishnu-Purana* which tells us about cowherd Krishna, in which we find the famous story of Prahlada, depicted as the model of untainted *bhakti*, the son of a pagan king, who had been taught the doctrine of *bhakti* and faced persecutions and death with loving trust in the name of Vishnu, are the two main works in the *Vishnu-bhakti* tradition.

presence of one infinite spirit.[522] In effect religions are "nothing but as many roads leading to one and the same goal". All paths lead to the same goal. All important Hindu scriptures teach that there are several pathways to the Supreme Being.[523] Christianity is seen as one of the many such pathways. Hindus have deep admiration and respect for Christian charitable work and educational institutions.

The question of conversion to Christianity makes very little sense to them. They dislike deeply the evangelising aspect of missionary work and religious propaganda and attempts to convert Hindus to Christianity. Conversion to Christianity is something unthinkable. At most they think that Christianity can contribute to making the role of religions more relevant and meaningful to modern man. Christianity is not a substitute for Hinduism.[524] Traditional Hinduism does not proselytize, because religion comes with the free gift of existence. Hence, according to the Hindu way of thinking, it is meaningless to insist on total conversion of a person to something that he is not.[525] What Hinduism defends against Christianity is the right of Hindus to their religion as being the most perfect expression of the *Sanatana Dharma*, the Eternal Religion.

There is always a welcoming attitude towards Christianity on the part of Hindus, who consider it as a sister religion which also can lead man to perfection. All religions are good in so far as they lead man to perfection. With regard to Christian claims to a monopoly of truth Kavalam M. Panikkar writes:

> The doctrine of the monopoly of truth and revelation is altogether alien to the Asian mind. To the Hindu who believes all good ways lead to God, and to the Buddhist who is taught that the practice of the noble eightfold path will perfect him, the claim of the votaries of any sect that they alone have the truth, and others who do not submit "shall be contempt", has always seemed unreasonable and absurd. Practically every educated Asian who seriously and conscientiously studied to understand the point of

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[522] Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India, Essays Towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, (New York: Scribner's book store, 1966), 22. All gods and goddesses are but the manifestations of this one Impersonal God. But we can easily find texts in Hindu Scriptures supporting polytheism, monotheism, and pantheism as well as belief in demons, heroes and ancestors. See S. Radhakrishnan , "Hinduism", in Basham, A.L.ed., *A Cultural History of India*, 67.

[523] In Hinduism itself there are many margas (ways) that lead to this goal: bhakti marga (way of love), gna marga (way of knowledge), Karma marga (way of action), and hatha and raja marga (way of total surrender). See S. Radhakrishnan, "Hinduism," 73-77.

[524] Educated Indians like M. N. Srinivas, S. Radhakrishnan, K. M. Panikkar et al. share this view. See Mysore N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India,* (Bombay: Allied Publications, 1966), 79-84. S Radhakrishnan would never accept that Christianity alone is the revealed religion. He writes, "As every religion is a living movement no one face or form of it can lay claim to finality: No historical religion can be regarded a as truth absolute and changeless." S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thoughts* (Oxford India: Paperbacks, 1940), 330.

[525] R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 17.

view of the missionary, from Emperor Kang Hsi to Mahatma Gandhi, has emphasised this point.[526]

Hinduism considers itself to be so rich that it can even accommodate Christianity within its own multiform structure. In general Hindus are tolerant people. Christians very often misunderstand this attitude of tolerance as intolerance.[527] Tolerance is a duty, not a mere concession. According to S. Radhakrishnan this Hindu attitude of tolerance is not a matter of policy or expediency, but a principle of spiritual life.[528] Hindus find difficulty in tolerating the attitude of superiority shown by Christians. S. Radhakrishnan could not accept Christianity's claim to uniqueness and absoluteness. He does not find any philosophical basis for this claim.[529]

Western Christianity was never an ideal or model for the Hindus. It is of course strongly linked to aggressive colonialism.[530] Nobody can deny the historical link between the spread of Christianity and the expansion of Western colonial power. Hence most Hindus now see Christianity as an unwelcome legacy of an historical era which has now come to its close.[531] Christianity is frequently regarded as Western imperialism in a religious garb, a religion which is alien to the socio-cultural context of India. It must be acknowledged that Christianity cannot boast of cordial or friendly relationships with other religions. Historically neither Christian nations nor Christianity have been models of righteousness and virtue.[532]

Both Christianity and Hinduism are living religions; an encounter between the two is not easy. As R. Panikkar has pointed out there exists an inadequacy of cultural synthesis and inefficiency of doctrinal parallelism.[533] The person of Jesus is central to Christianity. Hinduism, on the other hand, has no central figure. Christians have a resolute belief in the cycle of birth, life, death and resurrection leading to eternal life, while Hinduism professes belief in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth, until liberation can be achieved. These points of

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[526] Kavalam M. Panikkar, *Asian and Western Dominance,* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953),455.
[527] The Hindu attitude is one of positive fellowship, not negative tolerance. For details see S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, 335.
[528] S. Radhakrishnan, "Hinduism", 70-71.
[529] S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought* ,342-343. K. M Panikkar considers this attitude of superiority as one of the reasons for the failure of Christian mission in Asia. For details see K.M Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, 455.
[530] Richard. H. Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church*, (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 117.
[531] John Boel, *Christian Mission in India: A Sociological Analysis*, (Amsterdam: Graduate Press, 1975), 1.
[532] See Eugene, Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*: *A History of the Syro-Malabar Church from the Earliest time to the Present Day* (London: Longmans, 1957), 29.
[533] R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 38-42.

convergence and divergence are of prime importance in helping us to appreciate some of the difficulties that arise when comparing two large faith traditions.

The encounter with Christianity met with a variety of responses within Hinduism and Indian society in general. Many learned, upper caste Hindus sought to assimilate both rationalism and Christian spirituality into Hinduism. Others viewed it as a challenge to their Hindu identity and were motivated to engage in various Hindu revival movements.[534] Jesus Christ was the main attraction for these, and they sought to comprehend and present Christ within the framework of their Hindu religious background. At this stage our focus is mainly on the Christological dimension of their thinking, concentrating on the Hindu titles which they applied to Jesus and especially those which we have already highlighted, namely; *guru*, *avatar* and *prajapati*.

12 Hinduism as a lived and living religion today

Until now in this chapter the focus has been on the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism and on its development down through the centuries. It is Hinduism as it is practised today however that is most pertinent to this study and to the task of Hindu-Christian dialogue. The impacts on Hindu religious practice of global and local influences - social, economic and political – throughout modern history and continuing, have been many and varied; and all this is before mention of regional variations across the sub-continent. For this study, the focus is on aspects of the subject which have most relevance to inter-faith dialogue. These include the impact of secular and Western influences, current attempts to make political capital out of Hinduism's cultural dominance, and challenges to the Caste system. But equally important from the point of view of dialogue is the enduring and rich tradition of Hindu ritual and its use of art forms that lend themselves to potential replication for a Christian context.

The writer is more familiar with Hinduism as currently practiced in the State of Kerala than with its practice elsewhere. But it is because Kerala is the primary interface in India between Hinduism and Christianity, and therefore where dialogue is most important, that specific attention is given at the conclusion of this chapter to Hindu practice in that region. Hinduism is a major world religion, not merely by virtue of its many followers, but

[534] Considerable number of learned Hindus moved away from the traditional Hinduism, and joined one or other of these organizations. As a result, there emerged numerous organizations like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Shanti Nikethan and Viswa Bharati, Theosophical Society, Ramakrishna Mission, Servants of India Society, and Indian National Congress paving the way for social, religious, and political reforms in India. Besides, many of these great figures of renaissance and nationalist movements had the chance to have a European education, a contact direct or through the reading, with the prominent western thinkers of that time, even ones who made criticisms of Christianity. They started to make a self-critique of Hindu identity and its traditional values, including caste concept, as the light of the spirit of criticism developed in the Occident.

also because of its profound influence on many other religions during its long, unbroken history, which dates from about 1500 BC. The geographic, rather than ideological, basis of the religion has given Hinduism the character of a social and cultural system that extends to every aspect of human life wherever it is prevalent.[535]

The Hindu religion is still dominating the Indian culture. In shaping the religious beliefs, the geographic and climatic conditions of the land had played a vital role. A question arises therefore as to whether Hinduism is a religion or a culture? This matter is of critical relevance today in the context of movements identifying with 'Hindutva' (Hinduness), and not least that of the 'politicisation' of Hindu identity by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). According to D. Savarkar, one of the originators of Hindutva ideology, Indian identity is constructed around belonging to a Common Nation *(rashtra*), a Common Race (*jati)* and a Common Culture/Civilization (sanskriti). Those who fulfil those requirements can claim Hindutva. By implication those who cannot are not indigenous Indian citizens. Hinduism in the view of Hindutva is a culture; it has room for many religions[536]. But while Hindutva does not depend on holding a particular creed or adopting a particular form of worship, there is at the very least an ambivalence about the matter, certainly with respect to followers of Islam according to the Bharatiya Janata Party.[537] Although there are any references to a positive confidence regarding Hindu interest in dialogue the rise of Hindutva can complicate the view which will be elaborated in Chapter six.

Given the above, it seems justified to draw a sharp distinction between Hinduism as a religion and Hindutva. Hindu religion may be the most liberal of all religions in the world; it promotes, without ambivalence, the principle of unity in diversity.[538] Shashi Tharoor convincingly articulates the difference. While Hinduism is inclusive and all-embracing as expressed in the Upanishadic dictum *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*, Hindutva is exclusive and diametrically opposed to what Hinduism stands for.[539] For Javerhal Nehru it is "misleading, incorrect and undesirable" to use the term Hindu or Hinduism for Indian culture.[540] Hindu religion might be better served if it was called Arya Dharma, Vedism or Brahminism or by

[535] One striking feature of Hinduism is that practice takes precedence over belief. What a Hindu does is more important than what a Hindu believes. Hinduism is not credal. See, Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.
[536] Cited by Abraham D. Mattam, *Inculturation of the Liturgy in the Indian Context* (Vadavathoor: ORISI Publications, 1991), 36.
[537] Brian A. Hatcher, *Hinduism in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2016), 248-49.
[538] *Eekam st vipra, bhauda vadnati* (Truth is one and the sages call it differently) and *Vasudaiva Kudumbakam* (the whole universe is one family) are the eternal messages of Hinduism.
[539] Shashi Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu*? (London: Hurst and Company, 2018),14.
[540] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India,* (London: Meridian Books, 1951), 74.

some other name. But in current usage Hinduism designates a religion, or even irreligion (in the case of the Charvaka sect), and not a culture.[541]

Modern Hinduism has evolved from Vedic religion and Brahminism.[542] It is helpful in today's world to distinguish between Philosophical Hinduism[543] and Popular Hinduism. Popular Hinduism embraces a range of popular cults and religious practices like the worship of Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, Siva and other Hindu gods and goddesses, making pilgrimage to sacred place etc; these do not have a philosophical basis. Philosophical Hinduism owes much to Sankara or Sri Sankaracharya[544] an intellectual genius and major exponent of. Vedanta philosophy. For Sankara, the Upanishads teach that reality is One, 'Advaita', and that reality is Brahman.

Strictly speaking, only the High castes, who uphold the supremacy of the Vedas, are Hindus. The Outcastes or untouchables and tribals are outside the Hindu fold. Since these know nothing of Hinduism and Hindu gods and goddesses as followers of Hindu religion there is no connubium, no commonalism.[545] According to tradional terminology Hindus are called *Savrnas* and the Untouchables are called *Avarnas*. As a result of contact with Hindus, a section of the Untouchables has accepted some of the cultural cultic practices of Hindus; they have common religious festivals; many of them worship Rama, Krishna, Siva, and other gods and goddesses of Hinduism. At the same time, they have their own beliefs and cults, too. In B.R. Ambedkar's opinion it would be more appropriate to say that the religion of the Untouchables is, in some respects, similar to Hinduism.[546]

The aspiration of lower castes to a higher social status has, throughout Indian history and until now, contributed to a degree of social and cultural mobility. The ideals of

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[541] *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*,1.

[542] For a clear understanding of religious Hinduism, it is helpful to distinguish three distinct stages of its evolution. These stages may be called Vedic religion, Brahminism, and modern Hinduism. It is possible to make another distinction as well, with regard to Hinduism. Doctrinal or Philosophical Hinduism and popular Hinduism. Abraham D. Mattam, *Inculturation of the Liturgy in the Indian Context* (Vadavathoor: ORISI Publications, 1991), 56-57.

[543] Philosophical Hinduism is also referred to as Doctrinal Hinduism. By comparison with other world religions the term "doctrinal" can only be loosely attributed to Hinduism. Mattam, *Inculturation of the Liturgy in the Indian* Context, 57.

[544] As a Siva Brahmin, Sankara, was born at Kalady in Kerala about 788 A.D. Early in his youth he took to sanyasa, a life of an ascetic and reached Sringeri, Mysore. There he became the disciple of Govinda, a popular Gaudapada. Probably Gaudapada was alive when he was directly influenced by Gaudapada.

[545] Mattam, *Inculturation of the Liturgy in the Indian Context*, 69.

[546] B.R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Castes*: Critical Quest, 1937, See also, Babasaheb *Ambedkar writings and speeches vol.*1. Dr. Ambedkar Foundation Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India 15, Janpath, New Delhi.

Hinduism have been laid down in the Sanskrit Scriptures.[547] The adoption of Sanskritic deities and ritual forms by outlying groups brings them into closer alignment with higher castes in respect of customs and practices. A higher ritual practice confers a higher social status. [548] This sense of elitism has had its own side effects. The claim to higher castes by the lower ones has, resulted in change in occupation, style of life, caste name and in certain cases even the non-performance of the traditional caste duties. This has often caused violent reactions from the upper castes for whom such mobility was a threat in their domination in the society.[549] But the movement continues. Lower castes begin to make use of educational opportunities and to raise their voice against social inequality.[550]

Hinduism today shows the influence also of Westernization beginning in the first half of the 19th century.[551] K. M. Panikkar opines that "the view that the changes which have resulted from the contact between Indian and Europe have only touched the fringes of society, or merely added a veneer to it, is wrong."[552] Westernization has its own approach to social problems.[553] Being much inspired by humanitarianism and rationality it has contributed significantly to the reformation of Hindu society, not least in respect of the emancipation of the untouchable classes.

12.1 Hindu Worship and Art

As with Christianity, Hinduism has, from its beginning and until now, relied heavily on a range of art forms to give expression to its beliefs. In its efforts to find ways to give creative expression to the transcendent, the divine, religions inevitably resort to the use of imagination, symbol, metaphor - in short, the language of art forms. The Hindu view of art is

[547] The epoch of classical Hinduism was the time when the Sanskrit literature proliferated in all areas of thought. See Alex Michaels, *Hinduism Past and Present*, translated by Barbara Harshav (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 58-60.
[548] Sanskritism is a culture and original language. Classicism contended with the hegemonic influence of Sanskrit, as India's paradigmatic classical tongue. In the 1890s, a neo-Shaivism and classicism emerged, a third imaginary also surfaced in the discourses of tamilpparru, which S. Ramaswamy call ''Indianist''. See, Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue : Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-197*0 (Los Angeles University of California Press,1997), 39-51.
[549] Srinivas*, Social Change in Modern India,* 96-98.
[550] Kochuparambil, *Evangelisation in India*,230.
[551] The changes the West has brought about are "profound, many sided, and fruitful", and they occurred at different levels, intuitions, ideology and values. See, Sriniavas*, Social Change in Modern India,* 46-88.
[552] K. M. Panikkar, *The Foundations of New India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 17.
[553] Westernization and Sanskritization have brought many changes to the new Indian state. They exert their impacts in all spheres of human life: social, economic, political, culture and religious. Sriniavas*, Social Change in Modern India,* 70.

the Hindu view of life, life as interpreted by religion and philosophy.[554] Art is intrinsic to Hindu ritual worship; it makes extensive use of three symbolic devices - mantras, yantras and *murtis* (icons or images) - as aids to meditation. In Hinduism, philosophical concepts are to be complemented by devotion, *bhakti* yoga. All sorts of artistry have been spawned in consequence.

Particular mention must be made of music. Indian music theory emerged directly from the Vedas, the ancient treasure of hymns conceived by *rsi* seers through divine vision.[555] In the Vedic tradition sound is identified with the supreme reality, *Sabdha-Brahman,* the prime object of worship and meditation.[556] Hindu religious ritual continues today to exhibit a persistent preoccupation with musical features of tone, rhythm and dance, along with textual support and interpretation in both Sanskrit and vernacular sources.[557] The average ritual life of the practising Hindu is invariably permeated with the sounds of mantras, prayers, recitations, songs, and musical instruments. But, besides its use in ritual, Hindu religious music is considered indispensable for propagation of Hindu Faith. Its (predominantly) vocal music is characterised by long-established texts delivered with a clarity of pronunciation.

In *bhakti* (devotional worship) there is much emphasis on the emotional relationship between man and God; the primary quest of man is for emotional experience of the divine, for spiritual excitement in union with God.[558] In *bhakti, rasa*[559] is equated with experience of the divine. Music is the motivating energy for any religious activity. It is the connecting medium between the spheres of the divine and the mundane. It activates the connecting flow of emotion that delivers the human soul from wordily entanglements (*samsara*) and leads to the ultimate spiritual experience in union with the divine.[560]

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[554]There is in the Sanskrit language no exact equivalent for the word art as it is used in the modern European languages, for art in India has seldom been understood in the Western sense of Art for art's sake See, Mulk Raj Andand, *The Hindu View of Art, First edition Milton Park*: (George Allen &Unwin Ltd Routledge) xviii.

[555] Selina Thielemann, *Singing the Praises Divine Music in the Hindu Tradition* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2000),1.

[556] Thielemann, *Singing the Praises Divine Music in the Hindu Tradition*, 1-2.

[557] Guy L. Beck "Hinduism and Music" in The *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Arts* ,ed., Frank Burch Brown (Oxford University Press: Madison Aveneu, New York,2014),358-365.

[558] In Indian traditions, the term to denote aesthetic delight is rasa, literally 'juice' or 'taste', implying the notion of a liquid or flow *Rasa*, aesthetic experience, as supreme bliss is already acknowledged by the Upanisads , Taittiriya Upanisad 2.7.1.

[559] *Rasa*, in Hindu aesthetics, is what evokes in listeners to sacred music an emotion or feeling – which transcends description.

[560] Selina Thielemann, *Sounds of the Sacred*: *Religious Music in India*, (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation,1999),117-26.

13 Hinduism in Kerala[561]

Kerala has for a long time been a meeting ground of all Indian religious and political systems. The people of Ancient Kerala originally followed the Dravidian way of life and religious practices.[562] Jainism and Buddhism were significant until the 5th Century A.D. when their decline facilitated the spread of Hinduism. But Buddhism remained as a distinct religious entity at least until the 8th Century A.D. and even then, was by no means eliminated. Various practices of Hinduism are unique to Kerala. The people made offerings to a number of local deities and performed a variety of rituals and practices. Feeding the cow was a daily practice. Tree worship and ancestral worship were common. Caste or communal barriers did not exist in any rigid form.[563] The principles of social freedom and equality were cherished. The culture of Kerala is also characterised by unique richness and variety in such diverse fields as religion and philosophy, art and architecture, education and learning.[564]

It was mentioned above that Buddhism had a prominence in Kerala up to the 5th Century. A.D. [565] It was not however replaced by Hinduism so much as merged into it, as also were other popular rituals and models of worship. Some scholars believe that the Sastha cult and the Naga worship, which are widely prevalent in Kerala, are legacies of Buddhism. The images, and processions, *utsavas* etc. that feature in Hindu temples in Kerala also seem to have been modelled after those of Buddhists.

A Hindu reform movement gathered momentum in Kerala in the 8th century A.D. It threw up a galaxy of eminent personalities, like Prabhakara, who became a head of the Sankara School founded for Vedic studies. But despite its place in Hindu reform, Sankara appears as a distinctly dualistic creed, incorporating rather than supplanting Buddhism. Kerala was the birthplace of Sankara and Buddhism was prevalent at the time throughout Kerala. In the writings of Kerala-born Sankarcharya, (788-820 A.D.), its most celebrated Hindu religious teacher, this dualism is quite evident. For him the Upanishads teach that there is only one reality '*Advaida*' and that reality is Brahman; everything therefore is unreal,

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[561] Kerala is a state in South India popularly known as Malabar. The people of Kerala are called Malayali and they speak a local language, Malayalam. The environment of Kerala shares characteristics with the mainland of Southeast Asia and the Pacific archipelago, such as tropical climate, an average temperature of 250C -280 C and frequent rainfall**.** "The Living Culture and Typo-Morphology of Vernacular Houses in Kerala. Indah Widiastuti School of Architecture, Planning and Policy development- SAPPD Institute of Technology, Ban, ISVS e-journal, Vol. 2, no.4, September 2013.

[562] A. Sreedhara Menon, *The Legacy of Kerala* (Kottayam: Deepika Books, 1982), 12-13.

[563] Sreedhara Menon, *The Legacy of Kerala,* 14.

[564] Ibid., 9.

[565] The Buddhist faith must have come to Kerala in the 3rd century B.C. during the reign of Asoka. It is believed that some pf the temples like Vadakkunathan temple and the Siva temple at Madavurpara were one time Buddhist shrines. See, Sreedhara Menon, *The Legacy of Kerala,* 14.

mere appearance. The individual self "I" or "mine" is only appearance, not a reality. Brahman is the self of us all. When the truth, Brahman, is realised the apparent "I" will automatically cease: "I" and Brahman will be identical. "I am Brahman" (*Aham Brahmasmi*) and "That thou art" (*Tat tvamasi*)[566]. In Das Gupta's summary of the teaching of the Sankara School of Vedanta, the links to Buddhism are obvious:

> The Upanishad held that reality or truth was one, and there was "no many" anywhere, and Sankara explained it by adding that the "many" was merely an illusion, and hence did not exist in reality and was bound to disappear when truth was known. The world appearance is *maya* (illusion). This is what Sankara emphasises in expounding his constructive system of the Upanishad doctrine.[567]

The *Advaita* (philosophy) of Sankara expresses similar views on certain questions to those of Buddhism. It considers the "individual self" as illusory, unreal. Buddhism holds that there is no permanent self. Among the borrowings of Hinduism from Buddhism is the latter's monastic system. Adi Sankara Ashram in Kalady, Kerala is a well-known Ashram.

It is in the Kerala context that the writer hopes to pursue Hindu-Christian dialogue. Such dialogue, if it is to have any hope of being effective, must be 'at home' in the place where it is being pursued. This, necessarily brief, outline of some of the specific characteristics of Hindu practice in Kerala points firstly to the need for dialogue to be customised for the context. Secondly it suggests that Hinduism in Kerala is by no means a hermetically sealed entity; it comes with a history of multiple religious influences and of openness to these. For Christianity, as the other party in the dialogue, that represents a challenge to reciprocate with similar openness. Thirdly, it points to the rich harvest that Hinduism has gathered from Indian culture in its efforts to speak of the transcendent. It is a harvest within which Christianity can search within for ways to express Christian truths in an Indian context.

14 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline the fundamental features of Hinduism with particular attention to the Hindu titles which are central to our deliberations. We have also established how these titles relate to the Hindu concepts of God, man, world and human liberation. We cannot think of *Vedic Brahmana* texts and sacrifice without Prajapati; there are no *Puranas* and *Ithihasas* unless there are avatars; without the gurus, the paths of liberation and study of

[566] Chandogya- Upanishad, 6, 8, 6ff.
[567] Sunrendran Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*,Vol I (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,1975), 422-23.

Veda are unthinkable. We have paid particular attention also to the concepts of dharma, rta, rebirth, and caste system and history since they are central to the Hindu faith and vision.

Christianity in India finds itself alongside an ancient religious tradition with a specific vision of God, the world, humanity and the destiny of humans. Hinduism is a religion intimately intertwined with Indian culture. It possesses resources of eminent value for expressing Christian truths in an Indian context. More than that, such 'borrowing' conveys to both Hindus and Christian a sense of the shared engagement in the human search for meaning, which is the reason for dialogue. This is the context with which our study is engaged.

CHAPTER 4
CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE BETWEEN HINDUISM AND IINDIAN CRISTOLOGY

1 Introduction

Since Hinduism is a religion inextricably linked to the Indian culture and this is the context in which our study is set it is essential that we have an understanding of the late 19th Century Hindu Renaissance movement in India.[568] Among some Hindu scholars of that movement were a number who were strongly attracted to the person of Christ and who tried to comprehend and present him within the context of their Hindu religious background. They are to be greatly appreciated for how they tried to be faithful to their religious culture and at the same time to the person of Christ. They searched for the personal presence of God among us, as reflected in, and through, concepts of their religion. Other Hindus have spoken about Christ from a Hindu perspective. They include Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda. Their contributions also merit attention. Christian scholars of Hinduism have frequently been influenced by the writings and sayings of such as these in their efforts to present Christ, using concepts drawn from Hinduism.

Not surprisingly there are frequent references by most of these scholars to a number of Hindu titles ascribed to the manifestations of the deity – in particular *Guru, Avatar and Prajapati*.[569] At face value it might seem that the Hindu titles of various aspects of divinity, and especially those that appear to resonate with the person of Christ, should lend themselves easily to straightforward comparisons and might seem unproblematic in their implications

[568] Nineteenth century Indian society is marked by the emergence of Hindu renaissance movements and socio-political and religious reform movements. It is mainly through the encounters with Christianity that challenges have been put to Hinduism and Indian society. As a result of this encounter many learned upper caste Hindus wished to assimilate rationalism, Christian spirituality and human values into Hinduism. However, their recent renaissance movement has seen many learned Hindus move away from the traditional Hinduism, and joined one or other organizations such as Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Shanti Nikethan and Viswa Bharati, Theosophical Society, Ramakrishna Mission, Servants of India Society, and Indian National Congress paving the way for social, religious, and political reforms in India. Besides, many of these great figures of renaissance and nationalist movements had the chance to have a European education, a contact direct or through the reading, with the prominent western thinkers of that time, even ones who made criticisms of Christianity. They started to make a self-critique of Hindu identity and its traditional values, including caste concept, as the light of the spirit of criticism developed in the Occident. See, Sebastian Alackapally, *Inculturation and Interreligious Harmony of Life* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019), 151-184.

[569] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology: Enroute to dialogue with K Barth,H.de Lubac, K Rahner and R.Panikkar on Christocentric inclusivism* (Kozhikode: Premier Prints, 2008),45-48.

with respect to Christian theology. As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, such a process is neither straightforward nor unproblematic.

What follows is an attempt to offer an overview of the thinking of these scholars. The purpose in doing so is towards identifying the points of convergence and divergence that have emerged from efforts to explore the interface between Hinduism and Christianity. In addition to identifying points of relatedness and differences, Christian scholars of Hinduism frequently suggest that Christ surpasses, fulfils, completes or corrects these Hindu concepts. Towards the end of this chapter there will be an attempt to assemble these 'surpassing' elements also, alongside elements of relatedness and difference and offer some comment on each. [570] The following chapter, with the guidance of de Lubac, will try to reach conclusions and determinations regarding them.

Having gathered the perspectives of various writers in relation to the range of Hindu titles ascribed to manifestations of the deity, the focus will then be on one title only – that of *Avatar*. One reason is because of the prominent attention that the concept receives in Hindu society and popular discourse today; it is inconceivable that Hindu-Christian dialogue could function without reference to it. But primarily it is because the possibilities and risks of using the Hindu titles, across the range of these, in the development of an Indian Christology, can be adequately gleaned from concentrating on *Avatar*-doing so provides a fruitful means of identifying convergences and divergences between the two religions. The following is an overview of how, in general, Hindu Scholars, Christian Scholars and others have variously dealt with the interface between the two beliefs.

Section A: The Interface between Hinduism and Christianity. Literature Review

1.1 Hindu Scholars of its Renaissance Movement

Bhakti-Karma movement: Ram Mohan Roy,[571] a pioneer of liberal reform of Hinduism, regarded Jesus as the great teacher and entitled him "*Maha Guru*". He collected extracts

[570] J. George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 167-68.

[571] Raja Ram Mohan Roy, known as the prophet of Indian nationalism and the pioneer of liberal reform in Hindu religion as well as in Indian society, also known as the Father of modern India, was born from a Brahmin family in Bengal in 1772. Dissatisfied with the existing practice of the Hindu religion, he left home for his religious longings and wandered up to Tibet. He acquired a thorough knowledge in Islam which had influenced him so strongly that he stood against idol worship in his own religious tradition. *Upanishads* and Gospels were the two main sources of inspiration for him in his reformation movements. He is the founder of the great reform movement, "Brahma Sabha", in 1828, that became very soon "Brahma Samaj". He is the one who fought for the abolition of *Sati* (practice of the self-sacrifice of the widow by putting herself into the funeral fire of the husband), from the Indian society. He sailed to England in 1830 hoping to return to India for further service but

from the four gospels with a specific emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, and published them in 1820 under the title, "The Precepts of Jesus".[572] He intended these to contribute to the moral reform of Hindu society.[573] For him, what was appealing was not the divinity of Jesus, his unique Sonship,[574] or even the miracles performed by Jesus, but the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount, which he regarded as encompassing the supreme moral values of Hindu belief. For Ram Mohan Roy also, the saving dimension of Christ's life is his teaching function, and the death of Jesus is the supreme illustration of those precepts. The communication of these precepts was the sole objective of his mission, and the observance of the moral precepts given by Jesus is what leads us to salvation. It was Mohan Roy's view that Christ is the sure channel for Christians in their approach to God, while recognising that there may well be other channels for the people of other traditions.[575] He did not believe that Christ is the sole means of salvation for the whole of mankind.

Some of the Hindu renaissance scholars who sought to engage with Christianity do not have recourse to concepts such as *guru, avatar*, or *prajapati*. One such is Keshab Chandra Sen, whose ideas have been taken up by many other scholars, and for that reason deserves mention. For Keshab Chandra Sen, [576] God is triune; he claimed that his personal experience of God is of the Trinity. He viewed the work of Christ as the pre-existent Logos, and he presented it with the help of *Chandogya-Upanishad*:

> Here the Supreme Brahma of the *Veda* and the *Vedanta* dwells hid in himself. Here sleeps mighty Jehovah, with might yet un-manifested.… But anon the scene changes. Lo! A voice is heard…. Yes it was the Word that created the universe. They call it Los.… What was the creation but the wisdom of God going out of its secret

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died in Bristol in 1833.See, U. N Ball, Raja Ram Mohan Roy-*A Study of his Works of Thought* (Calcutta: Ray &Sons, 1993), 57-59.

[572] The complete title of this book is *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, extracted from the Books of the New Testament, ascribed to the four evangelists*. See Thomas M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1969),1.

[573] See Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 20.

[574] Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 22.

[575] Ibid., 25.

[576] Keshab Chandra Sen was born on 19 November 1838 in Calcutta and completed his university education at the age of 20. His liberal English education shattered his belief in idolatry and raised many challenges to his religious beliefs. He joined the Brahma Samaj in 1857 at the age of nineteen. Though he held a job in those days in the Bank of Bengal as a clerk, he resigned from that job having seen that it did not correspond to his temperament, and then became a Brahmo missionary. He was a man of spiritual fervour and great oratorical powers had showed a great enthusiasm for the teachings, life, and person of Christ. He fought against the caste-system, and organised Brahma Samaj much in the line of the Christian Church, and gradually, following his private interpretation of Christianity, he introduced the ritual practices into the Samaj, and finally formed the Church of the New Dispensation where he developed a system of asceticism and rituals. His mission tours in 1865, 66, and 68 helped the Samaj to grow, establishing new branches in India. In 1870 he undertook a preaching tour in Britain and came back with the awareness of the Church's limitations. He died on 8 January 1884. See, Alackapally, *Inculturation and Interreligious Harmony of Life,* 58-59.

> chambers and taking a visible shape, His potential energy asserting itself in unending activities.[577]

Logos, as the beginning and the end, is responsible for the act of creation which initiates the process of evolution and it is through Logos that man is called to attain the status of sonship.[578] Sen believes that the Trinity can be understood as Brahman as *Saccidananda. Sat* means Being, *Cit* means intelligence/wisdom, *Ananda* means bliss, and Logos is *Cit* (wisdom) ever at work in the development of the created world. In the fullness of time Logos is born as man in Jesus of Nazareth.[579] Christ came to allow all religions, including Hinduism, to attain fulfilment and perfection and to highlight the fact that Christ is "hidden" in the Hindu faith and in the Hindu brethren.[580]

The idea, as presented by Sen, that "Christ is hidden" in the Hindu religious tradition, has been taken up by many other Indian scholars and has been instrumental in paving the way for the development of a theology in an Indian context.[581] He writes:

> In every true *Brahmin*, in every loyal votary of the *Veda* on the banks of the sacred Ganges, is Christ, the Son of God. The holy word, the eternal *Veda* dwells in every one of us…. Go into the depths of your own consciousness, and you will find this indwelling Logos.[582]

Once more he sees this as the same Logos (*Cit*) which was ever active in creation and in evolution. Having exhibited itself in endless varieties of progressive existence the primary creative force at last took the form of the son in Christ.[583]

1.2 Other Hindus who have Spoken about Christ from a Hindu Perspective

Jnana-Karma Movement: India, in the century, is in the grip of the jnana-karma movement[584] Mahatma Gandhi,[585] was simultaneously inspired by the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the

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[577] Keshab Chandra Sen, *Lectures II*, 10. *Lectures on That Marvellous Mystery – Trinity* (1882), Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 28.
[578] See, Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 28.
[579] Ibid., 28.
[580] M. C. Parekh, *Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen*, Rajkot, 1931, 98f, in Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*. 60.
[581] Later this idea is well developed by Panikkar with great cogency. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 68.
[582] Keshab Chandra Sen, *Lectures II*, 33 in Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 38.
[583] See, Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 63-64.
[584] It is not a movement aimed at the creation of a "blissful heaven" up here, or *Jivamukti* of the type professed by Vedic-Upanisadic thinkers. See, Alackapally, *Inculturation and Interreligious Harmony of Life*, 160.
[585] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbunder in Gujarat on 2nd October 1869 in an orthodox Hindu family. At thirteen he was married to Kasturbai, and five years later he left for higher studies in England. Having completed his studies in law he returned to India in 1891 and the following year went to Africa as a legal adviser in a firm. Inspired by the New Testament, especially by the Sermon on the Mount, and *Bhagavad-Gita*, he formulated his famous doctrine of "Non-Violence". He convoked various non-violent campaigns and *Satyagraha* one after another until 1947 when India was freed from the iron chains of British colonization.

Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount. He reflects an interesting tension within himself on whether God is best described as "Truth" or as "Love" when he writes:

> Deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for me, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God …. I saw that rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God.[586]

There is resonance for Christians between the above quote and the response of Jesus to a question from Thomas as recounted in John "I am the way the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). But this is not to imply that Gandhi saw truth personified in Christ; truth for him is the inner voice of God, heard in the conscience of each human being [587] His thinking on Truth (*satya)* is always coupled with *ahimsa* (respect for all living things). *Ahimsa* is the supreme law of *dharma* for Gandhi. It literally means non-killing, but it encompasses more extensive values than those of non-violence. In negative terms it signifies "avoiding any injury to anything on earth in thought, word and deed" and positively it signifies "love, respect, and doing good even to the evil-doer."[588] According to Gandhi, the greatest, most effective and legitimate weapon a man can use against injustice and evil is *ahimsa* (non-violence). It was from this that he drew his famous principle of *Satyagraha* (holding on to Truth).[589]

He saw the principles of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* expressed in the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount and on his preaching love for enemies. He conceived Jesus as the great teacher of love.[590] But in spite of the passionate attitude that Gandhi held

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Soon, the Indian horizons were covered with black clouds: partition, long tragic procession of refugees, riots, terrible bloodshed. In those dark days of a nation's birth-pangs, Gandhiji was at his greatest, striding through the blood-bathed villages of Bengal and Bihar, pleading for peace, and resorting to his ultimate weapon, a three-week fast, to shock his co-religionists into sanity. Peace was eventually restored – but not before an immense price had been paid: a Hindu fanatic, enraged by Gandhi's concessions to the Muslims, shot him dead on January 30th 1948.

[586] He devoted himself only to Truth, and his autobiography is entitled 'My Experiments for Truth" Gandhi, *Young India* (journal) on 31-12-1931, cited in Soares G., "Mahatma Gandhi" in De Smet and Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 378.

[587] See Soares G., "Mahatma Gandhi" in R. De Smet and J. Neuner, *Religious Hinduism*, 379-380.

[588] Ibid., 381.

[589] *Satyagraha* is the method for resisting the evil through voluntary suffering. This very term was coined by Gandhi during his South African campaign to describe the particular form of non-violent agitation he was carrying out. It includes non-co-operation with an unjust system, civil disobedience to an unjust law with the readiness to suffer the consequences, and fasting in a religious spirit. These should be employed by a *Satyagrahi* (one who practices *Satyagraha*) with the spirit of love, for the aim of reform; but the ultimate goal of *Satyagraha* is always *Moksha*, salvation. Gandhi views Ahimsa and Satyam as means to an end where his ultimate goal is the realization of truth. He would be prepared sacrifice Ahimsa to realise the truth but would not sacrifice the truth for anything. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (New York: Abington Press, 1983), 20-28. See, also Alackapally, *Inculturation and Interreligious Harmony of Life,* 171.

[590] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Christian Mission*s, Ahmedabad, 1940, cited in Thomas M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1969), 198.

toward Jesus, for him it was difficult, indeed impossible, to perceive Jesus as the Unique Son of God. For him Jesus is rather one of the many incarnations of God, a great teacher, a perfect man, and one of the great prophets of God.[591] This form of Christology will be considered later in the study.

1.3 Christian Scholars of Hinduism

R.C. Das,[592] who came to Christianity in his later years, sees the uniqueness of Christ as a positive conservative spiritual and moral force integrating all that is true, beautiful, good, and just; Christ enables us to attain fulfilment and perfection through following His word. Christ, as a result is all inclusive, comprehensive and synthetic, the Real.[593] A particularly important contribution of Das is his suggestion that Christ transforms and fulfils the ritual aspirations of the human soul which are expressed in the various beliefs and practices of traditional *Sanatana* Hinduism. Christ is the "*Sat Guru*" (True/Real Guru); He has all the attributes required of a guru in Hinduism. The *Vedic* sacrificial system which finds atonement through the shedding of blood is realised in the self-immolation of Jesus on the cross. The Hindu heart longs for atonement and forgiveness through sacrifice and this is what makes the cross of Christ so appealing to them.

Narayan V Tilak[594] firmly believed as a Christian that, "If Christ could be presented to India in his naked beauty, free from the disguises of western organizations, western doctrines and western forms of worship, India would acknowledge Him as the Supreme Guru, and lay her richest homage at His feet."[595] Tilak's poetry, which maintains the general character of *bhakti* tradition, is much more devotional than theological. He presented Christ as "Mother-

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[591] See Thomas M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 201.

[592] R.C. Das was born in 1887 in a village near Dacca, from an agricultural family of *Vaishnava* Tradition who gave importance to the devotion to Krishna and Rama as divine incarnations. As a teenager he became well versed in the epics and traditional *Vaisnava* literature. During his higher studies in Dacca, he had the opportunity to contact Baptist missionaries and Brahmo minister Chandra Roy, which lead him later to Christianity. As he read the Gospels, he was profoundly touched by Jesus and saw that Jesus was appealing to his heart as his personal Saviour, Friend and Guide. See Thomas M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 210-16.

[593] See Thomas M. M. and Thomas P.T., *Towards an Indian Christian Theology. Life and Thought of Some Pioneers*, (Thiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 1998), 177-178.

[594] Narayan Vaman Tilak, one of the greatest poets of Maharashtra, issued from *Brahmin* family at Karazgaon in Bombay, in 1862. He studied Sanskrit and English in school but could not continue due to poor family background and continued his studies at home by his own efforts. He also studied Hindu *Sustras* and *Vedas* and began to be critical of Hindu orthodoxy, and an active participant in the political awakening in Maharashtra. He came to Christianity by reading the New Testament which he received during a train journey from a fellow traveller. His most famous work is entitled *Abhanganjali*. Tilak, the Christian poet of Maharashtra died on 9 May 1919. See, Winslow J.C., *Narayan Vaman Tilak: The Christian Poet of Maharashtra*, 1930, 118, in Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 10-14.

[595] Winslow J.C., *Narayan Vaman Tilak: The Christian Poet of Maharashtra*, 115.

Guru" and "Saviour."[596] His poems are expressions of Christ's love, of amazement at Jesus' suffering, love, and of his own longing for union with Christ. He thought of the reconciling of peoples and even of the coming together of Hinduism and Christianity.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay[597] was convinced that the most important way to inculturate the gospel message in the Indian context was by using the categories of the Vedanta. He states:

> We must fall back on the *Vedantic* method in formulating the Catholic religion to our countrymen. In fact, the *Vedanta* must be made to do the same service to the Catholic faith in India as was done by the Greek philosophy in Europe. The European clothes of the Catholic religion should be removed as early as possible. It must put on the Hindu garment to be acceptable to the Hindus.[598]

He utilised the "*Ka*" hymn[599] of the 10th mandala of *Rig-Veda* for an allusion of *Hiranya-garbha*[600] (also called Prajapati) and his sacrifice to Christ and his self-sacrifice.[601] Upadhyay insists that it implicitly refers to Christ, the "Firstborn" and his saving sacrifice.[602] He who becomes aware of the aggregate of all possible unmanifested objects by cognising knows his own self is *Hiranyagarbha*. It was Upadhyay's belief that not all religions were equal, but that fulfilment and reconciliation can be found for all religions in Christ and in him

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[596] Narayan Vaman Tilak *Abhanganjali*, (Collection of abhangas' translated by Winslow J.C.), 85, in Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 115.

[597] Bhabani Charan Banerji was the original name of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay who was born on 2 February 1861 of a *Brahmin* family in Khanyan near Calcutta. He was baptised in 1891 in the Roman Catholic Church and chose the name Theophilus, which he translated as *Brahmabandhab* meaning the 'friend of Brahman.' Later, in 1894, he put on the robe of a *sannyasi*, started the journal *Sophia* in which he published his views on Christianity in India. He moved to Calcutta and worked with poet Rabindranath Tagore in developing the famous *ashram,* Santiniketan. After having made a visit to England in 1902-03, he showed more affinity to the Hindu religion: he defended the Hindu avatars, and took part in a ceremony of *prayascitta*, a ritual atonement, in repentance for the 'defilement' which he incurred by travelling overseas and eating food with foreigners. But he remained Christian in faith. On 10 September 1907, Brahmabandhab died, at the age of forty-six. He is known as the Father of Indian Theology. See, Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 77-79.

[598] Brahmabandhab Upadhayay "The Cloths of Catholic Faith" in *Sophia monthly*, August 1898, in Julius Lipner & George Gispert-Sauch,eds., *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, vol. II (Bangalore :United Theological College, 2002), 207.

[599] "Ka" in Sanskrit means the "who." Each mantra of this hymn ends with the query: who is that deva (god) 'whom we should worship with oblation? Thus this hymn acquired such a title. See, Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 99.

[600] *Hiranya* commonly means gold; *garbha* means womb or source and translated also as egg. Therefore *Hiranya-garbha* signifies he who is begotten of gold. *Hiranya* signifies here wisdom for many commentators and so the term means 'begotten of wisdom.' Besides the fact that the *Ka* hymn of *Rig-Veda*ends with identifying *Ka* and *Hiranya-garbha* with Prajapati, numerous other narrations bear witness to this identification, together with *Purusha.* See *Rig-Veda* X. 121.

[601] The hymn: "*Hiranya-garbhah samavartatagre, bhutasya jatah patir eka asit; sa dadhara prithivim dyam utemam kasmai, devaya havisha vidhema*." *Hiranya-garbha* was begotten before all. The begotten became the sole lord of creatures. He holds heaven and earth. Who is that god whom we should worship with oblation; cited in J. George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,* 118.

[602] Yaska (assigned to about 6th century B.C.) is the author of the *Nirukta*, a classical etymological treatise on the *Rig Veda*.

alone. He distinguishes Christianity from Hinduism, and at the same time, tries to find a passage from Hinduism to Christianity as follows:

> The religion of Christ is supernatural… The truths in Hinduism are of pure reason illuminated in the order of nature by the light of the Holy Spirit. It is on account of the close connection between the natural and the supernatural that we have taken upon ourselves the task of expounding the Hindu scriptures systematically and of fishing out the Theistic truths from the deluge of Pantheism, Idolatry and Anthropomorphism,… upon which the Hindus taking their stand may have a view of the glorious supernatural edifice of the Catholic religion of Christ.[603]

Upadhya felt that Hinduism could serve as a natural step towards Christianity, and that the true Hindu could see the fulfilment of *Vedantic* teachings in Christ. The figure of *Hiranya-garbha*-Prajapati leads to the person of Christ and his sacrifice.

The Anglican Priest Nehemiah Goreh[604] felt strongly that God was preparing Indian Hindus to receive Christian faith, and that no other nation, apart from that of the Jews, was so well prepared. Their belief in the teachings of deep devotion, detachment from the material world, humility, and forbearance, were the Hindu qualities which enabled them to walk towards Christianity: he stated:

> But a genuine Hindu is rather prepared to receive the teaching of Christianity … Providence has certainly prepared us, the Hindus, to receive Christianity, in a way in which, it seems to me, no other nation - excepting the Jews, of course - has been prepared… yet they have taught us something of *ananyabhakti* (undivided devotedness to God), of *vairagya* (giving up the world), of *namrata* (humility), of *kshama* (forbearance), etc., which enables us to appreciate the precepts of Christianity.[605]

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[603] Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya "Our attitude towards Hinduism", in *Sophia monthly*, January 1895, in Julius Lipner& George Gispert-eds. *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, vol. I, 6.

[604] He owes his origin to a *Brahmin* family in Maharashtra in 1825 and grew up in Benares where he had a strict training in *Saivite* Tradition, but later turned to that of *Vaishnava*. His father Sivaram Goreh had become a widower and had renounced the world and spent his whole time in study, meditation and worship, and it was under him that Nilakanda had his early studies in Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures. After a long period of reflection, opposition from father and all relatives, and even abduction of his wife, he received the baptism on 14 March 1849 and took the Christian name Nehemiah, and so was excommunicated from his caste. He visited England in 1853 and had the opportunity to meet Queen Victoria, and to have an encounter with Max Müller. There he attended some theological lectures at the CMS Institution, and returned to India in 1855. His witness led many famous Hindus, Parsi and Muslims to Christianity. Later, he moved further and further in the Anglican direction. In 1869 he was ordained deacon, and in 1870 received the priestly ordination in the Anglican Church. With his profound knowledge in Hinduism and Sanskrit as well as in Christian theology, he published a classical refutation of the six philosophical systems of Hinduism on their concept of Brahman, Isvara, World, Maya, Bondage, and Liberation by pointing out logical inconsistency and various insufficiencies to satisfy the intellectual thirst, of which a discussion is found beyond our scope here. He also learned the writings of Fathers of the Church. He died in 1895. See, "Nilakanda Sastri Goreh, *Rational Refutation*," in *Robin* Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 54.

[605] Nilakanda Sastri Goreh, *Proofs of the Divinity of Our Lord*, 75.

In addition, he felt that the acceptance of the possibility of miracles, and above all the concept of avatars in Hinduism pointed beyond themselves to their fulfilment, to Christ.[606] For him, Christians' faith-union with Christ, experienced in the Eucharist was the fulfilment of the ancient Hindu desire for union with Brahman as *Saccidananda*, and God had placed that divine light in the hearts of his Hindu people and this, in turn, could guide them to the truth:

> May God, in His infinite mercy, grant, my dear countrymen, that you quench not the divine light which He has lighted in your breasts; that, on the contrary, you may follow its leading; that you meekly and patiently try, by it, the Christian scriptures; that you take hold on their priceless promises; and that, in the end, you may inherit, as your everlasting portion, the joy of the Heavenly Kingdom.[607]

SECTION B: The Interface between Hinduism and Christianity with Respect to Avatar: Literature Review

2. About Avatar/Avatara[608]

The concept of avatar is very much related to the *Trimurti* concept of God, and it is developed in the *Vaishnava* tradition, and the avatars are attributed to Vishnu.[609] Historically speaking, it is largely believed that the origin of the avatar-doctrine might have been influenced by the fact of absorption of the local heroes and deities by Vishnu and their gradual transformation into his own earthly manifestation. As G. Parrinder observes: "In later usage any unusual appearance or distinguished person could be called an avatar, and often is today in the language of respect, though this diminishes the original theological purpose of the term."[610] Whatever may be the exact details of the origin and evolution, the doctrine of avatar constitutes the essentials of today's Hindu beliefs and practices.

The number of the avatars available in different Hindu scriptures are varied and innumerable, as says *Bhagavata-Purana*: "Just as thousands of canals flow forth from an inexhaustible lake, similarly innumerable are the incarnations of *Hari*, the ocean of

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[606] See Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 55.
[607]Nilakanda Sastri Goreh, "Rational Refutation" in *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 56.
[608] The term *avatara* is derived from the root *tri*, which means "to carry across", "to cross over", in combination with the prefix *ava*, meaning "down". The finite verb form *avatarati* means "to come down", or "to descend". The noun form *avatarah* then means "coming down", or "descent". The final *h* is specific to the Sanskrit word, and thus in other Indian languages it is avoided and written as *avatara*. In the religious-philosophical context of Hinduism, *avatara* acquired a special meaning, namely, the descent of a deity into this world in a visible physical form. In a larger sense it refers to the manifestation of the divine power. Yet, in general it is applied mainly to the descent or appearances of Vishnu. See, Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (London: Faber and Faber,1970)19.
[609] Ishanand Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ* (Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1988),157.
[610] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (London: Faber and Faber,1970),20.

goodness."[611] Likewise in *Bhagavad-Gita* Krishna himself affirms that he has innumerable avatars: "I will state to you my own divine emanations; but only the chief ones, for there is no end to the extent of my emanations."[612] Numerous are the scriptures that list the avatars, and of them *Mahabharata,*[613] and the *Puranas* like *Bhagavata-Purana,*[614] *Matsya-Purana*, *Vayu-Purana,* and *Garuda-Purana* are the most important ones.[615] Among the various lists available, later religious tradition is inclined to fix the number of the most important avatars as ten, and thus known as *desavatars* (ten avatars), which are also called classical avatars of Hinduism.

Among the Indian perceptions of Christ, avatar occupies a prominent position. But the concept of avatar is not uniformly applied to Christ. For some Hindu theologians he is considered one among many avatars while for Christians he is a unique avatar.[616] The latter express the uniqueness of the avatarhood of Christ through various epithets attached to the title "avatar", such as perfect, unique, *purna* (full), only, and so on. We have chosen to divide this literature review of the treatment of the Avatar concept according to how it is variously applied by writers.

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[611] *Bhagavata-Purana* I. 3. 26-27.
[612] *Bhagavad-Gita* X. 19-41.
[613] The appearance of *Varaha, Narasimha*, and *Vamana* as divine avatars is found in *Mahabharata* III. 272. 49ff. Likewise, the passage of the late *Narayaniya* section of the *Mahabharata* mentions four avatars, namely Boar, Dwarf, Man-lion, and Krishna (cf., *Mahabharata* XII. 349. 37) Another passage of the same section adds the deified heroes *Rama-Bhargava* and *Rama-Dasarathi* to the list making a total of six avatars. See, *Mahabharata* XII. 339. 77-99.The same book also gives a list of ten avatars by adding to the above six, *Hamsa*, *Kurma*, *Matsya* and *Kalki*. See, *Mahabharata* XII. 104.
[614] This is the most descriptive in this field, and it gives many names and various lists of avatars. For example, *Bhagavata-Purana* I.3.1ff. gives a list of twenty-two avatars (namely 1) *Purusha*, primeval man, 2) *Varaha* (the Boar), 3) *Narada*: the lord became the divine sage, 4) *Nara* and *Narayana*: The lord was born of the wife of *dharma* as the twin sages and performed sever penance, 5) *Kapila*, the expounder of *Samkhya* philosophy, 6) *Dattatreya*: lord Vishnu being requested by *Anasuya*, the wife of sage *Atri* became their child, 7)*Yajna* (the sacrifice), 8) *Rishabha* showed the strong-minded ones the path of *sannyasa*, 9) *Prithu*, a righteous king, 10) *Matsya* (the Fish), 11) *Kurma* (the Tortoise), 12) *Dhanvantari,* who appeared with the jar of nectar during the churning of the ocean of milk, 13) *Mohini*, the beautiful: She, after deluding the demons, enabled the gods to drink nectar, 14) *Nara-Simha* (the man-lion), 15) *Vamana* (the Dwarf), 16) *Parasurama* (Rama with the axe), 17) *Veda-Vyasa*, the compiler of the *Vedas*, 18) *Sri Rama*, 19) *Bala-Rama*, 20) *Krishna*, 21) *Buddha*, and 22) *Kalkin*, as cited in Geoffrey PARRINDER, *Avatar and Incarnation*, Faber and Faber, London, p. 75), whereas in II. 7. 1ff. enumerates twenty-four (by adding *Suyajna*, the one who was born of *Rucci* and *Akuti*, and *Hari* (the remover), the one who rescued the afflicted elephant-king (*Gajendra*) from the jaws of a crocodile, to the above-mentioned ones). But in X. 40. 17-23 we can find only ten avatars, whereas twelve in XI. 4.17ff.
[615] The various *Puranas* like *Matsya-Purana* XXXXVII. 237-248, *Vayu-Purana* 98. 71-104, *Garuda-Purana* I. 202, and *Varaha-Purana* XXXIX. 48, give descriptions on avatars. See, Ishanand, *Kirhsna and Christ*, 244-245.
[616] James George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology,*158.

2.1 Christ as the Perfect Avatar

The writer Pradap C. Mazoomdar[617] was especially conscious of the western garb in which missionaries had presented Christ, and so he used the terms "Western Christ" and "Eastern Christ" to indicate the difference. He believed that the Christ presented by Christian missionaries, through the medium of European philosophy and theology, could not penetrate the Indian way of thinking. He sees the "Western Christ" as highly educated and intelligent: perfectly at ease with the principles of theology while his doctrine is historical, exclusive and arbitrary. He views this as being contrary to the natural instincts and normal common sense of mankind. Alternatively, he sees the "Eastern Christ" as being straight forward and natural with no pretensions whatsoever and depending totally on the profound, untaught impulses of his divine soul, and when he speaks, nations bow their heads.[618] Mazoomdar is prominent among those who considered Christ to be 'unique' and not just one avatar among many. He sees Christ as enabling the completion of all other partial and local avatars, allowing for a truly spiritual and universal incarnation of the Spirit, and providing for a permanent model of the divine order of humanity. He distinguished Christ from other incarnations who:

> stand for certain isolated principles of God's nature … the prophets of one country … the incarnations of one age … are partial, local, imperfect, bound by time, nationality and circumstance. Socrates is for the Greeks…. The need of man is for a central figure, a universal model…. The need of man is for an incarnation in whom all other incarnations will be completed. Such an incarnation was Christ.[619]

Mazoomdar's belief in the uniqueness of Christ extended to his understanding of Him as the Divine Man, at the core of the true and universal relationship between God and man, and consequently a type of humanity. He held that Christ is the "most perfect manifestation ever possible of eternal reason" and the "goal of human history."[620] Mazoomdar held the view that all religious prophets and incarnations have their place in Christ, who is the central

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[617] Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar was born in 1840 at Basberia near Calcutta, in *Vaidya* caste (caste of *Ayurvedic* doctors). After completing his secondary education he joined the Presidency College and since he was not strong in mathematics, he left the college after two years. He had contact with the leaders of Brahmo Samaj, namely Debendranath Tagore, the father of famous mystic poet Rabindranath Tagore, and Keshab Chandra Sen, his distant relative. Soon after that he published his famous works: *Oriental Christ* in 1883 and *Spirit of God* in 1894. After the death of Keshub Chandra Sen, Mozoomdar wrote a beautiful biography about him. Mozoomdar died in 1905, 27th May. See, Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 89-90.

[618] Thomas M.M. and Thomas P.T., *Towards an Indian Christian Theology,* 57.

[619] Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar *The Spirit of God*, Boston, 1894, 239f., as cited in Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 89.

[620] P.C. Mozoomdar, *The Spirit of God*, Boston, 1894, 246f., in Thomas M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 91.

figure, bound by all the others.[621] He rejects the notion that all religions are equal, but he also refutes the claim of any religion to have a monopoly of inspiration of the Spirit. At the same time, he considers that Jesus Christ completes and reconciles all the revelations of the Spirit in the religious history of mankind. He envisages the possible emergence of a universal religion of the Spirit in the future:

> A universal religion is always forming in the atmosphere.… It has contributed slowly to the formation of a unity between man and man - at least creating aspiration for a common religion.… Coming from common instincts, common truths, common processes, religion proves its source also is common; namely the Spirit of God.[622]

It can be said then that Mazoomdar viewed Christ as the "Full and Perfect Avatar" but in applying that title he is clearly implying the necessity of inculturation; there is need for an "Oriental Christ".

2.2 Christ as Full Avatar

Sunder Singh[623] begins from his mystical experience of Christ, rather than from any theistic considerations; his focus is exclusively on Christ.[624] He used many parables and life incidents to describe his spiritual reflections. Based on his mystic experience, he teaches that Christ is fully God-incarnated, in whom alone God is fully revealed, and to know him is to know that he is divine.[625] Singh frequently used the term 'avatar' as substitute for incarnation. He described the relationship of the created world to God in terms of the visions he had; Christ is the Image of God, and man is created in the image of God in different degrees; there is an inner connection between every human being and Christ, as everybody is made in the same image:

> The faces of all the spirits whom I see in heaven look like Christ, but in a lesser degree; just as the image of the sun is reflected alike in a number of water-pots.

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[621] Ibid., 90.
[622] Ibid., 95.
[623] Sunder Singh was born in the state of Patiala (in Punjab) on 3 September 1889 from a Sikh family of mixed religious tradition. His father was an orthodox Sikh while his mother was a strong devotee in the *bhakti* tradition of Hinduism. As a child he was brought up in deep devotion, and even in his very younger days he memorized *Bhagavad-Gita*. His first contact with Christianity was at a mission school where he studied. He burnt a copy of the Bible; for that his father rebuked him. In spite of all religious practices: study of *Gita*, *Upanishads*, even the Koran, together with *yoga* practice, he found no inner peace. He had frequent mystical experiences of Christ. The only book he always carried was a copy of the New Testament. He published eight short books, the first of which is *At the Master's Feet* in 1922. In 1929 he made a journey to Tibet in failing health at the age of thirty-nine, and never returned; it is believed that he had a martyr's death there in Tibet. See Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 96-97.
[624] Ibid., 99.
[625] Burnett H. Streeternd and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu. A Study in Mysticism and Practical Religion* (London: Scholars Choice,1921), 54.

> Christ is the Image of God - that Image in which God created man - this is the true image, but it is only imperfectly stamped on me.[626]

Sunder Singh always placed great emphasis on the importance of faith-union with the person of Christ: He says that India needs a theology of *anubhava* (experience) rather than speculation, and not only for those who teach and preach but also for workers whose lives and tempers are an actual revelation of Jesus Christ.[627] He sees Hinduism as being valid and true only in as much as its experience and beliefs are attributable to Christ. In common with other Indian theologians he believed that Hinduism has its accomplishment in Christianity: "Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism. Hinduism has been digging channels. Christ is the water to flow through these channels."[628] Comparison can be made here with Judaism as precursor in God's plan of salvation in the coming of Christ.

2.3 Christ as One of the Avatars

It is common for Hindu scholars attracted to Christ to present him as one of the Avatars. Hindu mystic Ramakrishna Paramahamsa[629] had a direct experience of Christ while viewing a painting of the *Madonna and Child:* We read that:

> He became gradually overwhelmed with divine emotion and breaking through the barriers of creed and religion, he entered a new realm of ecstasy. Christ possessed his soul. For three days, he did not set foot in the Kali temple.... It is he, the Master Yogi, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love Incarnate.[630]

For Ramakrishna, while Christ is an avatar of love, he is not the unique one. Likewise, Christianity, too, is one among other paths which lead to God-consciousness. According to him, all religions are nothing but different paths to the same goal, and are thus of equal importance.[631]

2.4 Christ as Isvar-Avatar

As a Hindu, Swami Vivekananda[632] professed a deep admiration and veneration for Christ and was inspired by the book *The Imitation of Christ*.[633] His insistence on service and love,

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[626] Ibid., 124.
[627] See Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 105.
[628] B.H. Streeternd and A.J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, 232.
[629] Sri.Ramakrishna with his phenomenal life of intense spirituality, broad and synthetic vision of Hinduism, simple and illuminating exposition of all the ideals of Hindu Theory, appeared on the Indian scene. See, Swami Nikhilannada, trans., *The Gospels of Sri. Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1969).
[630] *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, New York, 1942, introduction 34, as cited in Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*,112.
[631] Belur Math, *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 518, as cited in Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 59.
[632] His original name is Narendranath Datta, and was born on 12th January 1863 in an educated middle-class family in North Calcutta. He was a member of Brahmo-Samaj during his college days, and a keen reader of

his respect for the poor and downtrodden his ideal of monasticism uniting action with contemplation, and his idea of an all-inclusive "Hindu mission" are evidence of the influence of Christ and Christianity on him.[634] For him, *Vedanta* alone can become the universal religion of man, as it alone is based on the solid rock of an eternal impersonal principle, in contrast to the shifting sands of the historicity of personality, on which other religions are founded.[635] Besides, by holding the theory of *Ishtam*,[636] a Hindu can venerate any personal god, and hold any personal religious practice which is found to be most suitable for him and corresponding to his personal needs and temperaments. Thus, a Hindu, while practising his religion by *Ishtam*, builds up an understanding of other religions or religious practices without rejecting them.[637]

Vivekananda employed the light of *Vedanta* religious philosophy in an effort to understand Christ and Christianity. He thus attempted to take Jesus Christ out of the religious framework and historicity of the person of Jesus, and to convert him into a manifestation of the eternal principle of the *Vedanta*; Christ for Vivekananda is primarily an avatar, "Isvar-Avatar", the unique manifestation of God.[638] This avatar taught us pure knowledge to rid the world of *maya*. Vivekananda saw the manifestation of God in Jesus as *Isvar* as perfect so he could say, "If I, as an Oriental, have to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way left for me, that is to worship him as God and nothing else."[639]

Mill, Spencer, and Hume, and went through a religious scepticism until he met Ramakrishna in 1881 for the first time. Later he attached himself to Ramakrishna who initiated him to *sannyasa* and thus he became a disciple of Ramakrishna; of course the most intimate disciple. In 1893 he represented India and preached in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago and then visited America and almost all the European countries. He organized the Vedanta Society of New York and came back to India and, by his triumphant fame in India he organized Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. Unfortunately he fell sick at the age of 40 and died on 4th July 1902. By his zeal he is known as 'St Paul of Hinduism' and by his spirit of reform, 'the Luther of Hinduism.' See, Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, A Bibliography* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram,1964,),1ff.

[633] Swami Vivekananda translated into Bengali selections from Book1, Chapters 1-6 of Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ.*

[634] It was the outcome of an absolutely new spiritual outlook suited to the requirements of the age. The Ramakrisna mission which was formally registered in 1969 renders social, philanthropic, educational, charitable and missionary help to all. See P. Fallon, "Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan" in R. de Smet and J. Neuner *Religious Hinduism*, 365.

[635] See Thomas M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* p.

[636] The theory of *Ishtam* says that there is a variety of spiritual *sadhanas* (methods for acquiring God-experience) and religious paths, each one being valid in its own level and for its devotee, and none should be disturbed in pursuing what suits his own spiritual temperament. See Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 118-119. Likewise, Hinduism proposes also *Ishtadevata*, deity as one can choose for his personal devotion.

[637] S Vivekandand, *The Complete Works of the Swami Vivekananda,* vol. IV, (5th ed.), Almora, 1931, 331.

[638] Ibid.,1.

[639] Vivekanand, *The Complete Works of the Swami Vivekananda*, 143.

3 Christ as Avatar Encompassing Divinity and Humanity

Among those involved in formulating what has frequently been referred to as "avatar-Christology", Vengal Chakkarai, [640] in his book *Jesus the Avatar (1932),* presented Jesus as the avatar in whom divinity and humanity are perfectly harmonised. A.P. Appasamy and Noel Sheth have subsequently contributed significantly to this approach. We present below a review of each of these writers and also attempt a critical evaluation of the avatar-Christology of each of them.

3.1 Vengal Chakkarai: Jesus, Avatar par Excellence

According to Chakkarai, Jesus "is the known term in the interpretation of God" and the author proceeds to consider what light this throws on the profound mystery of God Himself.[641] The duality of Jesus, as Son of Man and Son of God, allows us to focus on the two mysteries simultaneously – that of God and of man – and consequently may be presented as the "avatar par excellence" in accordance with Indian thought. In considering how Jesus could be considered as an avatar par excellence he refers to many sources in an attempt to reach a credible conclusion.

The gospel narratives of His birth and His life on earth, especially His sufferings and death on the Cross provide us with all the evidence required to guarantee His humanity. As he states: **"**His joys and sorrows, His sufferings in body and soul, His growth in physical stature and wisdom, and last of all, His death, all no doubt point to His humanity."[642] Chakkarai believes that "God descends on earth in human form" and uses this fact to establish a convergence between Hindu avatars and Christ's Incarnation which, in his opinion, enables us to see Jesus as avatar for the Indian mind.

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[640] Chakkarai was born on the 17th January 1880 in Madras. He had his early education in a Scottish Mission School and later joined the Madras Christian College and graduated in philosophy in 1901. It was there he had come into contact with Christianity. Soon he felt in himself the deep influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His interest in the Good News of Christ gradually deepened into a personal commitment to the person of Christ and he received baptism in 1903. In 1906 he completed his degree in Law and for a few years he practiced as a lawyer. Then he engaged more actively in the various Christian movements in Madras. He founded, along with P. Chenchiah, the group known as the *Christo Samaj*, with the aim of indigenization of the Indian Church and the correlating of Christianity to Indian national life. Around 1920 he became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and was involved in politics. He was one of the leading members of the Rethinking Group which aimed at redefining the Christian faith in Indian terms and relating it to the cultural heritage of the country. He was a convert from Hinduism and naturally he was conscious of the need to establish the relation between the Christian Gospel and his Hindu heritage. He died in 1958. His works, *Jesus the Avatar*, and *The Cross and Indian Thought* are well known. He is one of the chief contributors to the famous work *Rethinking Christianity in India*. Besides, he published the journal *The Christian Patriot* and contributed largely to its growth. Thomas M.M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*,112.

[641] Vengal Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, Christian literature society, (Madras: CLS Press, 1932), 212.

[642] Chakkarai, Jesus *the Avatar*, Christian literature society, 31.

There is no doubt that Chakkarai remains very well aware of the great divergence between Hindu avatars and Jesus. The former is considered human but only in appearance – and sometime appear in forms other than human. Jesus is in every respect, fully human.:

> What is involved in the idea of Christ's humanity is not merely that He conforms to our idea of what a man is but that He raises it to the highest level. In other words, He is the true man, the ideal man, or the man in all men; and our manhood is justifiable only to the extent to which it approaches the manhood of the Master.[643]

The fact that Jesus lived and died as a human being, emphasises the fact that He is an historical person and not a mythical one, and there is no room for doubt about His humanity. Jesus diverges radically from the Hindu avatars. In considering the filial consciousness of Jesus he Chakkarai establishes the awareness Jesus had of His calling, of who He was and what was expected of Him, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."[644] Jesus was clearly conscious of his divinity; He asserted that He alone knows the Father that the Father alone knows the Son and that the Son alone can be the organ of revelation of the Father and Himself.[645] For Chakkarai Christ's Sonship of God is fundamental to his mission as Messiah. He came to recognize Himself as the Messiah because He was the Son appointed to find the reign of God.[646] Jesus continued to be with the disciples after His Resurrection: "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world".[647] The presence of Jesus is made real through his Spirit.

> The simple truth, clear on every page of New Testament, was that the Lord had not left them, but by some mysterious process had come to live in their hearts. Pentecost was the third stage in the history of the Incarnation, the manager at Bethlehem being the first and the resurrection being the second.[648]

The latter came but then departed and indeed ceased thereafter to exist. Christianity has the continued presence of the Avatar Jesus.

The Christian theory and experience in regard to the incarnation differ in essential respects from the Hindu. The Hindu philosophy of the avatar is contained in the great saying of the *Gita* where Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, 'I come again and again, *yuga* after *yuga*, for the protection of *dharma* and the destruction of *adharma*'. The avatars are phenomena of

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[643] Ibid., 30.
[644] Matt.11:26-27)
[645] Ibid., 40.
[646] Ibid., 49.
[647] Mt 28 :20.
[648] Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar* ,113.

recurring nature and the periodicity and multiplicity of these divine self-manifestations, if we may so call them, are their striking characteristics… Rama and Krishna were temporary and passed away, the Christian view that we are describing is that it is abiding and permanent… God dwells with men, and His tabernacle is among the children of men, not merely by their side, but in them. Rama and Krishna passed away from the world after having done their respective duties, the one through plunging into a river, and the other killed by a hunter. There is no promise and certainly no consciousness, that their spirits would come back and abide with human spirits. In the case of Jesus this is evidently different… It is further believed that He had come and ever afterwards, even until now, the same experience of Jesus coming back is being repeated.[649]

For Chakkarai Christ's resurrection and His permanent presence in the lives of His followers constitute His avatar-hood is unique:

> The Spirit of Jesus has become the *antaryamin*, the indwelling experience of His devotees. This experience is seen not only as the inner Spirit of every individual *bhakta* but as the Spirit animating the entire Christian body. Christ is the head of the Church which is His body.[650]

Two concepts are fundamental in Indian religious philosophy; *bhakti* (love or devotion) and *sakti* (power or energy). The divinity displays total power and at the same time love, compassion and mercy. These two concepts produced two religious philosophical schools, with the *tantra* school putting emphasis on *sakti* (power) of God while the avatar doctrine put its emphasis on *bhakti* (love)[651] of God reflected through various avatars. For Chakkarai both principles meet in Jesus; he is the Incarnation of God's love and power, or rather of the power of love.[652] He sees the resurrection as joining together power and love in Jesus: "The first Easter joined together energy and love, laying the foundations for the Christian view of the avatar of God in Jesus Christ."[653] The victory of the love of God is established through the resurrection and results in the manifestation of divine power. Thus, it is this meeting together of love and power in Jesus that allows his *avatar-hood* to be so unique.

Chakkarai believes that it is only in and through Jesus that humanity can access the most supreme knowledge of God, and would be unable to develop the concept of God

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[649] Ibid.,132-133.
[650] Ibid.,154-155.
[651] Bhakti yoga, also called Bhakti marga (literally the path of Bhakti), is a spiritual path or spiritual practice within Hinduism focused on loving devotion towards a personal god Bhakti yoga as one of three spiritual paths for salvation is discussed in depth by the Bhagavad Gita.
[652] See Ibid., 147-148.
[653] Ibid., 149.

without Jesus. "The most outstanding feature of Christian experience, to put it in non-technical language, is that we can no more think of God without Jesus Christ than we can think of Jesus Christ without God."[654] There was some knowledge of God prior to the arrival of Jesus in the world's history. However, our knowledge has now been profoundly enhanced by the vital entry of Jesus into our history. In Hinduism the avatar is understood as the embodiment on the human plane of the eternal elements in the divine nature.[655] For Chakkarai Jesus not only sums up the already existing knowledge of God but also takes it to the highest level:

> The consciousness of Jesus is the supreme Incarnation; it sums up not only the pre-existing elements of the being of God in humanity (that is, before the historic advent of Jesus) but takes it on to higher levels. The process of summation and advance is peculiar to Jesus and entitles Him to a pre-eminent place in the becoming of God. We can no more think of God without Jesus than we can conceive the world without the sun… This supreme knowledge of God, *paravidya*, is not knowledge that can become our possession except through Him.[656]

Jesus is therefore the full and final revelation of God; He is the "avatar par excellence". We humans have the possibility of seeing God in the face of Jesus:

> No man hath seen the ineffable God nor can see. We see God with the face of Jesus. To the ordinary and unsophisticated consciousness there is a black veil God would seem to have caste over His face. But now that Jesus has removed the veil, we behold the face of God Himself. That is what the greatest Christian experience says: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father'".[657]

Chakkarai further states that "It is Jesus who 'gives' colour, light and form (*rupa*) to God; Whom we call God stands behind Jesus, and it is Jesus who gives, as it were, color, light and *rupa* to God. Out of the infinite nebulousness emerges the face of Jesus. God is the unmanifested and Jesus is the manifested."[658] Finally, Chakkarai posits that it is as Son that Jesus reveals God to us as Father, and in doing so becomes the unique avatar of God.

> Is it possible for us to say that in Jesus God became the Father? God was working in nature and in the lives of men for the reproduction of His very heart and mind. But in Jesus the image came out perfect and shining, without flaw or mixture… In the picture of Jesus, the express image of the Invisible has come out… It is not a picture that has no life of its own. It is a picture in which the Lord of the universe has found His own soul. The Painter and picture are one.[659]

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[654] Ibid., 163.
[655] Ibid., 164.
[656] Ibid., 166
[657] Ibid., 172.
[658] Ibid., 173.
[659] Ibid., 207-208.

3.2 Critical Evaluation of the Avatar-Christology of V. Chakkarai

Hindu avatars are often more mythical than real human beings. More than that their role in most instances would seem to be to rescue and protect those of higher caste from the lower castes, the latter being invariably depicted as inferior or wicked, and even warranting extermination by the avatars. By contrast there is the historical fully human Jesus, coming in love and forgiveness for everyone, and not least the poor and marginalised. Chakkarai seems reluctant to sufficiently acknowledge such critical differences. In consequence his ascribing of prefixes such as "excellent" to the title when describing Jesus may result in His uniqueness being circumscribed. There are multiple valid reasons in the Indian context for ascribing the title Avatar to Jesus, but caution and clarity are always necessary.

4 Christ as the Only True Avatar: A. P. Appasamy

As a Christian who engaged in study of *the Bhakti* tradition, A.P. Appasamy [660] held the view of Christ as avatar, but he re-interpreted the term, and in applying it to Jesus, added some corrections so that he might retain the uniqueness of Christ. In Hinduism there are many avatars but in Christianity there is only a single incarnation, Jesus, for Appasamy. He contrasted Hindu avatars with Jesus in terms of historicity as he states:

> We believe that Jesus was the Avatara. God lived on the earth as a man only once and that was as Jesus. We do not regard that there were several Incarnations in the world and that Jesus was one among them. We firmly hold that Jesus was the one and only Avatara… It is our firm Christian belief that among all the great religious figures in the world there is no one except Jesus who could be regarded as an Incarnation of God.[661]

Also, whereas in Hinduism the annihilation of the wicked is a function of avatars, Christ came to save all of humanity. Appasamy describes Christianity as *Bhakti-Marga*[662] which provides faith union with Christ and even sees the cross as the supreme illustration of the love of God, which draws men to Him. While Appasamy's thought is Christo-centric in

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[660] Aiyadurai Jesudasen Appasamy was born and brought up in a Christian family. His father Dewan Bahadur A. S. Appasamy Pillai was a convert from *Saivism* to Christianity. After the studies in Tirunelveli and Madras, he went to America in 1915, and later to England where he took his doctorate in theology from Oxford, entitled as *The Mysticism of the Fourth Gospel in its Relation to Hindu Bhakti Literature*. Coming from England, Appasamy continued his studies on the bhakti line, and published his most original work: *Christianity as Bhakti-Marga* in 1928. Soon he became famous, and a leading figure in the Indian Church, and rendered his service as a distinguished teacher, writer, pastor and bishop. He took the *Bhakti* tradition, together with philosophy of Ramanuja to present Christian fundamentals in the Indian context. His contribution, especially in the line of *Bhakti* tradition, to Indian Christian theology is remarkable.

[661] A.J. Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London and Madras, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942, 259.

[662] As already mentioned in Chapter Three the Bhakti tradition especially the Vaishanava tradition there are various degrees in attaining God in propotion to the intensity of one's devotion.

nature, at the same time he stresses the importance of Church as the body of Christ and an instrument through which Christ reveals His will, and renders it effective in the world.[663] The Hindu scriptures, according to him, provide a God-given *praeparatio evangelii* for the people of India, and we find the culmination of these scriptures in Jesus Christ.[664] In this way Appasamy recognizes the values of other religious traditions, specifically that of Hinduism, in the Indian context. He tried to present Christ as "Logos-*Antaryamin*"[665] and the "Only True Avatar" ever possible. He opened a new way to introduce Christianity in Indian theology as *Bhakti-Marga*, based on the *Upanishads* and philosophy of Ramanuja.

The starting point for Appasamy in elaborating his avatar-Christology is the identity of the person of Jesus revealed in the gospels through various titles such as Son of Man, Son of God, and Messiah The title Son of Man, according to the author, indicates that Jesus is truly a man and at the same time representative of humanity: "When Jesus used the title Son of Man, he regarded himself as *the Man*, representing mankind in some special way."[666] The title Son of Man carries according to the author,[667] the authority of Jesus as the final judge of men,[668] the one who comes in the clouds with great power and glory,[669] and the one who holds the power to forgive sins.[670]

Jesus claims a special knowledge of God the Father and that he can satisfy the human longing for God.[671] He calls for men's absolute devotion and complete surrender to Him.[672] Likewise, according to the author, the title "Son of God" carries much significance. He is the beloved Son of God as announced at the time of his baptism,[673] and as proclaimed by Peter at Caesarea Philippi.[674] Further, we see in the fourth gospel the claims of Jesus as eternal being by saying "before Abraham was I am",[675] and his unique filial relation with God the Father: "I and the Father are one".[676]

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[663] For details about Christianity and *Bhakti-Marga*, See A. J. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bhakti Marga, A Study of the Johannine Doctrine of Love* (Madras: CLS publications,1930),32.
[664] Appasamy*, Christianity as Bhakti Marga,* 165.
[665] *Antaryamin* means indwelling. In Hindu vision, God as Isvara, being spirit indwells in the heart of devotees.
[666] Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, 248.
[667] Ibid., 248.
[668] Mt25:31-33.
[669] Mk13:26-27.
[670] Mk2:1-12.
[671] Mt21:27.
[672] Mt11:28-29; 10:37; 8:22.
[673] Mt 3:17.
[674] Mt 16:16.
[675] Jn 8:58.
[676] Jn 10:30.

The identity revealed through the various titles of Jesus becomes central to the belief of His followers. The author starts from the life of Saul who became Paul, and points to countless other people, simple and learned, poor and rich, young and old, men and women from all the nations of the world, through the ages, all of whom have accepted Christ as the Incarnation of God.[677]

> They have accepted His revelation of the Father as final and full. They have taken His ideals as the standard of their conduct. They have claimed God's forgiveness in the name of Christ and they have experienced a sense of compete release from the burden of their guilt. They have come close to God because of Jesus… And in every case they have found the claims of Jesus true. They have found that He is what He declared Himself to be, the Son of Man, with a unique relation to the Father and with a unique knowledge of the Father, and that He has come to the world to save men from their sins and to take them back to the feet of God.[678]

After presenting the identity of Jesus, the author argues that this identity matches the fundamental characteristics of Hindu avatars and invites us to look on these elements as those by which Jesus could be given the title of avatar. The fundamental features of Hindu avatars include the following: (1) An avatar is God Himself who has come down to the earth; he is not merely a holy man who has raised himself up spiritually;[679] (2) it is to satisfy the human longing for God that He descends to the world: "To satisfy these deep longings of human souls, God takes birth as a man. He lives in the world as one of us so that we can see his face and hear His teaching".[680] (3) God descends as avatar due to his love for men: "God becomes incarnate because of the love He has for men";[681] (4) God takes avatar out of His free-will, such that there is nothing to compel Him to come down to the earth and to live the life of man;[682] (5) the purpose of avatar is to help men. The identity of the person of Jesus converges, according to the author, with the above-mentioned fundamental characteristics of Hindu avatars, and hence Jesus could be understood as an avatar. Besides these convergences there exist various elements in the person and mission of Jesus which point to the uniqueness of Jesus, and which therefore make His avatar-hood unique. These elements are therefore not simply elements of divergence but surpassing characteristics of the Avatar-hood of Jesus.

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[677] See, Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, 248
[678] Ibid.,251.
[679] Ibid., 252.
[680] Ibid., 252-253.
[681] Ibid., 253.
[682] Ibid., 254.

According to Appasamy, Jesus the avatar not only differs from Hindu avatars but surpasses them. With the possible exception of Rama and Krishna, avatars in Hinduism are at best human embodiments of only part (*amsa)* of the divine. But, while we speak of Jesus as avatar of God, according to Appasamy, "we do not mean that He is an Incarnation of only an *amsa* or part of God. We mean that He is an Incarnation of the whole Being of God. As a New Testament writer says: 'the fullness of God had dwelt in him bodily.''[683] Appasamy points out the purpose of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as one of the differentiating elements of the avatar-hood of Jesus from Hindu avatars. Hindu avatars came to the world with a particular purpose – to defeat or even exterminate the wicked.

> The purpose of an incarnation is variously stated in the Hindu books. Many of the occasions, on which God is supposed to have become manifest are trivial and some are even unethical. An Incarnation is believed to have taken place to destroy a demon, to overthrow a persecuting king, to protect the *Brahmin* caste, to deliver a devotee from a small trouble or to give a boon.[684]

The noblest statement of the purpose of an Incarnation, according to the author, is found in *Gita*: "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of the Law I am born from age to age". For the author, the distinction is clear. Jesus came not to condemn and destroy sinners but to save, and this does not match with the establishment of *dharma* by Hindu avatars by annihilating the wicked. We read it in the words of the author as follows:

> It should be noted that even this highest and noblest declaration of the purpose of an incarnation falls short of the object for which Jesus declared that He came to the world. He was born on this earth in order to redeem sinners and not to destroy them. He clearly said that his purpose was not to call the righteous for they needed no help, but to call the sinners to repentance. It was characteristic of Jesus that He should have sought to establish righteousness (*Dharma*) in the world, not by helping those who were already good and by eliminating the wicked but by giving new life to the wicked and directing their energy into better channels… That is why He went out of His way to win sinners".[685]

Jesus, by his point of divergence regarding the avatar-hood of Jesus is its once and for all character. Jesus is the only Incarnation of God, according to Christian doctrine, and it is for all times, whereas there existed a multiplicity of avatars in Hinduism for each age (*yuga*). Besides, the acceptance of the multiplicity of avatars in Hinduism leads to the trend of seeing even the sages and holy men as the avatars, as in the case of many present figures in India.

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[683] Ibid., 256-257.
[684] Ibid., 257.
[685] Ibid., 257-258.

The author is also aware of the danger of the tendency to see Jesus as one among the avatars due to the multiplicity of avatars.

> There is a further important point in which the Hindu doctrine of Incarnation falls short of the Christian idea. As this passage declared, God is believed to come to birth age after age. This belief has really been most popular in India. The Hindus believe that God comes again and again into this world to help men. There is a tendency to regard every holy man as a likely incarnation of God… The doctrine of many Avataras constantly tends to the deification of every holy man in India. This is an important point on which we differ from Hindus. We believe that Jesus was the Avatara. God lived on the earth as a man only once and that was as Jesus. We do not regard that there were several incarnations in the world and that Jesus was one among them. We firmly hold that Jesus was the one and only Avatara.[686]

By underlining these differentiating and surpassing elements of the avatar-hood of Jesus, the author tried to hold the uniqueness of the avatar-hood of Jesus, and holds that Jesus is "the one and the only Avatar". Appasamy very usefully notes that the titles ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels, such as "Son of Man", "Son of God", and "Messiah" are culturally contexed. On that basis it seems entirely valid to make use of Indian titles in presenting Jesus in that context. But Appasamy takes care not to imply that Jesus is totally described by titles such as Avatar. Jesus diverges from and surpasses avatars. In this way the author safeguards, as some extent, the uniqueness of Jesus with respect to the avatar title.

4.1 Critical Evaluation of the Avatar-Christology of Appasamy

Although he proclaims that these Hindu Avatars came to, "help men" due to God's "love for men", he produces no evidence to substantiate this in his quotation from the classical avatar doctrine, Bhagavad-Gita, where neither of the key words "love" or "men" appear. It refers to "dharma", "the good" and "the wicked, none of which capture the necessary essence of the aforementioned "love of men". It is important to note that, while God sent down His son, Jesus Christ, for the salvation of all of mankind, Hindu Avatars descended to the earth only for the protection of "the good" and "punishment of the wicked". It seems apparent that the avatar is much more concerned about the establishing and maintaining "the Law" dharma. Remarkably, Appasamy fails to examine how the avatars establish the Law and what kind of "righteousness" or Law (dharma) they bring. There is massive difference between the Hindu concept of dharma and that of righteousness in Christian theology. It is right that Appasamy should affirm Jesus as the only Avatar of God but we also need to be cognisant of the intense desire in the Indian heart for the presence of God in their midst that is reflected in the concept

[686] Ibid., 258-259.

of the avatars. They should be entitled to at least view Hindu Avatars as "figures" and "types" who point them in the direction of Jesus the avatar.

Appasamy seems inclined to use the mythological nature of avatars to make light of the fact that Hindu Avatars are believed to come to protect the high caste Brahmins or Kshatriyas from the lower castes. Myths are at the heart of Hinduism and are not to be dismissed on the grounds of being 'not real'. Hinduism is not alone among religions in resorting to myth in efforts to finds words to describe the transcendent, and, invariably in all religions, mythological stories have a historical, anthropological and socio-cultural background.

5 Noel Sheth: Hindu Avatars and Christian Incarnation[687]

Noel Sheth,[688] in his article entitled "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison",[689] presents the possibilities for the development of avatar-Christology in an Indian context by comparing the doctrine of Hindu avatar and Christian Incarnation. He highlights a number of areas of convergence including, firstly, the immanence of the transcendent God[690] where both Hindu *avatar* and Christian Incarnation make the transcendent God immanent out of the free will of God. Secondly, he deals with the revelatory role of avatars and incarnation where both reveal the nature of God and his personal love and concern which stress devotion rather than knowledge."[691] Thirdly, he considers the saving role of avatars and incarnation, both of which are intended to lead to the "divinization" of the human being. Sheth, in dealing with how man becomes more divinized in Hinduism by the grace of avatars and how man is raised to the level of children of God through the Incarnation of Christ, states: "In both cases, the descent of God enables human beings to ascend to God. Human beings are raised to a higher divinity; they are divinized in Hinduism and made adopted children of God in Christianity."[692]

Both religions place great emphasis on building a society of love and justice. Both consider detachment from the world to be important but at the same time advocate striving for human well-being and a better world. In the Gita (III. 19-25) Krishna exhorts us not only

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[687] Noel Sheth, a Jesuit priest, professor and Rector of *Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth* University in Pune, is one of the known scholars of Indian theology and Hinduism, and has contributed much in the field of comparative religious theology in Indian context.

[688] Noel Sheth, in his article entitled "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison", presents the possibilities for the development of Christology in an Indian context through exploring the comparisons between Hindu avatar and Christian Incarnation. See Noel Sheth, "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison" I, & II" *Vidhyajothi*, *Journal of theological reflection*, Vol. 67, No 3, 4 Delhi, March, April 2003, pp. 181-193; 285-302.

[689] Sheth "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison,"181-193.

[690] Ibid., 191.

[691] Ibid., 192.

[692] Ibid., 192.

to be detached but to be involved in the world and work for the welfare of people… Similarly, the life of Rama is a model and inspiration for people to bring about *Rama-rajya* (the kingdom of Rama) - the kingdom of peace, justice, and love. The New Testament (Jn 5, 17; Mt 20, 28; Mk 10, 45) presents Jesus as concerned not only about the next world but also about establishing a kingdom of justice, peace, and love in this world.[693]

Sheth also identifies a number of areas of divergence. Firstly, in Hinduism, there are many avatars which descend from age to age while in Christianity there is only one divine Incarnation. There is no doubt that there is a fundamentally different world view and concept of history between them: "While there are many and repeated avatars, Christ comes only once. This is in keeping with the respective cyclical and linear world views of the two traditions."[694] Secondly, while avatars are believed to return to their original form when they have fulfilled their earthly mission, Christ, as proclaimed in Christian theology, was transformed to His glorified state in his resurrection, following his earthly journey. Thirdly, while it is believed that avatars leave this world permanently, Christian theology professes that Christ remains present in human hearts and continues his activity in the world through his Spirit, even after his death and resurrection. Finally, while avatars in Hinduism are made of "pure matter", existing free from hunger and thirst, sufferings and pains, joys and sorrows, Jesus Christ, on the other hand acquired human nature and became like human beings and hence was subjected to all human experiences except sin, even suffering, hunger, pain, and sorrow. One could say that in Vaishnavism the avatars are 'perfect', whereas in Christianity Christ is 'imperfect'. But it is more helpful to say that Christ saves by assuming a finite human nature, which involves suffering, while the avatars do not subject themselves to the pains and limitations of the human. Unlike *avatara*, Christ saves through the Cross. The suffering saviour is unique to Christianity.[695]

Sheth also notes the distinction between the avatars and the Incarnation in terms of purpose. Avatars have a variety of functions and purposes: some come only to serve a particular individual in a particular circumstance while others come for a group of people or castes. Christ, on the other hand, is seen as the unique saviour of mankind.

> Avatara have different purposes, and, unlike the incarnation, not every avatara grants ultimate salvation. Some avataras come only to save a devotee from a particular difficulty; for example, Narasimha (Man-Lion) saves his devotee Prahlada from persecution, and once his task is done, Visnu abandons his Man-Lion form… In the

[693] Ibid., 192.
[694] Noel Sheth, "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation, 285.
[695] Sheth, "Hindu Avatára and Christian Incarnation," 285-298.

> case of Christ, on the other hand, especially since there is only one incarnation, the purpose is primarily, if not exclusively, ultimate salvation[696]

While Sheth highlights these converging and diverging elements of Christ's Incarnation and Hindu avatars, he, at no time, makes any attempt to develop an avatar-Christology, nor does he ever attribute the title avatar to Christ, or use this term to indicate Incarnation. All the same, he concludes that both concepts are complementary and that the distinction exists largely because of two different world views.[697] While his position seems reasonable, it is essential that we note the lack of advancement towards a theological conclusion in this work. Any critical analysis of his work would focus on a number of factors including what evidence we have that avatars make the transcendent God immanent. We would need to consider how or if the faces we see in and through these avatars reflect the face of God in a similar way to how Christ makes God the Father appear through His Incarnation. Secondly, in considering the uniqueness of Christ, can we honestly claim that the universality of Christ's mediation and the fullness of revelation in Him can be the equivalent of the salvific and revelatory roles played by avatars?

Finally, we should also consider the differences in the world order as advocated by the avatars in the Kingdom of Rama (Ramarajya) and Jesus in the Kingdom of God. The existence of the caste system presents at least one major obstacle to the possibility of devising a synchronised view of this situation. We must also consider the equally important divergence concentrating on the surpassing elements of the Incarnation. This may lead us to the conclusion that, while Jesus has all the qualities evident in the avatar, Sheth goes beyond that, making it impossible to fully express His uniqueness in the term avatar.[698] Can we now use His uniqueness as a means to perfect, correct and fulfil the avatar ideal in the Indian context?

5.1 Critical Evaluation of the Avatar-Christology of Sheth

Sheth's study makes a number of interesting and valid points but fails to address many other equally important points. He does not elaborate sufficiently on the salvific role of avatars or examine how they can be considered to be saviours. Limited attention is paid to what avatars revealed about God. Given the central significance of Christ's revelatory and salvific powers we need to study carefully how the role of the Hindu avatars might be compared to this.

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[696] Ibid., 295.
[697] Ibid., 299-302.
[698] J. George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology*,160.

Although a discussion of the differences would take us far afield, we affirm that the *Ramarajya* (Kingdom of Rama) and Kingdom of God are not alike. Sheth notes the "defects" of numerous avatars in their purpose of establishing *dharma*, though he tries to justify it as a misinterpretation:

> From a socio-religious standpoint, some avataras have been interpreted as reflecting the superiority or domination or oppressive action of one group over another. For example, the story of the Vamana (Dwarf) avatara has been interpreted to mean the domination of the Aryan race over the Dravidian race, represented by Bali, who is pushed down to the netherworld. A racial interpretation is also given to the conflict between Rama and Ravana, the former standing for the Aryans and the latter for the Dravidians…. Brahimns are shown to be superior to Ksatriya in the story of the *Brahmin* Parasurama, who in retaliation exterminates all the males of the Ksatriya class twenty-one times. However, in the Rama story, the incident of Rama's superiority over Parasurama in bending the bow of Vishnu could be understood as suggesting the superiority of the Ksatriayas over *Brahmins*. In the case of Buddha avatara, Hindus are portrayed as religiously superior to Buddhists.[699]

An important issue in Christian-Hindu dialogue today is the caste system, which in Christian terms is inimical to basic justice. It is true that the class system (*varna*) in which the current caste system is rooted is a cultural inheritance, pre-dating Hinduism.[700] But Sheth's contention that any connection between avatars and the caste system is a "misinterpretation" seems inadequate. Narratives concerning many avatara in some Hindu sacred texts do depict them as hostile towards those who do not belong within varna and therefore would seem to support the caste system. This of course cannot be taken to imply that the concept of avatar is in itself oppressive, and indeed some modern Hindu scholars assert that Hindu texts and doctrines question and disagree with the *varna* system of social classification.[701] But the tradition of class division, which continues to be seen as fundamental to the maintenance of social order, powerfully influences the structures of Indian society today, and it would seem that the Hindu religion, more than socio- political considerations, dictates the resilience of these structures. Christians, in dialogue, must insist on the absolute equality of all human

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[699] Noel Sheth,"Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation,.193.

[700] The roots of the present-day caste system would seem to lie in the migration of Indo-Iranian (Aryan) peoples into the Indus River Valley around 2,000BCE. They brought with them not just their Vedic Gods but a social classification system consisting of four classes (*varna*) but which excluded from membership of any of these groups those that performed servile duties. Those not belonging to any varna were called *avarna*. Today the *avarna* are generally known as "Untouchables" or Dalits, a word which means oppressed or broken. The term *dasa* is used in *Rig-Veda* to refer to the black-skinned non-Aryans people encountered in India, and later in the post *Vedic* period, this Sanskrit word acquired the meaning 'servant'; cited by Abraham D. Mattam, *Inculturation of the Liturgy in the Indian Context* (Vadavathoor: ORISI Publications, 1991),35-36.

[701] M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Media Promoters,1978),22,31.

beings and it would help if it were acknowledged that the caste system, for historical reasons, is strongly embedded in the avatar stories.

A major flaw in Sheth's consideration of the role of avatars is his reluctance to take seriously their part in reflecting or contributing to perpetuating the oppressive behaviour of one group over another in the caste system, choosing rather to interpret it as manipulations or misinterpretations. This is unsustainable as the supremacy of the Aryan race and the caste system are embedded in Avatar stories. One thing which must be guarded against in the construction of any avatar-Christology is the possibility of losing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ although we should not be dismissive of the converging elements between the two but to proceed with caution and prudence. While Sheth highlights these converging and diverging elements we now use His uniqueness as a means to perfect, correct and fulfil the avatar ideal in the Indian context.

6. Modern Hindu Scholars on Avatara and Incarnation[702]

There has been considerable focus above on the avatara-incarnation issue as viewed by 19th century Hindu figures and then by Christian thinkers in the 20th century. The perspectives of 20th century Hindu thinkers, together with comments as a conversation partner, are required at this point. M. Devamony's book "Classical Hinduism" (1982) is especially relevant on the subject of Avatara and Incarnation.[703] Its third chapter is entitled "Incarnations". Dhavamony, basing his study on Ramanuja's school of philosophy, mentions the chief elements of the avatar-doctrine:

1) Avatar is an actual truth.
2) Avatar is the embodiment of divine nature in full measure.
3) The body of avatar is of the pure *satva* (goodness) and not of the three qualities (*trigunas*: *satva*, *rajas*, *tamas*).
4) The cause of avatar is the will of God.
5) The time of an avatar is a time of moral crisis when righteousness has to be safeguarded.
6) The purpose of an avatar is to save the virtuous, to punish the wicked and to redeem the sinners from their sin, and to reach the feet of the lord.[704]

He situates the concept of incarnations and avatara in the context of the Lord of mercy's descending on earth out of longing for union with the individual, to recover the lost

[702] Although sacred Hindu texts speak of innumerable incarnations of Vishnu, the principal ten are commonly accepted as the most significant. For a comparative study of the avatara, see, G. Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, 20.
[703] Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism.* (Rome: Gregorian University Press,1982)
[704] See N. S. Anantarangachar, *The Philosophy of Sadhana in Visistadvaita* Mysore: 1967),64f; cited in Mariasusai Dhavamony, "Incarnations" in Classical *Hinduism*, ed., M.Dhavamony (Rome: Gregorian University Press,1982),99.

soul and help it to come to him. He is at pains to stress that the doctrine of Hindu incarnation is not due "to the influence of any foreign religion". It is native to Hinduism. He traces its beginnings to attempts to reconcile monotheist aspirations with the development, over time and in different areas, of multiple forms of worship, and indeed with the conception of different deities or forms of the same deity. God's compassion is eternal and infinite and is solely responsible for saving souls from fetters of rebirth and misery. The compassion is described as an inclination to do good to others. The Lord shows compassion in innumerable ways. This led to the belief in incarnations and avatara. At the same time classical Hinduism is concerned not to accord any unique character or identity to any incarnation of the deity as this would imply a limiting of the divine, who is "inexhaustibly expansive".[705]

T. M. P. Mahadevan, offers both cosmic and soteriological purposes for avatars:

> Cosmic balance has to be preserved; and for this purpose, God comes in a tangible form, half concealing and half manifesting His divinity. He comes as the saviour of the world; and even the punishment he meets out to the transgressors proves to be for their good. Truly speaking, there is neither friend nor foe to the Lord. Each person benefits, according to his eligibility, when the waters of heaven descend to the earth and flow along human channels. Such descents are Incarnations or Avatara.[706]

For K. Bharadvaja, God's motive in sending avatars is especially revelatory,"Whenever God (Vishnu) manifests Himself in a form suited to a particular circumstance, or whenever He descends in person from his divine locus to any part of the world, or whenever He chooses to be born to live among us, we say that the Lord has taken an Avatara."[707]

Devamony is especially insightful in his contrasting Hindu and Christian perspectives on incarnation. He links the multiplicity of incarnations in the Hindu tradition to its cyclical concept of world history; different manifestations of the divine recur at different cosmic ages. Clearly in that context, no one incarnation can have exclusive significance in the salvific history of man. He has no difficulty with Christians considering Christ as a revelation of God but does dispute their belief that "the whole of divinity could be incorporated into a single manifestation."[708]

Some Hindu incarnations have cosmic motives while others have salvific and revelatory purposes. Some are towards preserving the world from peril or helping the good and punishing evil doers. Others are about revealing the true nature of God and helping man

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[705] Dhavamony, "Incarnations" in Classical *Hinduism*, 99-100.
[706] T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Publishers, 1974) 68.
[707] K.Bharadvaja, *A Philosophical Study of the Concept of Vishnu in the Puranas* (New Delhi: Pitambar Publishing Company, 1981), 323.
[708]Dhavamony, "Incarnations," in Classical *Hinduism,*110.

to follow God's mode of acting so as to enter into union with God. But apart from the strong divergences noted above in respect of Christian belief in the divinity of Christ, there is also a clear disparity in respect of soteriology. For the Hindu the divine consciousness is present in every human being. The human being is "naturally divine."[709] Salvation then cannot be about changing the human being but is rather about making him aware of his natural divinity. The Christian teaching pertaining to original sin resulting in the loss of man's union with God and its needing to be restored, is very much at variance.

For S. Radhakrishnan the divergences are more cultural than theological; he does not hold back in his assertion that the "Eastern seer" that was Jesus of Nazareth has gone missing in Western Christianity. With regard to the Christian belief in Christ, Radhakrishnan remarks:

> The difference between the Eastern and the Western approaches and attitudes to religion becomes evident when we compare the life of Jesus, and His teaching as recorded in the Gospels, with the Nicene Creed. It is the difference between a type of personality and a set of dogmas, between a way of life and a scheme of metaphysics. The characteristics of intuitive realization, non-dogmatic toleration, as well as insistence on the non-aggressive virtues and universalist ethics, mark Jesus out as a typical Eastern seer. On the other hand, the emphasis on definite creeds and absolutist dogmatism, with its consequences of intolerance, exclusiveness and confusion of piety with patriotism are the striking features of Western Christianity.[710]

This brief purview of current thinking among Hindu scholars, strongly suggests the need for more of same. While the discourse between Faiths must take account of respective legacies it pertains in essence to present and future. This writer identifies profound challenges for Christians in the implied questions of writers such as Devamony. They are fundamental questions: Who, today, for Christians is Jesus Christ – Son of God in a literal sense or otherwise? What, today, for Christians is Salvation – restoration of a lost relationship with God or otherwise? These are theological questions and not just cultural and linguistic issues as Radhakrishnan seems to imply. They pertain to the doctrine of original sin, to the meaning of the early conciliar pronouncements about Jesus and about God. Radhakrishnan has a point in asking for answers that are spiritual rather than dogmatic. The search for answers can be greatly aided by inter-faith dialogue, in the 'shared space' provided by the Second Vatican Council. Theology needs now to be done in the context of religious pluralism.

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[709] Ibid., 110.
[710] S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion* (London: G. Allen & Unwin 1933), 59.

7. Convergent, Divergent and Surpassing Elements; an Overview and Comment

7. 1 Convergence

Indian theologians have sought to utilise the concept of Avatar to present Jesus as God incarnate among us. and to point to the convergence with the Hindu avatar concept of God coming to this world in a variety of forms. There are apparent similarities in the purposes of both Christ's incarnation and Vishnu's avatars with respect to their saving aspects and their role in revelation. But the urge to make connection between Hinduism and Christianity under the metaphor of the Hindu figure of Avatar carries at least some risk of confining and limiting Christ within the Hindu concept.[711] The addition of a preface to Avatar such as "Perfect", (Mazoomdar), or "Full" (Singh) or "excellent" Chakkarai is liable to contribute to this circumscribing of Christ unless sufficiently clarified.

7.2 Divergence.

Elements of divergence could in broadest terms be ascribed to divergent cultural and philosophical underpinning concepts and in particular the contrasting linear and cyclical concepts of history. But going into the differences in more detail we identify the following areas:

i) The once and for all character of Christian Incarnation

The history of the Incarnation displays a once and for all character which encompasses the birth of Jesus, His death and resurrection and then the Pentecost event, in which the Spirit came to allow the disciples to experience the presence of Jesus who came to live in their hearts. This diverges from the repetitive nature and array of Hindu avatars, concerning whom there is no reference to their continued existence after their time on earth is completed. Central to the uniqueness of the avatar-hood of Jesus Christ is His resurrection and continued presence in the lives of His followers.

ii) Salvation for all

Jesus is a merciful and caring God so full of love that He died so that all of humanity would have the opportunity to attain salvation. Hindu avatars seek only to establish and maintain the law and the annihilation of the wicked. We need to emphasise how the unique love of God, revealed in and through Jesus, is poured unto the poor and the marginalised in a manner that surpasses anything displayed in the Hindu avatars.

[711] J. George, *Uniqueness of Christ in Indian Christology*,162.

iii) Historicity

Another area where the incarnation of Christ differs from the Hindu avatars is in its historicity. Jesus is real. There is nothing mythical about His existence in contrast to that of the Hindu avatars.

7.3 Surpassing

The word 'surpassing' here is used to convey the idea of Christ as fulfilling and/or correcting the Hindu concept of Avatar. But words such as these may imply that Christ differs only in degree from Hindu avatars; He differs in nature. It is important that the uniqueness of Christ is not lost in language. That uniqueness above all relates to His being the revelation in his own person of the loving, forgiving, and caring God. Hindu avatars neither reveal nor model these attributes of God. Jesus more than surpasses them. He goes beyond that which the avatar ideal can transmit.

As mentioned above the addition to the title Avatar of prefixes such as "Perfect", or "Full" when applied to Christ, may not sufficiently convey the radical difference involved. In his use of the term "Only True", Appasamy is clearer than are others on this issue. He safeguards, to some extent the uniqueness of Jesus with respect to the avatar title.

8 Language, Culture and Theology; Convergence and Divergence

Indian Christians, in their efforts to inculturate the Gospel message in Indian terms, have always made significant use not just of language but of concepts, images and artefacts from Indian culture which, long preceding their use by Christians, had been availed of by Hinduism to speak of the transcendent. Christian liturgical texts make extensive use in particular of the term *avatara*[712] when referring to the incarnation of Christ. Throughout Indian languages *avatara* usually refers to the descent, in some visible form, of gods or agents or messengers of the divine. This is so in the case of the Syro-Malabar community, whose vernacular language is Malayalam. But their use of *avatar* does not mean that they are equating Christian belief in the Incarnation with the Hindu belief in divine visitations in the course of human history.[713] We are dealing here with a linguistic and a cultural, rather than a

[712] The term *avatara* is derived from the root *tri*, which means "to carry across", "to cross over", in combination with the prefix *ava*, meaning "down." The finite verb form *avatarati* means "to come down,"or "to descend." The noun form *avatarah* then means "coming down", or "descent. The final *h* is specific to the Sanskrit word, and thus in other Indian languages it is avoided and written as *avatara*. See, G. Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, 20.

[713]See, John Moolan, *Introduction to Oriental Liturgy and Its Theology Syro-Malabar Church* (Vadavathoor: OIRISI Publications, 2013),107.

theological, usage of the word.[714] What has its origins in a shared culture does not imply a shared theological understanding.[715]

There are some Christian theologians however who show reluctance to attribute the title *avatar* to Christ. Raymond Panikkar[716] is especially critical of its use; Christ for him utterly transcends the Hindu concept. But while there is a risk of the meaning and interpretation of words used in both religions being taken to be the same, it can be argued that the recourse of both religions to the shared richness of Indian culture offers opportunities in terms of dialogue. The overlap provides a 'common language' and a useful starting point for the Church in its discourse with Hinduism, while being cognisant of the challenges.

9 Panikkar on the concept of Jesus as "Avatar"

For Panikkar, Christ should not be confined to the historical Jesus alone. He emphasises the trans-historical dimension of Christ.[717] He understands the presence of Christ in a wider perspective. Christ for him utterly transcends the Hindu concept:

> A Christ who could not be present in Hinduism, or a Christ who was not with every least sufferer, a Christ who did not have his tabernacle in the Sun, a Christ who does not represent the cosmotheandric reality with one spirit seeing and recreating all hearts and renewing the face of the earth, surely would not be my Christ, nor, I suspect, would be the Christ of the Christians.[718]

According to Panikkar, any Christology that limits itself to the historical Jesus of Nazareth cannot claim universality in the multi-religious context. He does not speak of Christ solely in Christian terms. Christ belongs to God, and not to Christianity alone. Christ is the mystery

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[714]It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make a detailed study of the Christology of the Syro-Malabar Church. See, *Thomas Christian Heritage*, the journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre is a theological journal, published twice a year, to promote research studies in theology, liturgy and History and spirituality of St. Thomas Christians. For detailed comparative study of the Liturgy of Hours in the East between and West is also beyond the scope of our research. Western Liturgical developments have received to the history of the Office in the middle ages than was true for the East. See, *Robert Taft, The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*: *The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today* (Minnasota: Liturgical Press,1993), xv.

[715] Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology," *Thomas Christian Heritage: Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre* Vol I (November 2008),60.

[716] In his books *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964), *Trinity and the World Religions* (1972), *The Intra-religious Dialogue* (1978), *Myth Faith and Hermenutics* (1979), Panikkar has outlined some of his parameters of cross-cultural theological methodology. In the books mentioned above Panikkar seems to attempt to develop a hermeneutical harmony between the Christological and Trinitarian approaches towards the resolution of the historical and the cosmic phases of the one economy of salvation, in which the pluralistic claims of the religious experience of the followers of various religions may be meaningfully harmonised.

[717] Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology," in *Thomas Christian Heritage: Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre* Vol. I. (November 2008), 54-56.

[718] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Press, 1982), 20**.**

that surpasses the Christian history and identity. Christ is present in one form or another in every human being and in all religions.[719]

> The Christ we are speaking of is by no means the monopoly of Christians, or merely Jesus of Nazareth... This, then, is Christ that reality from whom everything has come, in whom everything subsists, to whom everything that suffers the wear and tear of time shall return. He is the embodiment of Divine Grace who leads every man to God; there is no other way but through him. Is not this what Christians call Christ? It is he who inspires the prayers of man and makes them audible to the Father; it is he who whispers any divine inspiration and who speaks as God, no matter what form a person's faith or thought may have.[720]

Panikkar speaks of 'Christ as a symbol for the totality of divine and cosmic.... Christ stands for that centre of reality, that crystallization-point around which the human, divine and the material can grow.'[721] This interpretation of Panikkar has evoked diverse responses from theologians. Felix Wilfred says that it is against the background of the unity of all reality that we have to understand the Christology of Panikkar. In his opinion, Panikkar is not trying to separate Jesus and Christ. "All that he does is to place the Jesus of history against the transhistorical horizon of the Christ which is universal. In this way, Panikkar wants to open up a space for a meaningful dialogue and encounter with other religious traditions."[722]

M. Vekathanam's observation with respect to Panikkar seems more pertinent. Panikkar's focus is on the Word (that was in the beginning) more than on the Word (made flesh). In seeking to foster Hindu-Christian dialogue he chooses to speak not about the historical Christ but about the universal Christ, who is beyond the historically limited person Jesus of Nazareth. The universal Christ is present in Hinduism and in all religions, whether implicitly or explicitly. Christ is the ultimate and irreducible symbol who can be shared by others and Christ cannot be confined to Christianity alone. Vekathanam writes: "Panikkar equates this Cosmo-theandric principle with the Christ-principle that is universally present in different forms of religious convictions and ways of worship."[723] However, Vekathanam has difficulty with the fact that Panikkar seems to render the mystery of Incarnation subordinate to that of Christ's universality. The Incarnation, he says "is not a matter of universal presence, but one of concrete historical manifestation."[724]

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[719] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 20-21
[720] Ibid., 33-34.
[721] Ibid., 27.
[722] Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, 109.
[723] Mathew Vekathanam, *Christology in the Indian Antropological context* (New York: 1986), 304.
[724] Vekathanam, *Christology in the Indian Antropological context,*306.

It seems to this writer that de Lubac would have embraced such opportunity and differed from Panikkar in that regard. In his engagement with Buddhism he delved courageously into the 'overlap' in language between orthodoxy and Gnosticism (and the possible interchanges between the latter and Buddhism). His auscultation with atheism was the same. None of it was to the detriment of his faithfulness to the Christian tradition and indeed the opposite was the case; auscultation with Hinduism offers the same possibility.

Linguistic common ground can help identify common theological claims. In theistic Hinduism, creation is the work of a benevolent, eternal and all-knowing deity. Vaishnava Hindu and Christian usage of terms such as "avatara" and "incarnation" reveal a shared understanding of God as being involved in the world, as being transcendent and at the same time immanent. While Christians use the doctrine of Trinity to express God's relationality, Vaishnavas use the symbol of male–female relationship for a similar purpose. For both of them God is one and at the same time relational.

10 Conclusion

There has been a considerable focus in the present chapter, and in the previous one, on Hindu titles ascribed to the manifestations of the deity, in particular *Guru, Avatar and Prajapati*, on account of their significance in the exploration of convergences between Hinduism and Christianity. This chapter has sought to pay particular attention to *Avatar.* Numerous *avatara* are believed to have intervened in human history, as agents, messengers or manifestations of the deity. The relevance of this belief to that of Incarnation in Christianity is self-evident.

But having assembled a range of positions taken by Christian Scholars in their efforts to develop an Indian Christology which takes account of the Hindu doctrine of avatar, it would seem that something of an impasse has been reached. The Hindu concept seems so far out of step with the Christology that is based on the Councils of the first millennium, in particular the First Council of Nicaea and the Council of Chalcedon, that it seems unhelpful to try to utilise it. The usage of Hindu titles involves a certain danger in Indian Christology, considering that they might limit the person and mission of Jesus. All the same, these limitations should not stop us in our christological endeavour, but rather challenge us to handle it with care and prudence in our christological reflection, being faithful to the unique identity of the person and mission of Jesus Christ.

The development of Indian Christology, whether with or without reference to Hindu titles has challenged Christianity in India to be more Indian than Western. De Lubac's policy of theological auscultation invites us to listen to each other as we seek mutual understanding.

It is from de Lubac that we have drawn legitimation for listening to the voices of Hindu Renaissance Scholars and to others living beyond the Christian orbit. The next chapter will seek to further harness his methodology in pursuit of authentic Hindu-Christian dialogue.

The exploration of relationships between Faiths involves an examination not just of another Faith but of our own. The seeming impasse cannot simply be ascribed to the inadequacy of Hindu understandings to come near to the Christian understanding of God's intervention, in Jesus Christ, in human history. We must revisit our own understandings and the next chapter seeks to do that. All religions have arrived into the present wearing cultural clothing and carrying the legacies of specific history. There is both profound enrichment and unhelpful baggage in these inheritances. Distinguishing between them is a fundamental task of theology.

Dialogue with other religions demands clarity in our understanding of Jesus, who He is, who is the God he revealed, and what is his message. The Bible is our starting point. We must remain clear that the work of the Councils and of the Fathers of the Christian tradition are not additions to the Scriptures; much less do they prescribe a different course from that articulated in the sacred texts. This is also true of Vatican II's declaration of religious pluralism in God's universal plan of salvation for humanity; it has its validation in Scripture and a Christology for today must provide for this being the shape of God's plan.

De Lubac's belief that the universality of salvation is accomplished in Christ is his starting point for dialogue with other religions. In Catholicism his view of the Church involves the totality of the human race, called to be members of the Body of Christ. His methodology for exploring how this can be and what are its implications will be our guide for this part of our journey, as it has been in our travels to this point.

CHAPTER 5
A CHRISTOCENTRIC DIALOGUE WITH HINDUISM

1 Introduction

While being aware of the challenges posed by religious differences and that world peace is at stake in relationships between religions, we believe that de Lubac's Christocentric dialogue provides a bridge for promoting understanding between Hinduism and Christianity. Failing to do so puts at risk the integrity of religions themselves and where relationships are disrespectful of each other we are operating in direct conflict to all claims about the care of God for humanity and about humans being in right relationships with God, with each other and, with the rest of creation. The need for Indian Christians to seek dialogue with the sub-continent's largest religion is not an option, but an obligation.

We have already alluded to the fact that the Second Vatican Council, influenced by theologians such as de Lubac, has created the possibility and established the need for the Catholic Church to engage in inter-faith dialogue, although previous negative attitudes still prevail, residually, within the Church. Bearing that in mind we need to understand that dialogue must begin with the recognition that all religions have arrived into the present wearing cultural clothing and carrying the legacies of specific history. There is both profound enrichment and unhelpful baggage in these inheritances. Discerning what, within these inheritances, offers on-going enrichment and what constitutes unhelpful baggage is a fundamental task of theology. Inter-faith encounters offer both new challenges and distinct opportunities to engage in this discernment. It can be assumed that this would be de Lubac's starting point today, based on the two principles of Auscultation and the Catholicity of Truth.

A basic understanding of the fundamentals of Hinduism is a necessary starting point, particularly with reference to the Hindu figures Guru, Avatar, and Prajapati. To help in this task we drew upon the resources of Hindu scriptures and traditions, Hindu philosophical schools and the findings of various scholars. We then examined how various Indian theologians in the field of Christology have sought to relate Jesus Christ to these Hindu figures, especially avatar. We focused in particular on those involved in formulating what has frequently been referred to as avatar-Christology (The Mystery of Incarnation), on the points of convergence and divergence that they have identified between Christ and the Hindu avatar figure and on how they suggest that Christ surpasses, fulfils, completes or corrects the Hindu concept. Our main aim in this chapter will be to establish the importance of centrality

and the uniqueness of Christ in the discernment of our Christian-Hindu dialogue. In terms of 'the salvation of unbelievers', we will closely examine de Lubac's insights in Chapter VII of Catholicism with a view to reaching a deeper understanding.

1.1 The Centrality of Christ in our Dialogue with Hinduism

It is essential that we accept the centrality of Christ in the plan of salvation for all humankind. We proceed from there to declare our understanding of Jesus, who He is, who is the God he revealed, and what is his message, having recourse to the Bible and to the work of the Fathers of the Christian tradition. Then, with the guidance of the late French theologian Henri de Lubac we propose to work towards conclusions and determinations as to how best, while maintaining Christ's uniqueness, to offer Him to India in Indian garb, and from there to pursue authentic Hindu-Christian dialogue. We draw on de Lubac's own work on Christian–Buddhist dialogue and honour his massive contribution to liberating the Church from its exclusivist outlook as being the locus. Here we draw particularly on the principled approach which he developed for doing theology. The content of his theology reflects its production in the mid-twentieth century Europe, and, as such, stands as a precious resource; but his methodology has, we suggest, a timelessness and universality that transcends the theology that he produced. He restored pride of place to the Scriptures and a return to what is of value in the Christian tradition. He validated bringing methods of his spiritual interpretation of Scripture in the history of exegesis and socio-political questions.[725] Beyond that he endorsed the search, also critically, for the workings of God's Spirit in other religious, in cultural and philosophical traditions, and in the discourses of the world now and everywhere.

2 The Uniqueness of Christ in the Indian Context

Our challenge here is to reconcile two seemingly diametrically opposed points of view emanating from the Sacred Scriptures. In Acts 4:12, we learn that salvation can only be attained through Jesus Christ, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by whom we must be saved." However, we are also told in Timothy (1Tim 2:4), "God desires everyone to be saved." While accepting the fact that many non-Christian religions of the world have their own saviour figures and ways of salvation, we will attempt to develop an understanding of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus in the multi-religious context of India.

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[725] Kevin L Hughes, "The Spiritual Interpretation of Scripture" in *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (Bloomsbury: London, 2017), 205.

Some Indian theologians, such as Sebastian Athappilly, depict Jesus Christ, the unique and universal mediator of salvation, as both central and essential to the traditional view of what Christian faith really is.[726] He will not accept that there can be any parallel mediation to that of Jesus, who, as the incarnate son of God, is essential to the basic Christian faith in the Triune God and the fullness of divine revelation. He would see any attempt to reduce Jesus Christ to being one of a number of saviours or incarnations as being completely wrong.[727] Athappilly believes that if we were to accept that Jesus was just one of a number of mediators, then we would be denying His uniqueness. However, there is at no time, the implication that all non-Christians will be damned or that all Christians will be saved. But we do not mean that salvation of any person is possible only through Christ and that the salvific value of other mediators and saviours derived from Jesus Christ.[728]

While some might portray their belief in the uniqueness of Christ as being exclusivist and, in some ways, arrogant and superior, it is actually to do with the humble submission to God's revelation in Jesus and the importance of Jesus and His mission. If we accept Jesus as the incarnate son of God, then it is only natural to conclude that Jesus is the unique and universal Saviour. As St. Paul says "Proclaiming Jesus as the Lord is proclaiming God's own deed, for it is to the glory of God that we do this."[729] The proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ might make it more difficult for followers of other religions to accept and pose a barrier for fruitful dialogue. The danger then is that we succumb to the temptation to allow our faith to be diluted so that it can be adapted to become acceptable to all.[730] This would be a dangerous precedent to set as it would mean that we might be tempted to apply the same criteria to Christian doctrines such as those of the Holy Trinity, Incarnation, Eucharist and resurrection so that we might make it appealing to others also. Athappily is of the opinion that we should never compromise the authenticity of our Catholic faith just so that we might create a false harmony to allow for dialogue to take place.[731] Genuine dialogue requires both parties to be committed to their respective religious faiths. We must accept that each one of us is a person of dignity and on a journey to the Almighty. This does not mean, however, that doctrines of all faiths are equal or of equal validity.

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[726] Sebastian Athappilly*, Mystery and the Destiny of the Human Person: A Theological Anthropology* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007), 34.
[727] Sebastian Athappilly, *Theology in India: Essays on Christ, Church and Eucharist* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005), 26.
[728] Athappilly, *Theology in India*, 26-27.
[729] Phil 2:11.
[730] See, Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christology", 64-65.
[731] Athappilly, *Theology in India*, 96-98.

Jacques Dupuis, in his writing, gave great consideration to the different theological approaches to the subject of salvation for both Christians and non-Christians down the ages. He reserved his greatest deliberations for developments of the twentieth century, especially those leading up to and emanating from Vatican II. The literature on *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* attracted a vast array of reviews and documentation in many different languages.[732] For Dupuis, it is the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the son of God which dictates his uniqueness and universality. He believes that this is the main consideration in providing such an adequate theological foundation.

While he affirms the uniqueness of Jesus, Dupuis also allows for other mediations and divine revelations. He insists that the "commitment to one's own faith and openness to the other must therefore be combined. A constitutive Christology seems to allow for both. Christian identity, as it has been understood through the centuries, is linked to faith in the constitutive mediation and fullness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ… such a Christology leaves room… for other mediations and divine revelations."[733] Dupuis views the uniqueness of Jesus as neither absolute nor relative. He presents different models of interpreting the uniqueness of Christ with regard to other religions.[734] He introduces a new expression in the theology of religion known as "inclusive pluralism".[735] He stresses the fact that Jesus Christ is the universal saviour while at the same time asserting that all religions have some salvific value for their particular followers.

Felix Wilfred believes that the issues of uniqueness are modern Western questions which have come to the fore in recent centuries as a result of the irruption of other religious traditions into Christian consciousness as never before.[736] He does not see it as vital to insist on the portrayal of the uniqueness of Christ in presenting Christology in the Indian context. He believes that the language of uniqueness [737]is not a perquisite for the Indian experience and interpretation of Jesus. However, he feels that the language of uniqueness will continue to be an issue in India unless deep rooted inculturation allows for a viable interpretation of Jesus Christ through the categories consistent with their interpretation of him. This is

[732] Gerald O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis: The Ongoing Debate" in Theological Studies, September 2013, Vol.74. No.3.
[733] Jacques Dupuis T*oward A Christin Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 379.
[734] Ibid.,380.
[735] Jacques Dupuis, "The Truth will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited," Louvain Studies 24 (1999),26.
[736] Felix Wilfred, "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness: An Indian Perspective, *Vidyajyoti* 57 (1993), 654.
[737] Wilfred, "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness: An Indian Perspective, 667.

especially so where some Indian traditions have no problem at all with entering into the religious traditions of other faiths without relinquishing the ultimacy and universality which they experience in their own.[738] Felix sees no conflict with total commitment to one's own faith while displaying absolute respect to other religious traditions in their otherness. Felix believes that all Christologies are governed by their setting or circumstances while no Christology is all encompassing. As a result, India must seek a Christology which has validity in its own right, and which captures the spirit and feeling of the encounter with the person and the message of Jesus. [739]India's experience of Jesus and its Christologies are peculiar to India only, where no absolute superiority and uniqueness of a specific religious system is accepted. This religious attitude is known as *Sarvadharmasamabhav* and this has been the mark and inspiration of the Indian tradition,[740] so, undoubtedly any worthwhile interpretation of Christ in India will be governed by these principles. Felix explains what "Sarvadharmasamabhav" means:

> Sarvadharmasamabhav is not a statement about the equality of all religions; it is not a pragmatic attitude which is popularly expressed as live and let live; it is not a superficial irenism forestalling possible religious conflicts. Nor is it a relativism that fails to respect the specificity of each religious tradition. The attitude of sarvadharmasamabhav has a deeper root: it is the result of one's own experience of the inexhaustible Ultimate of ultimacy and universality within the realm of one's religious faith, what results is not the affirmation of its uniqueness over or against others; what results is rather the capacity to understand the faith of the other in its ultimacy and universality.[741]

India accepts a spiritual person but, it is through following his message that they come to understand who he really is. Indian tradition has no interest in defining the metaphysical makeup of the personality of a guru so when it encounters Jesus Christ. The first and foremost thing in the encounter of India with Jesus Christ is not a metaphysical constitution (something like the what Council of Chalcedon attempted to do), but the path he shows. It is not a question of avoiding the issue of the person of Jesus and taking only of his teaching. it is a matter of reconstructing the personality of Jesus, re-appropriating him and interpreting him through his *marga* (the way) which will also disclose his being and truth.[742] Felix sees

[738] Wilfred, "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness: An Indian Perspective, 661-664.
[739] Ibid.,664.
[740] Ibid.,666-669.
[741] Ibid.,669-670
[742] Ibid.,672.

the important encounter of India with Jesus Christ on the path of suffering, which is the fate of millions of poor in India today.

Indian theologians have often been accused of paying too much attention to the practice of inculturation, dialogue and liberation while neglecting the proclamation of Jesus, his person and his unique revelation. However, from an Indian perspective, it is through inculturation, dialogue and liberation that the means of preaching the uniqueness of Jesus are provided so that is the mission that must be taken up.[743] It is felt that it is through these means that the Indians will come to recognise the mystery of the person of Jesus and that there is no need to invoke support from the language of uniqueness to fulfil this mission. Here it is possible to be firmly committed to the Christian faith and to interpret the mystery of Jesus Christ in faith without feeling the need to invoke the language of uniqueness.[744]

While the Western language of uniqueness presupposes an epistemology, this is something which India does not share. According to Sebastian Kappen it is essential to rediscover the historical Jesus free from the cult, dogma and institutionalism so that the challenge of moving from the security of orthodoxy to Orthopraxis can be taken up.[745] While interpreting Christ in India Pandippedi Chenchia was very critical of the Church, her institutions and dogmas.[746] This challenges us to formulate and carry out a self-assessment of Christianity which will enable us to concentrate on the centrality of Christ in Hindu-Christian Dialogue.

3 Hellenization of Christianity

Very early in the life of Christianity a major event took place which changed it and the place of the Church in the world: this was the conversion of the emperor Constantine (313) to Christianity.[747] Since then Christianity became the official religion of the empire which would have been unthinkable during the first three centuries as they were marked by persecutions of a most bloody kind, especially the last of them under Diocletian which

[743] "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christolgy,"68.
[744] Wilfred, "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness: An Indian Perspective, 670-672.
[745] Sebastian Kappen (1924-1993) belongs to the society of Jesus. He took his doctorate in Theology from the Gregorian University, Rome in 1962. The theme of his doctorate is "Religious Alienation and Practices based on Karl Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844". He has written extensively in Malayalam and English. Some of his important writings include Jesus and Freedom, New York,1977; Jesus and Cultural Revolution; A Perspective, Bombey, 1983 and Liberation Theology and Marxism, Puntamba,1986. See, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christolgy,76.
[746] Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886–1959), developed a theology of the new creation. See, Sebastian Chalackal, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Christolgy,55.
[747] Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian empire*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2-4.

endured several years. [748] Prior to this change bishops were under threat and fulfilled their functions in subterfuge but now they would exercise considerable influence on the life of their regions. Theological debate would now come out into the open and ecumenical councils would play a major role in the centuries to follow. Conciliar activity had become significant since the second half of the second century with local and regional synods. But it was unthinkable for political as well as economic reasons that the Church would see an ecumenical council.

The fourth century would also mark a change in the issues that would be important theologically. Up until then the concern was the economy of salvation but now it turned to the mystery of God in himself. The two terms 'economy' and 'theology' came to have significance in this period. [749] The 'economy' refers to the way in which God saves his people. 'Theology' is the term used by the Fathers of the Church to refer to questions about the nature of God, the being of Christ and the status of the Holy Spirit. These 'theological' questions led to considerable conflict as the Church sought to hold in tension the absolute monotheism of the Old Testament with its clear appreciation of the unity of God, on the one hand and a growing awareness of distinction which was eventually defined as the doctrine of the Trinity, on the other hand. Answers emanating from Greek philosophy would offer a ready-made but false solution.

The two immediate questions that needed to be resolved were the divinity of the Son and, subsequently, the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The divinity of the Son and the Spirit was challenged by biblical monotheism and Greek philosophy. Henri de Lubac comments on the impossibility of the incarnation from the perspective of that philosophy:

> The idea of a spiritual Reality becoming incarnate in the realm of sense, needing time for its accomplishment, that without prejudice to its spiritual significance should be prepared, come to pass, and mature socially in history – such a notion is entirely alien to these philosophers. Confronted with it, they find it a stumbling-block and foolishness.[750]

Our primary concern here is reaching a fuller understanding of Christology and to that end it is essential that we understand how the early Christian world grappled with understanding Jesus Christ: what was their Christology? We keep our focus on our working definition of

[748] W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 79-80.
[749] Teleford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Cambridge: Grand Rapids,2002),4.
[750] Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 166-7.

Christology: Christology is the discourse 'concerning God's presence in his (Christ's) own action and being'.[751] In this regard we have a particular interest in the first ecumenical council held at Nicaea in 325.

4 The Council of Nicaea

It is worth noting that Constantine called the Council of Nicaea without consulting Rome. This became the precedent for the Eastern Councils of the Church. The definition of Nicaea was forced through by Constantine who threatened exile to the seventeen bishops who initially were refusing to sign.[752] The Council of Nicaea I (325) taught that the Son was of the same substance as the Father, 'consubstantial' with the Father (*homoousios*). He is 'of the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.'[753] **'**Consubstantial with the Father': This is the key term of Nicaea which affirms the previous phrase 'of the substance of the Father' and describes the resultant state of the one begotten. Both Father and Son share the same substance; the Son is God just as is the Father. One of the main difficulties with Nicaea is that it did not distinguish between *hypostasis* and *substance*. [754] This failure to recognise the difference between the terms is evident in the final canon of the Creed of Nicaea, condemning the Arian heresy.[755]

Nicaea marked the birth of a language that is properly dogmatic in the Church. It was the first time that an official and normative ecclesial text used words that didn't come from Scripture, but from Greek philosophy.[756] This caused opposition: the Trojan horse of pagan philosophy had been introduced into the sanctuary of the confession of faith. It was regarded as blasphemy to distance the revealed language of Scripture. This could be an aporia. However, the Scriptures themselves are historical documents composed of human language. That is why the message in the Scriptures always needs to be interpreted so as to continue to be understood according to its truth. A fundamentalist and literal approach to reading the Scriptures is a betrayal of the Scriptures. Ecclesial dogma is an act of interpretation of the word of God in Scripture. It doesn't add to the Scriptures or say something other than is in

[751] Pope Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 63.
[752] For details see, Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press,1983), 56.
[753] Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals,* 43rd edition, Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash, eds., (*San* Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 125.
[754] L. D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, 34.
[755] Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils* 51-52.
[756] Mark A. Noll, "Realities of Empire: The Council of Nicaea (325)" in *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*,3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing Group, 2012),46.

the sacred texts, but it translates into new cultural languages, in the light of new questions, what the Scriptures actually say.[757] This is the significance of the term 'that is' in the Nicaean formula. In other words, the Hellenization[758] of the language of faith aims to protect the meaning of the Christological kerygma: Jesus is the Christ.

5 Hellenization and the Asiatic Mindset

As mentioned in our general introduction from the Council of Nicaea onwards, the Church has used the categories of Greek philosophy to articulate the ontology of Jesus. A characteristic of Greek thought [759] is a dualism which seeks to explain all phenomena in terms of distinct entities. Thus, there is 'material' and there is 'spiritual': 'secular' and 'sacred.' The limitations of this mindset are evident in the attempt to express the relationship between Christ, the Father and the Spirit through the concept of the Trinity. It sought to convey an understanding of God as characterised by 'loving relationship'. But it has tended to be reduced in European thinking to a mathematical conundrum. Scripture scholars have become increasingly exercised about how much richness has been lost in the transition from Aramaic and Hebrew thought and writing to the straight jacket of Greco-Roman[760] and subsequent European thought patterns. Hebrew writing is reflective of an Asiatic mindset which focuses on the oneness and interdependence of creation, on relationality rather than on separateness. All of this is expressed through poetry, mythology, and stories.[761] Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and Christian Scriptures (New Testament) make liberal use of these forms of expression.

Positive encounters and collaboration with Hinduism can help Christianity in its recovery of its own treasures; this is an additional reason and motivation for Hindu-Christian dialogue. It is with pleasure that it can be noted that as a result of living with Hindu brethren and sharing the Indian culture, various 'Indian faces' of Jesus are being discovered by our theologians, and different Christologies have been formulated in recent years. The Church must express the Christian message in the concepts and language of contemporary cultures

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[757]Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: The Free Press, 2001),196.
[758] Martin Hengel, *The Hellenization of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003),45-46.
[759] Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind Understanding the ideas That Shaped our World* (Pimlico:Random House),4.
[760] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 32.
[761] Aidan Nichols, *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction To Catholicism*, 2nd ed. (Michael Glazier Books, 2016), https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8116914-epiphany.

and clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophers.[762] Western philosophy has little currency in Asia. 'Hellenization' creates problems for Christian Faith in its world-wide journeying across the world. It may have been more effective if the church had incorporated the Hebraic relational theology. This would never be considered as a shift from the traditional patterns of the Church, rather a development which opens the way for incorporating our Christian traditions namely Hebraic, which is as old as the Greek tradition that would attune with the theology of de Lubac.

6 Understanding Scripture in Context

Jesus is foretold in Hebrew Scriptures and described and explained in the New Testament. Taking account of the contexts in which, the texts of the Bible were written is crucial to authentic interpretation. Scriptural exegesis has not stood still since de Lubac's time and new insights into contexts have enhanced our understanding. However, they also mean that Biblical interpretations that have come to be regarded as definitive now require revisiting in light of new insights into how history has shaped, for good or ill, the Christian tradition that we have inherited. These considerations open wide the entire field of Scriptural studies to new examination. [763]

We must confine ourselves in this work to those aspects which pertain especially to our engagement with inter-faith dialogue. But this in itself is no small field. The starting point for dialogue with Hinduism is our respective Scriptures and then with the subsequent interpretation of these in each tradition. Inter-faith dialogue invariably contains within it the challenge to read the Bible afresh and to reassess traditional interpretation in light of new exegesis.[764] It seems totally consistent with de Lubac's approach to doing theology that we do so. In dialogue with Hindu people Christians must be able to distinguish between definitive truths of the Christian Faith and what is rather the result of the cultural and historical contexts through which the Faith has come to us.

The exploration of relationships between Faiths involves an examination not just of another faith but of our own. As a result, it seems in order to bring a similar critical lens to Christianity as it has come down to us through history. The field of study known as empire

[762] Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium* et *Spes,* (December 7, 1965) No.44.
[763]See, Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 110-12.
[764] M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 71-72.

studies[765] is concerned not just with those times when the Bible was written but onwards from the first centuries of the Jesus movement until now. Throughout this time Empires have remained in the background.[766] The history of Christianity runs in tandem with that of European empires and their encompassing of virtually the world – including India. Christianity preceded the colonisation of India, but the latter has deeply affected how Christianity has developed and been perceived. The realisation of the influence, first of the Holy Roman Empire on the Christian tradition as it has come to us, raises new questions as to the truths of Christian faith and what are historical constructs.

The peace of Constantine[767] came to be regarded for some as a mixed blessing, because on one hand it legalised Christian worship but on the other hand which tended to undermine the practices of the followers of the "Way of Jesus". For most of the first three centuries allowing it to go down the slope of political power Christians or followers of the Jesus Way[768] were a minority within the Roman Empire – and the target of some hostility. That was to change at the beginning of the 4th century when the Roman Empire was shaken by power struggles. Two contenders for the role of Emperor, Constantine and Maxentius, faced each other in 312CE at Milvian Bridge near Rome and Constantine won. [769] Prior to the 4th century Christianity had many symbols of faith, such as the fish; the cross was never one of them. After Constantine the cross and the sword became identified and virtually interchangeable. It became the imperial symbol of conquest and war.

Judaism was one of the casualties of Christianity becoming the only legal religion in the empire. Antagonism towards Judaism preceded Theodosius and is probably present in the Gospels of Matthew and John. The cutting of Christianity from its Jewish roots obscured not just Judaism but the Hebrew Scriptures (henceforth entitled "Old Testament"). Not only that, but the Jewishness of the "New Testament" was abandoned. Jesus was stripped of his

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[765] Nestor Miguez Joerg Reiger Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of the Empire* (London: SCM Press,2009), 2-4. See also, R.E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence :Studying the Historical Jesus* (MI-Cambridge, Grand Rapids, 2000), 23-29.
[766] See, G.V. Scammell, *The World Encompassed* (California: University of California Press,1981), 225-26.

[767] William T. Kavanaugh "What Constantine Has to Teach Us" in *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate* ed., John D. Roth (Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications,2013),83-84.
[768] Our use of "the Jesus Way" relates to the history of Christianity in India; in the first three centuries Christian belief and practice was defined *Margam* ,"The Way". It was one of the most ancient titles of the Church. This title stresses the practical nature of Christian living. It is a *Margam,* "the way" to be travelled, a way of life-a life-style. See,Varghese Pathikulangara, *Mar Thoma Margam* (Manganam: Denha Services,1989),12-14.
[769] By the end of the 4th century, Emperor Theodosius had made Christianity the only legal religion of the empire. In a very short period of time Christianity had moved from being a minority movement, often suffering at the hands of empire, to be a legally established entity, sharing in the dominant power of the State. See, Margaux Baum and Julian Morgan, *Constantine* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2017), 27.

Jewishness and in the imperial church councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, he was perceived in Greek terms. It is from these Councils that the Creeds that define Christological and Trinitarian dogmas emerged, although it must be said that the Jewish thought-forms and Jewish roots[770] had been largely removed. What Jesus taught and disclosed of God was from his Jewish tradition.[771] Both Hebrew and Christian Testament authors sought to talk about God. Conscious that God is beyond talk; they resorted to symbols, metaphor and poetic language. For some, in 'literalising' texts, Nicaea and Chalcedon may have lost some of their meaning and Jesus may have been described in a way that the Gospels and Letters had not necessarily imagined. This could have resulted in the foundational creeds being stressed more in Greek categories, at the expense of those included in the New Testament. We do not reject these long-established tenets of the Faith but, we, with a deep commitment to Christian-Hindu dialogue in India, feel entitled to critique the context from which they emerged, and to seek to prioritize Scripture as a starting point for dialogue.

7 Titles Attributed to Jesus in the Gospels

While we examined Hindu, titles attributed to Jesus in chapter four we now examine those attributed to Jesus in the gospels. De Lubac's return to *ressourcement* served to bring the writings of the Fathers alive again.[772] If we go further to the New Testament Christology, we are enabled to find links which would be amenable to Indian minds and henceforth to Hinduism.

The New Testament authors had to take account of different contexts – Judaic, Hellenistic and Paganistic – using images and figures from these in such a way as to present Jesus without losing his unique identity. It is in this context that they ascribe various titles to Jesus[773] – Son of Man, Christ, Immanuel, Son of God, Lord, Saviour, Son of David, King of Israel, or King of Jews, High Priest, Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth, and Prophet from Nazareth. No single title is considered exhaustive, as capturing the wholeness of the mystery of Christ. So, we have, in the New Testament, support for the adaptation of cultural elements and the

[770] The Jewishness of Jesus is a historical fact. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew. When he was thirty years old, he began to preach in the Jewish synagogues about the fulfilment of the Jewish Scriptures, proclaiming the kingdom of God to the Jewish people. At the very end of his life, he celebrated the Jewish Passover, was tried by the Jewish council of priests and elders known as the Sanhedrin, and was crucified outside the great Jewish city of Jerusalem. Above his head hung a placard that read in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19). See, Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist :Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (New York: Random House),12.

[771] B. Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist :Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper,*14.

[772] Jacob W Wood "Ressourcement" in *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (Bloomsbury: London, 2017), 93.

[773] The titles of Jesus present the reality of NT conception on the person of Christ. See, Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press,1957).

usage of a plurality of titles in Christology; usage of Hindu titles for Jesus in the formulation of Indian Christology is justifiable. Among those attributed to Jesus in the Gospels and Letters, the titles especially of 'Son of God', 'Son of Man' and 'Lord', were at the centre of the disputes in the early Church about the identity of Jesus, whether human or divine or both.[774] Just as we have found the Hindu titles to have originated in and been shaped by, cultural and historical influences, the same is true of these titles.

Beyond the common denominator of seeking, through ascribing titles to Jesus, to proclaim that, in and through him, we find something decisive for salvation occurred. New Testament writers prefer various titles for Jesus and at times use specific titles differently. Many, such as Son of Abraham or David, or Mary, are used to emphasize Jesus' humanity. Whether others aim to describe Jesus as God is one the most enigmatic questions[775] facing Christians. This study makes no attempt to suggest answers but given our focus on titles as points of connection and basis for dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity, some examination of those of particular relevance to that dialogue that are used in relation to Jesus, in particular in the Gospels, is warranted. We have suggested above that Luke's intention in using the titles "Saviour"[776] and "Lord" in the nativity story is to undermine and contradict the politically motivated cult of emperor worship and imperial claims to being liberators of humanity. Apart from Luke's use of "saviour" in his account of the birth of Jesus it is not much used in the New Testament. The term "lord" is mostly used interchangeably with "master". Paul would seem to use it as substitute for Jesus' name.[777] With respect to the title

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[774] Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (Cleveland: Ohio World, 1969).

[775] The question "Does the NT call Jesus God?" is often posed throughout the entire NT. Many scholars oppose using the title "God" to designate Jesus for the following reasons.1) Using the title God to Jesus is not biblically founded.2) The title does not exhaust the fullness of the mystery of Christ. 3) In this title (*Jesus is God*) God is understood as an entity that can be objectified. These objections are mutually related. Though the second and third objections are dogmatic they deny the biblical attestation of Jesus' divinity. If the first objection is clearly answered the rest become unfounded.
For details see, Joseph Pamplany, "Nomenest Omen: Exploring New Testament Christological Enigma of Emphasising Jesus'Divinity and safeguarding Monotheism" in *Thomas Christian Heritage: Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre* Vol I (November 2008), 36.

[776] This title was originally used for God or any human being who would "save" people from present or future dangers. See, Pamplany, "Nomenest Omen Exploring New Testament Christological Enigma of Emphasising Jesus' Divinity and safeguarding Monotheism" 32-34.

[777] The Hebrew title אָדוֹן simply means "Lord" It is the vocalization of tetragrammaton: -is very *often written* in the Bible and was rarely pronounced after the Babylonian exile. The Greek word κύριος is very frequent (Mt; 18 Mk; 104 Lk; 52 Jn; 107 Acts; 274 Paul; 717 in total). While it usually refers to Jesus, it occasionally refers to God. When people (esp. foreigners) call Jesus *Kyrie*, it is used simply as a sign of respect (Mk 7:28; Jn 4:11; etc.), while his disciples usually refer to him as their "master"; in later texts, calling Jesus "Lord" is an indication of his messianic or divine status (Ac 2:34-36). The disciples also address Jesus as an *Epistates* ("master") seven times in Luke, while Jesus' name is often substituted by "the Lord" in Paul.

"Son of God" it is by no means certain that it was used to imply full divinity.[778] It may have been used more in line with Hebrew Scriptures, where the term "God's sons" is used in relation to angels (Genesis 6:2),[779] or good people (Wis:2:18) or with the people of Israel in general (Ex 4:22). In short it implied a special relationship with God. While Jesus referred to God as "Abba" it cannot be said that he ever referred to himself as "Son of God". And finally, there is the issue dealt with above about the historical context of the early centuries of the Church as having influenced the titles acquisition of a more divine connotation.[780]

Such considerations lead to questions as whether the Creeds of the 4th century can be seen to accord with the Gospels and Letters. It is not in the remit of this study to pursue these questions, but it seems very much in order to question the determinations of imperial-led Councils as basis for dialogue with Hinduism. It is not in these but in the Scriptures that we have the basis and starting point for our dialogue – namely our assertion of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation for humankind. That prompts us to focus, in the section that follows, on what the Gospels reveal about Jesus that received little or no attention at Nicaea and Chalcedon, his humanness and his message. In the course of this section we will note those aspects that put Jesus on a different plane from the figures of Hinduism that relate to the intervention of the deity in the lives of humans.

7.1 The Gospels, a Composite Picture of Jesus

Beyond the question of titles and what they imply about Jesus, the Gospels, collectively, paint a picture of his life, mission and message. The emphasis of the Synoptic Gospels is on the human and functional elements in his life, though they are by no means exclusively about these. John, from the beginning, is more explicit in the matter of the uniqueness and transcendence of Christ.[781] We will deal first with John's description of Jesus as "The Word made Flesh", before proceeding to an exploration of the Synoptic Gospels. "Word" in early Genesis has nothing to do with vocabulary. It is poetry. It asserts that when God speaks, creative things happen. The prologue to John's Gospel (Jn1:1-15) is no less poetic. The

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Pamplany, "Nomenest Omen Exploring New Testament Christological Enigma of Emphasising Jesus' Divinity and safeguarding Monotheism" 34.

[778] Pamplany, "Nomenest Omen Exploring New Testament Christological Enigma of Emphasising Jesus' Divinity, 32-36.

[779] (Gen:6:2); "…he sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took as wives whomever they chose"or if the righteous man is God's son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries" (Wis:2:18). "And you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son (Ex odus 4:22).See, Pamplany, "Nomenest Omen: Exploring New Testament Christological Enigma of Emphasising Jesus Divinity and safeguarding Monotheism," 38.

[780] Ibid., 39.

[781] Ibid., 40.

original Word was *Logos*, from the Greek denoting meaning. A valid translation of the opening of the fourth Gospel could run as follows, "In the beginning was meaning and meaning was with God and meaning was God. Meaning was in the beginning with God.'
In the context of the perennial search of humanity for meaning, at the heart of which are all religions, such understanding of John's prologue is profound. For Christians incarnation is about how "Meaning became flesh", became embodied, enfleshed; it is about God coming into the heart of our historical experience, taking up residence in the thick of history.[782] It is this suggestion that, like much else in the Gospels and in the absence of a Judaic lens with which to view it, John's prologue and not least his poetic connecting of Creation with Incarnation has suffered a literalisation that had not been intended. It is not saying that Jesus was at Creation.

We focus in the following section on the Synoptic Gospels. The Synoptics proclaim the unique and authoritative nature of His teaching function. He begins His public ministry by identifying himself as the one sent "to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed" (Lk 4:18). He proceeds to radically contradict the normative worldview and discourse, especially in the Beatitudes which proclaim as "blessed" the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the persecuted (Mt 53-12). He promises a reversal of all these. In worldviews these are curses. In the Hindu vision they are the result of *karma* – and irreversible. He teaches "as one who had authority" (Mt 7:29). His claim to speak on his own authority, to be speaking on behalf of God and with God's voice is rendered credible by His way of teaching. He takes up Hebrew Scriptures and interprets and corrects it. "You have heard that it was said… but I say to you."[783] Hindu gurus are at best transmitters of messages from the divinity.

7.2 Jesus Stands as the Unique Model

Jesus doesn't just teach about love and morality. In his life he acts consistently with what he teaches and provides a model – and challenge – for all: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Mt 20:25-

[782] Although Logos/Word is used only in Jn. 1:1-18, as a Christological title, it is very common in later Christianity. The Greek word. λόγος, can refer not only to a single "word," but also to a "phrase," a "sentence," a "speech," or even the power of "reason" or the "mind." John's use of this title alludes especially to the OT story of God creating the world merely by speaking (Gen 1), while John's statement that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) is somewhat similar to Matthew's use of the title "Emmanuel" (Mt 1:23). Ibid.,44-45.Ibid.,42.
[783] Mt 5: 21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44.

27). "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Jesus, through living His life as He did, challenges his disciples and gives them a model. By facing these challenges courageously, even to the point of sacrificing his life, he proves himself to be "unique"; in short, a man who challenges not only by his teachings but also by his very life. It would be difficult to find any Indian gurus or avatars who ever came remotely close to living their lives in a similar manner to Jesus. In brief, Jesus Christ by his very life proved how a true guru and real avatar should be, and he invites the whole of mankind to look on and study from him. After seeing the life of Jesus, one could firmly hold that Jesus is the true guru and the real avatar.

7.3 Jesus is for All and Especially for the Poor

Jesus never stands for a particular class or group of people. He has the utmost respect for women, somewhat unusual for the time, and He seems to take such an interest in and attachment to the reviled and hated, the poor and the downtrodden, the sinners and the sick, the misfits of society and He frequently breaks bread with them. He does not exclude the rich or those of upper class. He finds time to be with the rich and the learned, accepts their invitation, and talks in a friendly manner with them as well. Jesus continually challenges the norms of the past as when asking for a drink of water from a Samaritan woman, an action atypical of existing customs.[784] Likewise as he delivers the parable of Good Samaritan,[785] it is the Samaritan, not the priest or the Levite passing by, who becomes the true neighbour to the one who fell among the robbers. The paradox reaches its apex when Jesus applauds the example of the Samaritan and highlights the fact that it is, he, and not the priest or the Levite who is the model for the lawyer to imitate: "go and do likewise." Jesus is the master and teacher, standing not for a particular class of people but for the universal values of love and service without boundaries.

In direct opposition, Indian gurus are meant for particular castes, and the lower castes and the outcastes do not have the right to study *Vedas* and be twice born. Gurus here do not represent the force of social change, but rather act to protect the status quo, and there is no hope for the betterment of the outcasts and the lower castes. It is in this context that Thomas Thankaraj observes that "Guru in Indian society never became a liberating force in the socio-

[784] Jn 4:1-15.
[785] Lk 10:29-37.

political dimension with the aim of creating a fully human society based on human values such as equality, justice, freedom, etc."[786]

Likewise, the surprising contradiction is seen even in the avatars who are supposed to establish justice and righteousness (*dharma*) but doing it by protecting the higher castes against the lower castes. Prajapati, even in his noblest sacrifice[787], gives prime importance to the supreme priestly *Brahmin* castes and brings justice only for their sakes. Jesus, on the other hand, opposes all types of discrimination and his love for all enable him to be unique and so He stands as the correcting principle and guiding model for Hindu gurus and avatars. The existing Indian situation, implying innumerable events of oppression and exploitation in the name of castes in social, political, and religious realms establishes the extreme need of a correcting force, and here Jesus would appear as the ideal guru, true avatar, and real Prajapati with his unique identity. By inviting all to his discipleship without the discrimination of caste, creed, sex or social status, Jesus stands as someone "different", "surpassing", "correcting", and "accomplishing" the Indian concepts of guru, avatar and Prajapati. Hindu concepts are in need of correction and betterment, and here, Jesus with his unique life-example, becomes the model and correcting force for Indian gurus. In brief, Jesus, by virtue of his exemplary qualities, stands as the correcting force and guiding principle for gurus and avatars of Indian society challenging them by his very life.

8 The Functional Uniqueness of Jesus in Respect to Hindu Figures

Our primary concern is to address the question, "How does Jesus surpass, correct and perfect the Hindu figures at various functional levels?" Here we must consider the converging elements which become central to our discussion where Jesus can rightly be referred to as guru, avatar, or prajapati, as he embodies various elements attributed to these figures but as having a uniqueness and reality that is absent in Hindu figures. Hindu titles do not do Jesus justice. Such corrections and perfections must be seen as divine acts and divine interventions where God corrects and perfects in Jesus.

The implication of the unique person of Christ extended also to the love revealed through him: the love he showed to mankind is not mere human sympathy or politeness but divine love. In Jesus Christ, the God of creation became the God of redemption, and this redemption is out of his love and by means of love. Christ is the one who reveals God's

[786] Thomas Thankaraj, *The Crucified Guru, An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1994), 113-115.
[787] P. Lakshmi Narasu, *The Study of Caste* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003),15-16.

loving nature: indeed, "God is love."[788] God achieved a new image, or a new dimension of his image in and through Christ, who provides a new face to God in history by becoming the self-definition of God as revealed in the teaching of the Church:

> The God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption, as the God who is "faithful to himself,"[789] and faithful to his love for man and the world, which he revealed on the day of creation. His is a love that does not draw back before anything that justice requires in him. Therefore "for our sake (God) made him (the Son) to be sin who knew no sin.[790] If he "made to be sin" him who was without any sin whatever, it was to reveal the love that is always greater than the whole of creation, the love that is he himself, since "God is love.[791]

Truly, it is in Jesus Christ that mankind sees what perfect love is: Christ becomes the definition of love, and henceforth no one can rightly speak of love without referring to the one who becomes the unique reference of God's love. In Jesus what we have seen is the divine love, such that "God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love."[792] The revelation of love is the essence of human redemption, by which man is newly created, as expressed by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptor hominis*:

> Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself." If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity. In the mystery of the Redemption man becomes newly "expressed" and, in a way, is newly created.[793]

Christ, by sharing God's love in a perfect manner with mankind, rightly gives meaning and significance to human life; indeed, Christ is the meaning of mankind. Thus, being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event and with *a person*, who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction:[794] A Christian is the one who adopts this fundamental option for love, as portrayed by Pope Benedict XVI "This love which is revealed by Christ is "divine" because it comes from God and unites us to God in

[788] 1 Jn 4, 16.
[789] 1Thes 5, 24.
[790] 2 Co 5, 21; Gal 3, 13.
[791] I Jn 4, 8, 16.
[792] Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas est* (December,25,2005), No,11.
[793] *Redemptor hominis,* 10.
[794] *Deus Caritas est* ,1.

Christ. Through this unifying process it makes the entire human race a "we" that transcends our divisions and makes us one in Christ Jesus."[795]

8.1 Jesus on the Cross provides a new Face for God

Jesus' death on the cross carries a cluster of paradoxes and mysteries. We cannot simply ignore it as a punishment of a convict, of a revolutionary or of a blasphemer, though socio-politico-religious factors certainly play their role. The cross, as Paul says, is a scandal for Jews and folly for Gentiles.[796] The paradox of his death on the cross becomes obvious if we consider Jurgen Moltmann's expressed belief:

> He who proclaimed that the kingdom was near died abandoned by God. He who anticipated the future of God in miracle and in casting out demons died helpless on the cross. He who revealed the righteousness of God with an authority greater than Moses died according to the provision of the law as a blasphemer. He who spread the love of God in his fellowship with the poor and the sinners met his end between two criminals on the cross. Thus, in the end the basic problem and the starting point of Christology is the scandal and the folly of the cross.[797]

If the death of the Messiah on the cross is scandal for the Jews and folly for the pagans what then is it for the Indians? According to the law of *karma*, suffering is because one's past actions; even Supreme Brahman is helpless before this eternal law of *karma*, where liberation means freedom from the cycle of re-birth marked by the suffering and death. Avatars, being divine incarnations in this *maya*-world, are not supposed to suffer, while gurus are liberated from worldly sorrows and pains. The cross of Jesus thus demands us to abandon our human and worldly criteria and to take the criterion of Jesus himself to understand the real victory of the cross. A correct vision on his message, mission, life, and person is required for understanding the message of the cross, as we cannot approach the cross with our visions to understand what it is. Edward Schillebeeckx encapsulates these sentiments in:

> The disciples have experienced Jesus as liberating revelation and salvation whereas the adversaries of Jesus perceived him as a danger and menace. Both of them, the disciples and the adversaries of Jesus, see the words and deeds of Jesus in tune with the vision they already have of God and life.[798]

Whatever one's viewpoint there is no doubt that the crucified Christ surpasses and challenges all existing concepts of God that man has ever formulated, including the concept of avatars.

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[795] *Deus Caritas est,*18.
[796] I Co 1:23.
[797] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974),125.
[798] See, Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Experience of Jesus as Lord* (Great Britain: Seabury Press, 1980), 41.

This crucified Christ provides a new face for God. De Lubac perceives the death of Jesus on the cross with all its paradoxes as the supreme act of *kenosis*:

> He who bore all men in himself was deserted by all. The universal Man died alone. This is the consummation of the *kenosis* and the perfection of sacrifice. This desertion - even abandonment by the Father - was necessary to bring about reunion. This is the mystery of solitude and the mystery of severance, the only efficacious sign of gathering together and of unity: the sacred blade piercing indeed so deep as to separate soul from spirit, but only that universal life might enter.[799]

This is an accurate reflection of the opinion of Saint Paul as expressed in his letter to the Colossians in the early Church where he considered this as "the most earth-shattering event of human history which happened imperceptibly, without fanfare: no burning bush, no sea to traverse just a manger and a cross. Indeed, it is in this person that "the power of God and the wisdom of God"[800] is manifested in all its splendour, and we call him with the proper name "Jesus Christ."

The death Jesus had the inseparable part of his mission and his identity. The saving mission of Jesus is accomplished, and his identity as Messiah is revealed, through his death on the cross and his resurrection. In this instance, the vision of de Lubac is particularly relevant in that "it is in the total renunciation or *kenosis* of Jesus Christ that unfathomable riches are made possible. For him the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of resurrection, but it is also a mystery of death.[801] Even the cross is transfigured. De Lubac quotes St. Irenaeus "By the wood of the cross, the work of the Word of God was made manifest to all: his hand are stretched out to gather all men together."[802] The wood of the cross becomes the "Tree of Life", the seat of glory. Christ's final words "It is accomplished,"[803] fully vindicate John's vision, with references that span the Book of Revelation.[804]

The Indian vision, the cross becomes the true wooden *yupa*, the real sacrificial post, comes down from heaven, stands as the cosmic life-giving tree,the ladder between heaven and earth, through which mankind has the access to divine life.[805] Thomas Thangaraj, as

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[799] *Catholicism*, 367.
[800] I Col.1:25.
[801] *Catholicism*, 367.
[802] *Adversus Haereses*, 5,17; cited in *Catholicism*, 369.
[803] Jn 19: 30.
[804] "I am the Alpha and the Omega," Rev. 1: 8; "Behold, I make all things new," Rev. 21: 5; "The new Jerusalem," Rev 21: 2.The Alpha, through whom all things were created, is the Omega towards which all is beckoned. See, *Christ and Creation*, 392.
[805] See here the meaning and significance of *yupa* in Hinduism as we have mentioned in Chapter Three, under the sub-title "Prajapati in Pasubandha" (Animal Sacrifice).

noted earlier, has himself drawn attention to this unique element of the guru-ship of Jesus, wherein by his death on the cross, Jesus the guru became guru par excellence:

> The death of Jesus on the cross was seen in a new light. No longer was it the tragic and unfortunate death of a guru. The cross became the supreme and climactic point at which the guru was to be seen as being fully himself – the embodiment of what he taught and did. It became a symbol of guru's victory over sin and death… It is no longer the teacher-guru who dominates the scene, but the victim-guru, the dying-guru, the crucified guru who appears as the guru par excellence.[806]

Jesus thus has manifested the "face" of God by "creating" a new face for God in history, and in consequence God has "acquired" a new face in Jesus Christ. Jesus on the cross is thus to be understood as the manifestation of the "face" of God – the face of supreme love − such that the cross becomes the supreme act of divine revelation.

If Jesus was revealing God's face on the cross, then, by his resurrection we can understand that God the Father was certifying and rewarding him. The resurrection of Jesus thus can be conceived as an act of God by which He attested and certified Jesus, his identity, and his words and deeds, as well as the face of God he manifested to us. As Wolfhart Pannenberg notes, "If Jesus has been raised [this means that] God himself has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus. "If Jesus has been raised from the dead, ascended to God… then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus."[807] The resurrection thus confirms that Jesus was united to God in a unique way. In short, by his death and resurrection, Jesus surpasses the prophets and kings of ancient times, proving himself "greater" than them and providing a new face of God.

We can understand with almost the same logic that he surpasses gurus and avatars of Hinduism and proves to be "someone greater" than them, as the face he provided for God is more authentic than that which is created by avatars and gurus. What we could see and experience in Jesus is a God who cares for the poor and the afflicted: who forgives sinners and partakes of meals with them and reveals the unending love of God to whom he gives a new face by his death on the cross. Rather, Jesus becomes the criterion of God, as Jesus by his very being and doing – by his words and deeds challenges every God-concept that every religion has ever formulated. Indeed, he stands as the correcting principle of the God concept and becomes "the school of theology" where anyone can learn the 'what and how' of God. While we can envisage the similarities and commonalities between Jesus and avatars, we

[806] Thomas Thankaraj , *The Crucified Guru,* 101.
[807] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1977), 67-69.

must be aware that avatars can never be the "patrons" of universal love and forgiveness where they stand for particular castes, exacting revenge against one another. Our emphasis should be on helping them attain the ability to reflect the God-ideal more clearly.

8. 2 Jesus' Uniqueness in Evoking Divine Presence and His Revelatory Function

One of the fundamental features of a guru is to evoke the divine presence among the disciples while, as already stated, the avatars are supposed to be either partial or full incarnations of the divinity. In addition, the words of gurus and avatars are supposed to be revelatory, as they reveal God's will and nature. So, there is a convergence that justifies those titles being ascribed to Jesus. But Jesus cannot be seen as a simple agent of revelation, nor can his revelation be limited to any of his teachings. While the object of revelation is God Himself, this occurs in the person of Jesus Christ, revealing God through his active presence and his entire being:

> In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (Eph. 1:9) by which through, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature… This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.[808]

It seems necessary to consider some reflections regarding the Hindu figures in contrast to Jesus as God's incarnation. The avatars of Hinduism are not exclusively in human form, but also in the form of animals, fish, and man-lion. Moreover, the ones who are in human form are not fully human; they are human only in appearance. In contrast to these avatars, Jesus Christ not an acting or *maya* – illusory – form. Jesus' human nature is an undisputed fact in Christian faith based on biblical and historical foundations. Besides, while Hinduism holds the multiplicity of avatars, Christ is seen as the unique incarnation and the Once and for all event in history. While pointing to the significance of avatars in respect to Christ, Parrinder observes that they could be considered as the "preparation" for Christ. At the same time, he also notes the fundamental difference between Jesus and avatars: the avatars are not truly historical while Christ is. He remarks as follows:

> The Avatars of Hinduism lead up to Christ and they are valuable preparations for him. More easily than Jews or Greeks, Indians can understand the coming of God in human

[808] *Dei Verbum*,2.

> form. Yet this very ease has great dangers, and the casual way in which many modern Hindus consider Christ as just another Avatar thereby deprives him of significance and challenge. The avatars, after all, were a flashing kaleidoscope of theophanies, coming and going in the endless cycle of ages. They were never really men.[809]

9 Jesus is "Historically Real"

In considering the historical reality of Jesus we can only conclude that any valid Christology must be always a Jesus-Christology in the fullest sense of the term. Indeed, as observed by de Lubac, historicity is to be seen as a necessary element of human salvation seeing that the human race is called to exist in history:

> If the salvation offered by God is in fact the salvation of the human race, since this human race lives and develops in time, any account of this salvation will naturally take a historical form – it will be the history of the penetration of humanity by Christ.[810]

It is also the assurance and evidence of human salvation offered by God for us who are in history. The person of Jesus Christ and the events related to him: incarnation, life, passion and death being historical, they diverge from and surpass the myths and human imagination. The historicity gives much significance to the Christ-event that a myth can never have. It is to be admitted as noted in the previous section, that the historicity provides some sort of validity to the Christ-event as "real and true" which the Hindu figures do not have. The very affirmation "Jesus is historical" means that he is not like the Hindu avatars who remain above this world and history 'pretending' to be human. He does not simply remain a prajapati of the human interior vision the sages saw, but the Real Prajapati, the Lord of the Universe, who is offered 'before our eyes' as perfect priest and victim.

The Christ event signifies that this world and history are not something awful and thus to be negated and to be rejected. The world and its history are to be appreciated positively, because God shares our history and fate in Jesus. The world and man in history acquire meaning and value in the person of Jesus Christ by his incarnation and thus Jesus Christ, as W. Kasper writes, is "not only the final self-definition of God, but the final definition of the world and man.[811] But the world is not without blemish; it is in need of divinisation and

[809] G. Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, *A Comparison of Indian and Christian Beliefs*,183-184.
[810] Henri de Lubac *Catholicism*. *A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*, (Translated from French by Lancelot C. Sheppard), (London Oates & Washbourne 1950), 69.
[811] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 2009),185.

sanctification. This is underlined by K. Rahner who writes, "the incarnation appears as the necessary and permanent beginning of the divinization of the world as a whole."[812]

In addition, the Christ-event becomes the centre of history theologically. Christ not only becomes the centre of history but also its beginning and final point, so we can say that all of history finds its realization in Christ. The historical implication of the Christ-event makes it unique. W. Pannenburg tries to bridge the historical particularity of the Christ-event with the whole of human history with his idea of '*Prolepsis*' (anticipation). History reaches its fulfilling destiny only at the 'End' of history; but in the destiny of Jesus the 'End' of all history has happened in advance, as *prolepsis*. Jesus is the anticipated end and not just the middle of history. It is this *proleptic* character of the Christ-event that makes it unique in history with its universal relevance. Its content cannot be fundamentally revised by new events in history; it is unsurpassable and thus unique. Thus, Jesus Christ, being historically real, has unique significance and bears unique identity, especially in contrast to the mythical figures of Hinduism. This uniqueness is not something to be viewed only as surpassing but diverging in a unique manner. The identity of mythical figures is attributed and given by the sages; whereas that of Christ is existentially real. Christ is not just a symbolic figure like Rama or Krishna or any other avatars or gurus, nor a product of human religiosity as Prajapati or an illusory (*maya*) fact, but God's response to human longing.

Jesus stands apart from Hindu figures. His function and person are not equal to those of these figures. In other words, what is implied by the title Christ in the functional and personal levels is not the same as that of the Hindu titles: guru, avatar and prajapati. Not only by the universality and the saving aspect, but also in his person, Christ differs from these Hindu figures. Jesus by his very title Christ, not only surpasses these figures, but also diverges from them in a unique way. Christ's solidarity with his fellow human beings resides at the deepest level. In Jesus Christ, the perfect encounter of God and man, the very consciousness of Christ is the consciousness of the word made flesh.[813]

10 The Forgiving God

The forgiving love of God, expressed in and through Jesus, is totally new in Jesus**,** unlike all the prophets of the Old Testament, and in our context all the Indian gurus, avatars, and Prajapati.as he is the one who has the authority to forgive sins. While Jesus is given the title of avatar, guru, or Prajapati in Indian Christology, he stands with this surpassing uniqueness

[812] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith,*18.
[813] Henri de Lubac, "The Light of Christ" in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 20.

of the forgiving love of God. As we have noted, we cannot ignore the fact that almost all the avatars reveal 'divine justice' through annihilating the wicked and protecting only the right. In other words, the avatars are not conscious of saving the wicked and sinners: they act for the good and against the wicked, whereas in Jesus the forgiving love of God is revealed in a surprising manner.

As we have noted once, it is to be remembered here the avatars are mostly depicted as the protectors of Aryan castes against Dravidians and hence are coloured by the Aryan-Dravidian conflict, and consequently they can never be the proponents of universal, forgiving love. We cannot deny the historic-cultural fact that "the good" protected by the avatars in most cases are the Aryan superior castes against "the wicked" inferior castes. Besides, in *Sanathanadharma*, in the Hindu vision, there is no forgiveness of sin, as everything is considered as the result of *karma*, and hence unchangeable even by Brahman. If you do the good acts you will get the *moksha* (heaven), otherwise you will receive punishment, and thus must continue to be under the cycle of rebirth. Any discussion about similarities between Hinduism and Christianity needs to explain at the outset theological concepts that have a shared currency in both. This is particularly important when following the path mapped out by Henri de Lubac, who, as a Christological inclusivist, tries to show that salvation is possible for all people of religious faith.

11 The presence of Grace: Comparative understanding in Hinduism and Christianity

Rudolf Otto, the German philosopher, warned against drawing parallels too easily when comparing religions and stressed the need of highlighting the differences as well as similarities. He declares his belief that Christianity is still not suitably equipped for assessing and understanding other religions. In addition, the attitudes of detachment employed in scientific study of other religions are not satisfactory while the usual categorisation of true and false, of divine gift and human effort, of revelation and human speculation are also inadequate. We require a new level of understanding and communication, if we are develop a method of reaching the reality of the concepts and vocabulary of other religions. This is where Henri de Lubac's approach of sensitive auscultation is helpful, allowing us to delve into the depths of the similarities of the respective beliefs. While there is no concrete comparison in Hinduism to the death of Jesus there are some parallels to the Christian concept of grace and of human beings requiring assistance to return to the fold after falling away.

In the Bible we learn of the grace of God in certain historical events in both the Old Testament and New Testament. We see deliverance from Egypt, the covenant of Sinai, and the return from Exile, all of which manifest the grace of God in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, grace came through Jesus Christ, and is impossible to separate from Him. This is the major difference in Christianity and Hinduism. While in P N Srinivasachair's exposition of *prapatti parasada* and *visvasa* (self-surrender, grace and faith), we hear similar references to the Christian way of thinking but there is no mention of an historic occasion or person. In *Bhakti* cult grace falls far short of what Tillich is referring to when he says that grace permeates everyone's life.[814] While grace is accepted as a gift from the divine, received in faith and central to the continuous relationship of trust and communion with the divine, it is not rooted in history or a person as in Christianity. There is no evidence that the thinking of *prajapati* and the uncaused grace of the divine leads to waywardness in Hinduism.[815]

In Hinduism the sense of obedience and obligation as the human side of the divine movement of grace is not considered a major issue. We see grace portrayed in the New Testament as experienced between the devotee and Christ and also between devotees. A faith community is essential in the acquisition and imparting of grace as understood in Christianity. The group character of devotional life is seen in some forms of the *Bhakti* cult as solely a deeply emotional attachment to the deity. There is a sense of condemnation because of humanity's moral unworthiness and the divine help coming to the aid of human beings in their brokenness. With regard to the differences we see two opposing views of the gap between divinity and humanity. In Hinduism, the human self is actually united with the divine but is prevented from fully realizing this deep communion because of worldly restrictions.[816]

12. Christian Salvation Differs from Hindu View of Liberation

The Hindu vision of the world, man and history is related to its concept of liberation**,** which entails primarily freedom from the bondage of re-birth caused by our *karma*. It is also connected to the concept of "twice-born" which in turn is connected with the caste-context and re-birth. A low-caste person has no right to be initiated by a guru and to become twice-

[814] P. J. Tillich, *Morality and Beyond* (New York: Peter Lang,1963), 62.
[815] The Southern School asserted the extreme view that God even loves the sin in the sinner although it seems it was done, not to excuse or justify indiscipline but to be logically consistent.
[816] Mariasusai Dhevamony, *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 378.

born. By contrast the "adopted son-ship" of Christianity presents salvation as given freely and open for all regardless of any human boundaries. Hindu avatars are frequently described as "saviours" on account of their establishment of *dharma,* which consists in the protection of the good, namely the superior castes, and the destruction of "the wicked" represented by the lower castes. The contrast with Christ Saviour is stark.

Unlike Christianity, Hinduism tends not to display representations of its supreme deity but rather of a number of chief deities in multiple forms.[817] Heather Elgood, writes, "Religious ritual in Hinduism revolves around the devotion and ultimate identification of the worshipper with God. Hindu art is created to assist this process and combines imagery and allegorical symbolism to represent the deity, to make visible the invisible."[818] There is a positive aspect to the relationship between the deity and the follower, which can grow and develop, allowing a movement towards "salvation" in these religions. The concepts of repeating ages where death and life exist in harmony and are not diametrically opposed to each other may well be significant in shaping Christian reflections from the topic and in possibly creating different perspectives on death, dying and eternal life, perhaps. It seems to be important that Christians continue to insist that the physical body and the physical world in salvation and redemption are essential witness to God's love for all aspects of creation. Accepting this, obligates us into care for this cosmos in which we live now, to develop it and protect it in every way we can. We are all called to action to protect and nurture all of humanity, while encouraging all of humanity to protect and nurture the earth, which provides for us through God's kindness and goodness. Adopting these principles would, undoubtedly, be an appropriate soteriological starting point, in developing dialogue that would increase our understanding of other religions, but also, almost certainly our own.

While there are a number of similarities between Hindu figures and Jesus, Jesus surpasses them. Although there is some convergence between Jesus and the Hindu figures in their teaching and in establishing a divine presence, He consistently outshines and exceeds them, perfecting Hindu ethical teachings through his promotion of unconditional and universal love. The Indian vision of human life, understood by such concepts as caste, *karma*, and *dharma*, do not suffice to describe a universal love regardless of racial distinction. They are supposed to liberate, but in truth they are in need of liberation by a perfect guru or true avatar who can correct and perfect them. In other words, the millions of

[817] K. J. Largen, "An Exercise in Comparative Soteriology", 2-4.
[818] Heather Elgood, *Hinduism and the Religious Arts* (London: Cassell, 1999), 14.

Indian people are invited to see their perfect guru, true avatar, and real Prajapati in nobody else but in Jesus Christ.

13. Henri de Lubac Revisited

At the conclusion of this exploration of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels, we reconnect briefly with de Lubac's starting point for dialogue with other religions. De Lubac holds to the belief that the universality of salvation is accomplished in Christ:

> The grace of Christ is of universal application, and no soul of good will lacks the concrete means of salvation, in the fullest sense of the world. There is no man, no 'unbeliever' whose supernatural conversion to God is not possible from the dawn of reason onward.[819]

Here we discuss how he arrived at this vision which was so different from those of the theological circles of his time. The face of the inclusivist theologian in de Lubac is evident in *Catholicism*, where, holding the views of the Fathers and of St. Thomas Aquinas, he clearly states that the grace of Christ is universal – not lacking in any soul of good will. According to de Lubac, we must believe that there is not one unbeliever for whom a supernatural conversion would not be possible. This belief demands that we consider de Lubac's understanding of the relationship of unbelievers to the Church and a means of salvation for them

14 Salvation Outside Church Membership

The questions for de Lubac are connected to universal salvation and authentic Catholic unity and related to these are issues concerning salvation outside the Church. He posits:

> Where is the obligation to seek the additional light of the Church? If an implicit Christianity is sufficient for one who knows no other, where should we go in our quest for an explicit one? Or if every man can be saved through a religion that he unwittingly possesses, how can we require him to acknowledge this religion explicitly by professing Christianity and submitting to the Catholic Church?[820]

De Lubac deals with this particular problematic in chapter VII of Catholicism and begins from a position of pointing out some of the errors regarding the idea of being 'saved' and 'not saved'. De Lubac's conviction as to the catholicity or universality of salvation precedes the Second Vatican Council's teaching on same. In two lectures in 1941, directed against the raging antisemitism of Naziism, he not only asserts the possibility of salvation for the whole of humanity (not just Jews) but delves courageously into questions that arise in consequence:

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[819] *Catholicism*, 219-220.
[820] *Catholicism,* 221.

why is there need for the Church to engage in mission and where is the necessity for Christianity?[821] It seems clear from these lectures that, long before Vatican II, de Lubac was wrestling with the meaning of "Church" in the teaching "Extra ecclesia nulla salus."

These were by no means easy questions for de Lubac and for this writer there is profound significance in his acknowledging, in Theology in History" (1945): "It may be the case that we have let some error slip surreptitiously into the very givens of the problem. We must then go back to the point of departure and revise these givens."[822] He proceeds to ask if the notion of salvation that is at their foundation is any good?[823]

Whilst we now have the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes,* we remain with de Lubac's dilemma with respect to the Church's understanding of Salvation and its teaching on Original Sin; its "point of departure" and its "givens" remain to be re-visited. In Chapter Two we touched on these issues with respect not just to de Lubac but to Rahner's post-Council deliberations. With respect to this thesis it seems clear that much greater clarity on these issues is specifically necessary so as to equip the Church for its mandate from Vatican II to dialogue with other religions. In Chapter Four we alluded to the difficulties for Hindus not just with regard to Christian belief in the divinity of Christ, but also the clear disparity in respect of soteriology; Hindus have great difficulty with the Christian teaching pertaining to original sin resulting in the loss of man's union with God and its needing to be restored; incarnation and salvation were only necessary therefore for the undoing of previous damage. For them the divine in the human is a given, not requiring restoration. We can confidently assume that today de Lubac would be urging that soteriology needs now to be done in dialogue with other religions. The ultimate need is for a Christology that liberates the Risen Christ from being the 'property' of Christians and places him at the centre of salvation for humanity.

In Catholicism, de Lubac view of the Church involves the totality of the human race called to be members of the Body of Christ.[824] In clarifying roles within the Church de Lubac is at pain to distinguish between the head and the members as one of subordination where Christ leads

[821] Lectures entitled "The Theological Foundations of the Missions." January 1941. See, Henri de Lubac, "The Theological Foundations of the Missions," in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996).
[822] Henri De Lubac, "*Theology in History"* (1945), trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996).393
[823] Ibid. 394
[824] This is similar in many ways to the statement in *Lumen Gentium* 1,7: "For by communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation."

and governs, and the Church submits. There is no confusion between head and members. This difference is evident in the fact that despite knowing that the Church is holy, she is sinful because of her members.[825]

The main question confronting us is "What is the relationship of nonbelievers to the Church?" As we noted earlier de Lubac pointed out how "salvation" has a historical context that is not bounded by specific periods of history. Equally we need to note that the "Church" also has an historical dimension. According to Francis A. Sullivan we can summarise the thinking of the Early Fathers before Augustine in three ways. [826] The first relates to both Jews and Gentiles who had lived before Christ who according to these writers had the possibility of salvation; the second relates to those who had separated themselves from the Church through heresy or schism and so by their own choosing had placed themselves beyond the salvific grace of the Church; the third refers to those pagans and Jews who, towards the end of the fourth century when Christianity had become the official religion of the empire embraced by the majority, adhered to their own beliefs.[827] It was against these pagans and Jews that the term "No salvation outside the church" began to be used. This judgement was based on the assumption that such pagans and Jews had no reason to reject the Christian message which was clearly true. Francis Sullivan sums up the situation thus: In no case was the exclusion of people from salvation seen as an arbitrary judgement on the part of God."[828] This latter point is very important and one that accords with the inclusivist approach of Henri de Lubac.

In considering this, de Lubac rejects a number of positions such as the one which denies grace to nonbelievers, salvation by way of recourse to miracles and the possibility of a natural salvation which would see colossal numbers of humanity consigned to Limbo.[829] De Lubac portrayed the salvation of everyone as being achieved through Christ who provides some revelation of the Father to everyone and that the grace of Christ is of universal application. In de Lubac's view nonbelievers will be saved through the mysterious bonds which unite them with the faithful. [830] Nonbelievers are saved because they are an integral

[825] De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*,24.
[826] Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002) ,27.
[827] Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response,*28-29
[828] Ibid.,30.
[829] Catholicism, 108.
[830] Susan K Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Edinburg. Wm.B Eerdmans Publishing Co & T&T Clark Ltd,1998),89-92.

part of that humanity which is to be saved.[831] Consequently, it is possible for those who are not exteriorly connected to the Church to be saved, but their salvation is through the Church due to the unity of the human race saved by Christ.[832] In other words, salvation is through the unity of the body. Those who find themselves outside the normal conditions for salvation are actually saved through their connection to the faithful.[833] In this way de Lubac's belief in the unity of the human race allows him to account both for the necessity of Church for salvation and indeed, for the salvation of those who appear to be outside the Church. [834]

De Lubac goes on to make clear the relationship between distinction and unity, personal and universal and draws on this dogmatic paradox. The paradox is that "the distinction between the different parts of a being stands out the more clearly as the union of these parts is closer. The less they are "fragments" the more they are "members", and the greater is their convergence into unity."[835] This pilgrimage of the church leads to the importance of history in de Lubac's theology. For him, "the stages of history: they are in reality stages of an essentially collective salvation."[836] De Lubac discusses the true nature of the catholicity of the Church. He says the Church does not already contain the final unity that is its goal in Christ. But he reminds us that a Christian must never confuse the church with the kingdom of God. History provides the stage for the drama of salvation, and, consequently, for de Lubac, the church, as the temporal vehicle by which humans travel to that natural reunification with God and each other, is also extremely important as the channel to salvation.[837] The implications of de Lubac's perspective on salvation through the Church is as important as her mystical reality apart from her visible existence in time. A certain Church tradition has posed the problem in terms of the horizontal relationship of the other religions to Christianity or to the mystery of the Church. According to de Lubac the problem of "salvation of unbelievers" has confronted the Christian conscience in tragic guise as a consequence of successive discoveries in geography and history. But this problem has been solved by most theologians in the true Catholic sense.[838]

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[831] Catholicism ,116.
[832]This poses different questions for us regarding nature and grace. If humanity is created as a whole and redemption involves the restoration of the lost unity of the whole, this amounts to a natural salvation. On the other hand the original unity of human race is graced and restoration to unity is at the same time a restoration to grace. For details see, Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac,*91.
[833] Catholicism,116.
[834] Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac,* 92.
[835]Ibid.,.328
[836]Ibid.,148
[837]Ibid.,236.
[838]Ibid.,217

De Lubac acknowledges that "outside Christianity, humanity tries to collect its members into unity" on its own. Humans attempt, socially and sometimes even spiritually (e.g., through non-Christian religions), to restore the lost unity among themselves. It is only Christ, through the church who can bring one to salvation, therefore the question must be asked, what may happen to those outside the visible church on earth? De Lubac's response to this question is neither "they will not be saved" nor "they may be saved,"[839] instead, he disregards the basis of the question itself. He sees Salvation as being communal action which results in the re-establishment of the unity of the human race with God and among its members. He also quotes St. Justin Martyr that "The seed of the Word is innate in the whole human race."[840] Accordingly, the seed is planted in each individual of the numberless generations across the countless ages. Lubac addresses the individual's responsibility in the economy of salvation and the demands therein:

> We must cooperate in the collective salvation of the world by taking part, each in accordance with his own vocation, in the construction of that great building of which we must be at once the workmen and the stones; at the same time we must cooperate, by the impact of our whole Christian life, in the individual salvation of those who remain apparently 'unbelievers. Two duties these that are interrelated: two ways, if we can so speak, of bringing redemption to maturity.[841]

The church is, therefore, crucially important for the very possibility of salvation itself. Salvation is not about which human beings are saved and which are not, but it is about the fact that the church clearly sees the goal of salvation and cooperates in history with the saving initiative of Christ. In other words, there must be a community to cooperate with Christ, otherwise Christ's salvific work affects no one. Without the church, salvation would be impossible. De Lubac avoids simple solutions to this tension and he emphasize that salvation outside the church is part of Catholic tradition and this doctrine complements rather than contradicts the doctrine of the necessity of the Church since it is part of Catholic tradition. De Lubac neither confirms nor denies Cyprian's famous axiom that "outside the church there is no salvation."[842] He takes pains to express himself on this matter by restoring the original unity in the light of Christ's redemptive work.

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[839] Ibid.,236.
[840] Justin, *Second Apology*, c. 8, n. I: cited in *Catholicism*, 283.
[841] Ibid., 241
[842]Ibid..,234.

De Lubac sees the stages of history as the "stages of an essentially collective salvation."[843] De Lubac then discussed these stages of history and their place in salvation history "Amid this universal chorus Christianity alone continues to assert the transcendent destiny of man and the common destiny of mankind. The whole history of the world is a preparation for this destiny."[844] De Lubac acknowledges that "Outside Christianity, again, humanity tries to collect its members into unity."[845] As already stated, he explores the question itself and points out that the salvation is communal and believes that the Church is necessary for the very possibility of salvation itself. Since the Church is on a pilgrimage through history, the actions of its pilgrims take on a "special dignity and an awful gravity.[846]

14.1 Unity of Humanity

De Lubac suggests that there is a specific unity in the Church. "Unity is interiority, unity is in no way confusion, any more than distinction is separation."[847] He recognizes the wisdom of what many others had said, "distinguish in order to unite", but adds that "unite in order to distinguish" is also inevitable. The result of unity is not a loss of identity but a gaining of freedom, a strengthening of one's being. De Lubac rephrases "the paradox as union differentiates and solidarity binds together. A person is neither an idealised individual nor a transcendent nomad".[848] In the midst of the dichotomy between the individual and the community is de Lubac's understanding of unity. For de Lubac one must distinguish in order to unite, and indeed, unite in order to distinguish.

> Man, no more loses himself or disintegrates by becoming an integral part of that spiritual Body of which he must be a member than he does by submitting himself to God and uniting himself with him. On the contrary, he frees himself, he is strengthened in being. And as St. Augustine said: *solidabor in Te, Deus meus*,[849] so St. Ildephonsus of Toledo could say with equal truth: *in unitate ipsius Ecclesiae solidari*.[850] Union differentiates. Solidarity binds together.[851]

It is an undeniable truth that an isolated person is meaningless, and humanity needs a gathering place that is God. According to de Lubac if there is "becoming" there must be fulfilment, and if there must be fulfilment there must always have been something else

[843] Ibid., 148
[844] Ibid., 141
[845]Ibid., 225.
[846]Ibid., 232.
[847]Ibid.,230.
[848]Ibid., 331.
[849] I am made firm in you, my God.
[850] To be made firm in the unity of the Church herself.
[851] Catholicism, 331.

besides becoming.[852] Humanity without that gathering place leads to alienation. Integrally connected, for de Lubac, with this 'social catechism' is the mystery of the cross. The final paradox is that the mystery of new life is bound with the mystery of suffering and death.[853] It can be argued that de Lubac has captured the fundamental idea underlying the concept of unity. The logic of his argument arises from his capacity for focusing on and maintaining the idea of unity in all things. De Lubac arrives at his conclusions about the Catholic Church by drawing on three main themes: Man, in the image of God, the Church as a visible body of Christ and the sacrament of the Eucharist as a means of salvation and unity.

15. **The Lubacian inclusive vision**

It is de Lubac's conviction that the light of the Word illumines all people in a thousand anonymous forms and the grace of Christ can be everywhere at work. Every human being is created in the image of God; the unity of humanity follows; and so too does the link between all human beings and Christ.[854] De Lubac's anthropology and Christology are of a piece. Every soul is naturally Christian due to being created in the image of God:

> Let us say, then, borrowing the language of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, that every soul is naturally Christian, not because it possesses already an equivalent or, as it were, a first stage of Christianity, but because the image of God shines in the depths of this soul; or rather, because it is itself this image, and that, burning to be reunited with its Model, it can be so only through Christ.[855]

What de Lubac is suggesting here is that there is a pre-Christian character in the human person in virtue of creation in the image of God. The persons of other religious traditions "can be saved because they are an integral part of that humanity which is to be saved."[856] But salvation is possible only in and through Christ; He is the Mediator enabling the human person to move from image to likeness; from "natural dignity" to "supernatural dignity." De Lubac vividly articulates the intrinsic connection of every person to Christ and he sees the grace of Christ is universal.[857] His vision of the reconstituted unity of humanity by referring to the concept of the New Man,[858] which he understands as the Mystery of Christ: 'This mystery of the new Man is in the highest sense of the word the mystery of Christ.'[859] In the

[852]Ibid.,.355
[853]Ibid., 368
[854]Gen 1:26-27.
[855]*Catholicism*, 168.
[856] *Catholicism*, 232-33.
[857] *Christ and Creation*, 438.
[858] Eph 2: 15.
[859] *Catholicism,* 47.

Indian Christological context, the historical nature of the Christ-event, with its universal character, stand as the starting point for engaging with Hinduism.

When we deal with the historical person of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, we cannot ignore the fact that he, according to Christian faith, is not a past event who lives only in human memory. He is not someone like the prophets of history who left their message for us and are gone for ever. While the Christ-event is historical, anyone who lives today has the possibility of a valid Christ-experience. He is not like the avatars who left the devotees for ever and now live only in memories; so too with the gurus. Prajapati remains only in the pages of the *Vedic* descriptions. Even those avatars who acquired human nature left it forever whereas Christ's humanity is in a transformed, glorified state. Again, no avatar, or guru in Hinduism is universally applicable in the sense that he/she bears a universal mission, but their function is limited to some particular people for a particular period. Christ as the unique and universal saviour not only surpasses these figures but is radically different from them.

Jesus Christ goes beyond that which Hindu figures can encompass. He cannot be fully expressed through them; adding prefixes such as "unique" or affixes such as "par excellence" to Hindu titles are of limited usefulness. The titles are helpful but should not be allowed to restrict Indian Christology. They can only have a relative significance; they are neither the final point in salvation and liberation, nor the assured means for it, but rather can serve as indicators of the assured means and end, Jesus Christ, in whom the God-man relationship is absolutely established. They cannot adequately describe who Jesus is. While there are certain risks and dangers in Indian Christology which might limit the person and mission of Jesus, it should not hinder us in our Christological endeavour, but rather challenge us to handle it with care and prudence.

16. De Lubac's Christocentric Vision

In India, though it is not yet evident at present in villages, large urban societies are influenced by a new-age religious outlook. Our reason for presenting Jesus as real avatar as highlighted in previous chapter is not to satisfy this viewpoint, but rather to portray the uniqueness of Christ which emphasises his unique person and mission and a definitive option for Christ. De Lubac's Christocentric approach is the mainstay of this chapter and is very much in tune with his inclusivist' vision for the Indian Church to be faithful to Christocentric dialogue. He categorically states that the grace of Christ is universal and present in any soul of good will.

He implicitly believes that there is not one unbeliever for whom a supernatural conversion would not be possible. He also posits the possibility of finding saints among the pagans:

> We consider, nevertheless, with St Irenaeus, that the Son, from the very beginning and in every part of the world, gives a more or less obscure revelation of the Father to every creature, and that he can be the 'Salvation of those who are born outside the Way'. We believe, with St Cyprian, St Hilary and St Ambrose, that the divine Sun of Justice shines on all and for all. We teach, with St John Chrysostom, that grace is diffused everywhere and that there is no soul that cannot feel its attraction. With Origen, St Jerome and St Cyril of Alexandria we refuse to assert that any man is born without Christ. And, lastly, we willingly allow, with St Augustine… that divine mercy was always at work among all peoples, and that even the pagans have had their 'hidden saints' and their prophets.[860]

17. Conclusion

Our intention has been to shed a critical but respectful light on Hinduism in the manner modelled by de Lubac in his treatment of Buddhism. While valuing other religions, de Lubac considers Christianity as the only religion of grace. Yet they cannot be discarded because humanity has a transcendental destiny, for which the whole history of man is only the preparation.[861] We hope that our arguing in this thesis for the inclusion of our Hindu brethren in salvation and the recognition of the preparatory significance of Hinduism, resonates with de Lubac's vision.

In our exploration of Hinduism in this text we have critically explored the historical and cultural contexts which have shaped Hinduism as we know it today. That critique included not just the historical and cultural legacies which have enhanced the Hindu religion, but those that have impacted negatively upon it. As India is non-European, we are especially conscious not just of the Western garb which Christianity wears, but of how Roman Imperial history influenced the establishment of basic tenets of the Christian Faith as it has come to us. We accept that we may have relied too exclusively on the eight Councils of the first millennium which were philosophical and theological in their articulation of the Christian dogmas. However, de Lubac's Christocentric approach counteracts any perception of failure and his 'inclusivist' vision' has become a beacon in portraying the Indian Church as being faithful to Christocentric dialogue with Hinduism. De Lubac's absolute belief in the unity of the human race allowed him to account both for the necessity of Church for salvation and indeed, for the salvation of those who appear to be outside the Church. As a result, in de

[860] *Catholicism*, 108.
[861] *Catholicism,* 111-116.

Lubac's soteriology the concept of the mystical body is inclusive as opposed to exclusive. The image of the Church as the bride of Christ maintains a distinction between the Christ and the Church while expressing the close union between them.

Never before in the history of humanity have we at our disposal the means of communicating within and across religious traditions: never before did we have the urgent need for communication that is open, respectful, and aimed at a common purpose of mutual understanding against a background of growing secularism and indifference to religious values. Whatever about differences over specific points of theology there are many points of shared belief around concepts of human dignity, flawed human nature, God-initiated salvation, redemptive journeys and man's ultimate destiny in both Hinduism and Christianity. In the final chapter we will explore how these links might be strengthened going forward.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE APPLICATION OF LUBACIAN PRINCIPLES TO HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

1 Introduction

Having set out the cultural and inter-religious contexts for the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding between Hindus and Christians it is appropriate by way of a conclusion to indicate how at a practical level what forms such engagements might take and how such encounters meet Henri de Lubac's core Principles of Auscultation and Catholicity**.**

Practical approaches are required in the domain of theology and we cite examples of such initiatives undertaken by the Church and suggest a framework of definitive steps that are warranted. We reflected on the current state of inter-religious dialogue in India which is a story of both progression and regression with account needing to be taken of both. In particular there is the primacy that must be accorded to dialogue in the arena of day to day interaction between Christians and Hindus, informed and guided by theological deliberations but outside the halls of academia. With this in mind we take note of the voices and writings of Hindus who claim no scholarship but only a dedication to their religion.

The existence since the beginnings of Christianity of the Syriac churches in Kerala, with a foundational history of groundedness in Indian culture and mutually respectful relationships with Hindu neighbours, is of pivotal relevance to Hindu - Christian dialogue throughout India today. For this writer, Priest of the Syro-Malabar Church and for whom the locus of his engagement in dialogue is Kerala, the learnings from history and the on-going legacy of respectful co-existence of Christians and Hindus there, are of particular importance. We will offer below a brief history of that experience of convergence and of how, regrettably, it suffered interruption.

The points of convergence examined in detail in chapters four and five indicate that the ground is fertile. There is a profound connection between Hinduism and Christianity that has yet to be fully appreciated. They converge in the shared desire for peace and search for salvation. Before suggesting ways of moving the process forward and outlining what shape our mission and dialogue may take in the future, we will attempt to shed further light on the salient features of the two traditions that would promote a mutual understanding and *rapprochement*.

1.1. Similarities and Differences in the Rich Traditions of Hinduism and Christianity

In our attempt to promote inter faith dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity it is important to identify areas where the two traditions converge but also where they diverge.[862] This realistic approach ensures that we do not get carried away with false optimism and that we approach the task respectful of inherent problems. While Christians come in many varieties, Hindu marks a group of traditions.[863]

God is beyond definition, name, attributes, words, language. All 'God-talk' in human history has involved wrestling with language, resorting to poetry, metaphor, and creativity. All of it is, unavoidably, culturally contextualised. This is the case not just as regards Hinduism. Language, of course, carries layers of meaning which is why de Lubac's Principle of Auscultation is so important in inter-faith dialogue. God is more than Creator. While accepting our human incapacity to comprehend the person(s) of God we need to appreciate that God is not fully comprehensible in either religion. Acceptance of this should promote a general acceptance of God's inscrutability.

Part of de Lubac's Christology,[864] which sees the historical Jesus as our best revelation of the Christian Triune God could find acceptance by Hindus. God maintains an intimate relationship with humans and nature. This is a fruitful source of inter-faith dialogue given that both traditions believe in Divine providence. Human beings, according to Hindu belief, are emanations from the Supreme Being and their destiny is to rest in the Supreme Being. While Christianity does not concur with belief in emanations, we should remember that there are many pathways to union with God and the shared belief in humankind's ultimate destiny provides an important meeting of minds between both Faiths.

The message of Christ proclaims the equality of all human beings as preached in the Beatitudes. There should be no stratifications, no castes. In former times the problem of 'caste' was a real stumbling block to the Christian promotion of The Beatitudes. Fortunately, as noted earlier, many Hindus are beginning to move away from the old 'caste' mentality.

As previously stated, Christ as *Avatar* is problematic. Hindus find it difficult to believe the absolute claim of Christ as the unique way to God. This point of divergence is real but in

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[862] Harold Coward, *Hindu- Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), 20.
[863] Francis X. Clooney, S. J. "Prologue: Reflections on Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* Vol. 20. no.2, (Spring, 2012),7.
[864] De Lubac sees conditions for contemplating the past; the great diversity of the theories which have been professed in the course of Christian history and how these theories depend on social, cultural conditions. See *Catholicism*, 322.

itself it should not preclude dialogue about the centrality of Christ in Christian belief. Christians can point to other persons of lesser rank such as Mary and the saints who assist in finding a path to God. It is accepted that Caste is embedded in religious and cultural narrative and therefore not easily amenable to socio-political critique. However, as already noted, the caste system is beginning to be looked at again as a too restrictive category. Admittedly much still needs to be done but through inter-faith dialogue Hindus are invited to reflect on this practice.

We do well to remember that the Hindu concept of history is cyclical. Hebrew culture offers a linear concept of history which has also been adopted by Christianity. Jesus proclaims the possibility of a social transformation of the world where justice and equality reign as in the Kingdom of God. The Hindu concept of liberation is constrained as a result of its cyclical view of history; the most that a person might hope for is to achieve a higher level, following reincarnation, and ultimately to find rest in the Supreme Being. Liberation then has to do with existence after death. There would seem therefore to be limited (if any) space for working for a better world. The Christian message is at least as much about life before death and calls on its adherents to be engaged in the struggle for social justice and equality in the world. It is fundamental to the message of Christ and it is perhaps noteworthy that Hindus admire Christians for their charity and for the provision of institutions of care. However, the idea of engagement in confronting the underlying causes of poverty, unjust systems, seems alien. In the context of the caste system being one that is as inimical to principles of equality as any that humanity has devised, this is not surprising. This is then a fundamental point of divergence where we must consider if human beings are equal or if they are subject to ranking or stratification.

History as linear or Cyclical;[865] the heightened awareness of the need to take account of Jewish tradition as 'parent' of the Christian faith, brought to the surface the radically opposed philosophical perspectives on history between Christians and Hindus. It was from the Jews that the Western world inherited the linear understanding of history.[866] The cyclical perspective, which is very old, sentences humanity to living on a wheel from which it cannot get off. Escaping from it seems at best a distant possibility for Hindus. Being a philosophical issue, it was outside the scope of this study but given the theological implications it is an area

[865] For details see, Paul Ricoeur, "The History of Religions and the Phenomenology of Time Consciousness," in *The History of Religions: Retrospect*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Macmillan,1985),30. Also see Lawrence W. Fagg, *Two Faces of Time* (Wheaton III: Theosophical Publishing House,1985).
[866] Mircea Elaide, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Pantheon Books,1954), 26.

deserving of study. It would seem not possible for Christian theology to do other than insist that Incarnation places humanity on a journey towards new possibilities and new relationships. We are not sentenced to being imprisoned in the past unless we choose to be. We are free to be history-makers. But a cyclical view of history seems fundamental to Hinduism. Clearly, this different view of history and one's proximate or ultimate destiny within a cyclical or linear view creates problems for political and social progress. However, it is not a barrier to dialogue. Rather it invites greater application of the Lubacian principle of Auscultation in a non-judgemental way as a means of promoting mutual understanding.

It is important to stress that both traditions, theology of Trinity & *Trimurti* concepts are essentially about God as relational, as is the Hindu Divine Couple concept. Both traditions respect complexity and relationality within the divine simplicity. For Christians, this is manifest in the doctrine of the Trinity, while for Hindus a more likely form of relationality is the male- female relationship of a divine couple. Either way, the divine person is one, yet relational.[867] Within a programme of Hindu-Christian dialogue there are some claims common to both. God is omniscient, omnipotent, without beginning; God can be recognized as the maker of the world. Such a God is accessible, loving, and intent on the good of the human race. These general concepts present numerous approaches to a shared understanding that do not threaten either belief. Vaishnava Hindu and Christian usage of terms such as "avatara" and "incarnation" reveal a shared understanding of God as being involved in the world, as being transcendent and at the same time immanent.[868]

We realised that in terms of deep listening and dialogue the rich traditions of Hinduism and Christianity, surrounding core believes is a large and complex area. Hence, the exploration of the fundamental features of Hinduism with particular reference to the titles which relate to the Hindu concepts of God, man, the world and human liberation have enriched our inter-faith understanding. There is already a precedence for trying to associate Hindu concepts of divinity with the person of Jesus. Among the Hindu scholars of the Renaissance movement were strongly attracted to the person of Christ and who tried to comprehend and present Jesus within the context of their religious background. It is very important within the context of inter-faith dialogue to uphold the centrality of Christ in our traditions and to avoid the danger of syncretism.

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[867] Francis X. Clooney, S. J. "Prologue: Reflections on Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue" in Journal *of Vaishnava Studies,* Vol.20, no 2 (Spring, 2012),10.
[868] Clooney, "Prologue: Reflections on Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue,"10.

1.2 Dialogue: A Central Tenet of Hinduism

According to Graham M. Schweig Dialogue holds a profoundly important place in the practices and theological vision of the Chaitanya school of *Vaishnavism*.[869] Dialogue itself is a vitally important part of the practice and worship in the life of those committed to Krishna *bhakti* and it permeates every aspect of bhakti. Consequently, the onto-existential dimensions that emerge from a deeper theological understanding of *bhakti,* dialogue between persons of other faiths with persons of *bhakti* is not only possible but is an absolute necessity for the very practice of *bhakti* and a life fully lived in *bhakti*. It is in *bhakti* that dialogue becomes the basis of a genuine pluralism of faith.'[870] As a result of our study we now understand that "Dialogue" is not a recent discovery but has always been an essential part of Hinduism. [871] Contrary to what might have been believed previously dialogue was not invented by the Church or Vatican II but was always important in Hinduism even before it encountered Christianity. Those seeking understanding of world religions would have encountered a popular and much celebrated Hindu adage. This adage is often worded in the following way: "Truth is one. Paths are many".[872]

From the Hindu perspective, individuals should have freedom to practice their own faith as a matter of choice. No one should be tied down to only one faith and should be free to adopt the practice of various religions of his choice depending on his temperament, attitude and perception. This would create a climate in which all of us can live in peace and harmony.

Hindus have expressed openness towards and respect for other religions throughout its history. They have never claimed to be the exclusive possessors of truth. It is not necessary to be or become a Hindu to obtain salvation. They recognize revealing and saving powers in all great religions. Hindus respect all prophets and sages who come to guide humanity. In the context of the diversity of human needs, they hold that the great religions of the world are not only relevant but also necessary. Hindus have shown willingness to learn from other traditions. They are at liberty to draw inspiration from any source in their spiritual quest. Actually, the Hindu tradition encourages its followers to celebrate other ways of God-realization. Fundamental to Hinduism is the fact that there are no rigid barriers between itself

[869] See Graham M. Schweig, "Vaishnava Bhakti Theology and Interfaith Dialogue" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* 50-52.
[870]Schweig, "Vaishnava Bhakti Theology and Interfaith Dialogue," 51-52.
[871] Ibid.,52.
[872] See, Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 863.

and other religions. All religions are meant to lead us to the Ultimate Reality. This Ultimate Reality may be pursued differently by different people.

We recognise that "The voice of God reaches the spirit of man in a variety of ways, in a multiplicity of languages. One truth comes to expression in many ways of understanding."[873] This is a mirror of Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate* in particular. Recognition of this should not discourage us from pursuing inter-faith dialogue where voices in many shades and formats will share a common search for enlightenment.

As indicated in the General Introduction, at the outset we wanted to set the context of this study, the warrants for which are threefold; this researcher's Indian identity, the promulgation of the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, otherwise known as *Nostra Aetate*, by the Second Vatican Council in 1965 and the guidance of the late celebrated French theologian Henri de Lubac.

2 *Nostra Aetate* and Hindu Religion

It is worth noting that The Hindu religion gets a special mention in *Nostra Aetate* where it states:

> ….in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical enquiry...the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless ...often reflect a ray of truth that enlightens all people.[874]

This encouraging statement provided me with permission to explore ways and means of approaching Hinduism with a view to finding that 'ray of truth that enlightens all people'. However, we were also conscious of a caveat in *Nostra Aetate* where it goes on to state, 'Yet she (the Church) proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19) men find the fullness of their religious life.'[875]

These statements from *Nostra Aetate* provided the writer with the parameters of research – to seek out that 'ray of truth that enlightens all people', while respecting the teaching of the Magisterium in relation to the centrality of Christ in God's plan for salvation. Seeking out the ray of truth required me to explore Hindu sources as a way of initiating inter-

[873] See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 244.
[874] *Nostra Aetate*, no.2.
[875] *Nostra Aetate*, no.2.

faith religious dialogue: protecting the integrity of the Church's Christology required us to find a scholar whose theology deals with both questions. That scholar was the late French theologian Henri de Lubac.

We have emphasised a number of times throughout this thesis that the inclusiveness espoused by Henri de Lubac has been a guiding force in his approach to inter-faith dialogue, in this case between Hinduism and Christianity. Drawing once again on the wellsprings of Lubacian thought the author would present two examples of inclusive dialogue drawn from two beautiful and profound encounters that we find in the Gospels. They both describe how Jesus responded to requests for assistance from two outsiders. The first, (Mt.15: 21-28) describes the meeting between Jesus and the Canaanite woman who begged Jesus to cure her daughter, who was possessed by a demon. After refusing to help her because she did not belong to the House of Israel he relented and healed her daughter because of the faith displayed in her plea, "… even the dogs eat the crumbs that falls from the master's table." In the second, (Jn.4:4-30) Jesus' offer of living water to the Samaritan woman was beyond her expectation and scandalized the disciples. In Hindu terms these women were of a lower caste than Jesus and his disciples. Yet in two grace-filled moments, Jesus not only accepted them but offered them sympathy and understanding. These are not the only incidents in the Gospels where Jesus revealed the generosity and inclusiveness of the Father. Devotees of Hinduism would appreciate these two beautiful soft collisions of culture and belief that echo down through the centuries and speak to today's fragmented world. By instigating discussions on mutual understanding between the Christianity and Hinduism we are actually bringing the good news of the gospel to everyone involved, without imposing Christian principles and beliefs.

2.1 Lubacian Method of Dialogue in Hindu Encounter

Although Christianity and Hinduism appear in many ways to profess seemingly incompatible beliefs Henri de Lubac found ways of overcoming the problems which may well have hindered fruitful inter-religious dialogue through the twin Principles of Auscultation and Catholicity of Truth. We witnessed how successful he was in his dialogue with Buddhism and we have sought to apply the same methodology in our encounter with Hinduism. The two religions here, despite much historical evidence to the contrary, have certain advantages when it comes into interfaith dialogue.

What appealed to us about de Lubac was his ability to interpret contemporary issues through an historical lens which challenged conventional theological wisdom. Rahner

expressed it, "What is it that makes the properly historical in studies like those of de Lubac....so stimulating and to the point."[876] For us de Lubac summed up the tension that exists between competing theologies of salvation while pointing the way to a resolution of this tension. In his first work *Catholicism*: *Christ and the Common Destiny of Man,* (French origin ,1938), he addressed the pertinent question of the necessity of Christ and the Church for salvation while at the same time acknowledging his conviction that many people who have never heard of Christ can be saved. De Lubac highlights that 'whole history of the world is a preparation for this destiny.'[877] This theological position presented us with the key to opening up the topic of inter faith dialogue between Hindus and Christians.

2.2 Application of the Lubacian Twin Principles

The Principle of Auscultation: In early reading of the works of de Lubac this researcher found it liberating to follow his mode of theologising which came to be known as *Ressourcement* – a mode of theologising at variance with the forms of neo-scholastic theology. Here was a Patristic renewal with a return to the great traditions found in the Scriptures. What we found particularly helpful in this approach was that by abandoning the defensive strategies of the neo-Scholastics, with their legalistic, dogmatic and philosophical theological categories, a way was opened for me to approach the Christ of the Gospels with a view to finding common ground with those Hindu scholars who, in the nineteenth century had already begun to take an interest in Christology.

De Lubac's Principle of Auscultation appealed to me because it seemed to redefine dialogue. Too often our listening to other's points of view is superficial in that we do not try to enter into the mind and heart of our interlocutor. In this asymmetric perception both remain unaffected by the viewpoint of the other. Indeed, we are truck by the example of Jesus when he highlighted a similar asymmetric perception as reported in Mt. 13: 9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear". In this incident of the parable of the Sower Jesus later explains to the disciples that his listeners could not understand the parable because their hearts were not open to new thinking. We realised that in any inter-faith dialogue this kind of deep listening, auscultation was essential. Furthermore, we realised that the same deep listening was required of me as we listened to the words of the many theologians such as de Lubac**.**

[876] Karl Rahner, 'The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology', in *Theological Investigations* (London, Longman & Todd,1969),9.
[877] *Catholicism*, 141.

Truth is Catholic: Hindu religion is naturally pluralistic. A well-known *Rig Vedic* hymn says that "Truth is one, the wise speak about it in different ways."[878] Traditionally, it is well known that Hinduism, in its many forms, is nothing if not open when it comes to alternate conceptions of God. This does not mean, of course, that they accept all forms as Divine, but, given certain qualifying characteristics, the tradition is quite "catholic," so to speak, and let us not forget that *catholic* means "all-embracing".[879] De Lubac states that, "the whole Church forms, in some sort, but one single person. As she is the same in all, so in each one is she whole and entire; and just as man is called a microcosm, so each one of the faithful is, so to say, the Church in miniature."[880] The Word 'catholic' indicates in ancient Greek, a universal proposition. This word is used in Greek classics, such as those of Aristotle and Polybius, and was often used by early Christian authors, too, in its more generic sense. Truth is catholic and the significance of this principle for de Lubac is profound; 'the truth is one and is to be found in the depth and the universality of humanity; this is its Catholicity.'[881]

The visionaries of different faiths want to break out of the narrow bonds of religions or sects while each individual should have freedom to practice his own faith as a matter of choice. In addition, it is felt that an individual should not be compelled to be tied down to only one faith and should be free to adopt the practice of various religions of his choice depending on his temperament, attitude and perception. This would create a climate in which all of us can live in peace and harmony. Such a liberal attitude to belief and religious practice would, of course, not reflect Christian orthodoxy. A prayer which sums up a great deal of the idea of the individual in the writings of de Lubac (*Catholicism*). This might be taken as the *vocation* of the human person as de Lubac states:

> Again, does not to be a person, if we take the old original meaning of the word in a spiritual sense, always mean to have a part of play? Is it not fundamentally to enter upon a relationship with others so as to converge upon a Whole? The summons to personal life is a *vocation,* that is, a summons to play an eternal role. Now perhaps it will be understood how the historical character that we have found in Christianity, as well as the social, emphasizes the reality of this role: since the flow of time is irreversible nothing occurs in it more than once, so that every action takes on a special dignity and an awful gravity; and it is because the world is a history, a single history, that each individual life is a drama.[882]

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[878] *Rig Veda* 1.164.46. See, *Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* 3.
[879] Coming from *katholikos* i.e., "throughout the whole," or "universal; cited in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* 3-4.
[880] *Catholicism,* 315.
[881] *Catholicism*, 121.
[882] Ibid., 332.

3. Dialogue in practice

The dialogical aspects of Lubacian methodology and Hindu spirituality not only encourages but requires us to mutually engage in a search for understanding. *Redemptoris Missio* states, "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way."[883] The measures needing to be undertaken by the Church must operate alongside of theological and conceptual frameworks. While the Church is undertaking various initiatives at Parish, Diocesan and National levels, practical approaches are necessary. Francis Arinze supports that way of thinking and believes that the Church instead of increasing the number of documents, should enter into practical steps by leaving aside her institutional set up and become a witness of community of dialogue.[884]

In the post Vatican II era, we have witnessed the Church make great strides in developing relationships with other religions. The decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, states, "Bishops should dedicate themselves in their apostolic office as witness of Christ before all men."[885] Central to this progress has been the willingness of successive Popes to travel all over the world on official visits and, while there, to meet and interact with religious leaders of different hues in an effort to develop a better understanding of each other's practices and beliefs. Such commitment saw Pope John Paul II engage most positively with Hindu and Muslim leaders in India while Pope Benedict XV endeared himself to the Jews through the positive message delivered in Jewish Synagogues during his visit to Germany. The Abu Dhabi document," [886] which became major milestone in interreligious dialogue[887] recalled the *invocation* to action from *Nostra Aetate*:

> In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.[888]

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[883] *Redemptoris Missio*,57.
[884] Francis Arinze, *Church in Dialogue: Walking with the Other Believers* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press,1990), 333.
[885] *Christus Dominus*,11.
[886] Joseph Vellaringatt SJ, *Walking with Francis*, (Delhi: Media House, 2017),20-22.
[887] Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso (secretary of the Pontifical Council) declared the signing of the "Abu Dhabi Document" by Pope Francis, July,2019.
[888] *Nostra Aetate ,* no.1.

The Church is now more aware than before of her duty to proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom people may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. There is no doubt about the Declaration’s effect on the Catholic Church itself as *Nostra Aetate* commanded the Catholic population to ‘encourage, preserve and promote’ the spiritual values of other religions and this certainly raised the profile of interreligious dialogue.

4 Forms of Dialogue

In 1984, the office for interreligious dialogue in Rome issued an extensive reflection on the experience gained through dialogue which resulted in a text, *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions, Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*.[889] It marked the twentieth anniversary when Paul VI introduced the term “dialogue” into the unfolding of Vatican II through his encyclical on the church.[890] This text was a fourfold typology for dialogue suggesting different approaches with each providing a different set of answers to the question, Why Hindu-Christian dialogue? The different dialogues are as follows:

a) The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

b) The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

c) The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

d) The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.[891]

This typology is not exhaustive, nor are the definitions perfect. In particular it might be better to speak of the dialogue of discourse, or dialogue of formal exchange, since such dialogue need not be, and in fact is not, confined to theological issues. Nevertheless, this division into four forms has proved its worth pedagogically. It will be followed here since it provides useful pegs for the reflections to be presented.

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[889] *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions, Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* AAS:75(1984) 816-828.

[890] *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964), issued half-way through Vatican II, the text uses the term “dialogue” over 70 times, defines it, and places it within the mission of the church.

[891] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 32.

4.1 Dialogue of Life

From the description given above it can be seen that the dialogue of life is not something passive. It is not mere co-existence. Nor can one speak of dialogue where people insist upon or are required to stay in their ghettos. This form of dialogue requires openness, a desire to enter into relations with others. Its aim is to establish good neighbourly relations, to ensure that people are living in peace and harmony.[892]

How can this be done? Perhaps the first thing is to stimulate an active interest in the other, a healthy curiosity. If new neighbours arrive, we observe them, trying to find out what they are like. Can this not be applied to people of a different religion who come and settle in a particular region, or even if they are only going to be present on a temporary basis?
Acquiring knowledge about others helps to overcome prejudices. This knowledge can be made available, through booklets, through talks, through meetings, but it can also be acquired through direct contact between followers of different religious traditions.[893]

Paying visits to one another's homes is a normal way of increasing neighbourliness. The description given above talks about sharing joys and sorrows, so it could be presenting congratulations at the marriage of a son or daughter, or on the birth of a child, or offering condolences at a time of bereavement. It might include giving a helping hand when someone is sick or elderly. Life itself provides occasions for meeting and thus for dialogue. Acknowledging the feasts of people of other religions is a way of showing recognition and esteem for them.

4.2 Dialogue of Action

Having considered the four forms of dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* states:

> The importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice and human liberation needs to be stressed. Local Churches are called upon, as witnesses to Christ, to commit themselves in this respect in an unselfish and impartial manner. There is need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their own members are victimized but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims.[894]

Reference is made here to Christians, to Catholics, to local Churches, but they are not the only ones working for greater respect for human rights. It is encouraging to see for instance in Pakistan where they constitute a very small minority of the population, Christians and

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[892] Joseph Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu: Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing Centre, 2009), 217-220.
[893] *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission, 29-30.*
[894] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 44.

Muslims have been protesting together against certain measures, such as the proposal to have one's religious belonging included on one's identity card, or the blasphemy law.[895]

The passage from *Dialogue and Proclamation* continues: "There is need also to join together in trying to solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as in education for justice and peace."[896] Work for justice and peace is an integral part of the Church's evangelizing mission and has to be carried out at all levels. The commitment to education, to medical work, to social action, is not confined to the Church's members and these services are offered to all. They will continue to exist in a multi-religious environment, even when the Christians are in the minority. There can of course be different situations. There are those in which the Church is in control. She has her own institutions: schools, universities, hospitals dispensaries, training centres, and so on. There still has to be much reflection when the pupils, students, patients, staff, belong to another religion or to a variety of religions. What is to be the ethos of the establishment? How are the followers of other religious traditions to be made to feel at ease? Such situations offer many opportunities for serious dialogue.

Another type of relationship is created when the Church does not have its own institutions, but members of the Church, either as individuals or as recognized religious bodies, work within already existing structures. These may be under state control or belong to the private sector. In North India it is often requested to have religious women to work in hospitals. It can happen, in these circumstances, that co-operation is strictly professional and that there is little opportunity for real dialogue. [897] Yet in the long run relations of dialogue can be built up, helped by the generous witness of those who are engaged in this work.

4.3 Dialogue of Theological Exchange

Religions belonging to a multi- religious situation is a complex one. The primary religious community is the community of those who share the same faith. The dialogue of theological exchange involves specialists seeking to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.[898] This requires both a mutual revealing of beliefs, symbols, and values and an interior dialogue within each individual involved in the exchange. In any interior dialogue the truths to be revealed are

[895] *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission,* 31.
[896] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 44.
[897] Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu: Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions,* 219.
[898] Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu: Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions,*220.

weighed, tested in a manner that, hopefully, allows them to be reconciled into each person's faith and commitment. Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, says that in this area "the contribution of the laity is indispensable".[899] He speaks first about the example that they can give in their life situations, and also the relations they can build up through their activities. Specific mention is made of the possibility of contributing through research and study. Besides, CCEO[900], binds the Eastern Catholics to be fully committed to the dialogue stating, "Dialogue and co-operation with non-Christians are to be eagerly and prudently encouraged."[901]

A plurality of great religions exists and will continue to exist, so it is essential that we think in terms of God's plans, or actions in history as these religions did not come about by chance and they remain relevant to us. All those who embark on an interior dialogue are not only connected to each other but also with the interreligious dialogues taking place around the world. Such a development has been the focus of this thesis which is very much in line with de Lubac's theological method; we have tried here to use that method as the foundation on which to build a fruitful process of dialogue with our Hindu neighbours.

To best equip those engaged in dialogue it is essential to promote research and study. This will involve not only religious information but also the various aspects of inter-religious dialogue and a survey of the changes that it could bring about in society while identifying further areas of co-operation and understanding. A significant moment in the Church's outreach to other Faiths was when Cardinal Bea suggested that non-Catholic observers should be invited to the Second Vatican Council. As a result of his recommendation 60 observers actually attended, hence he played a major role in drawing up the declaration on the Jews which was influential in the writing of *Nostra Aetate*.[902]

4.4 Dialogue of Religious Experience

To some extent this can be a specific form of the dialogue of discourse, when the topics for discussion are selected from the realm of spirituality. One example of this is the Christian-Muslim seminar on holiness held at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1985.[903] In this meeting papers were read on the concept of holiness in Christianity and Islam, the teaching on the paths to holiness, and also concrete examples of holy people.

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[899] *Redemptoris Missio*,57.
[900] Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)
[901] CCEO Can.592. no. 2.
[902]Stjepan Schmidt, *Augustin Bea: The Cardinal of Unity* (New York: New York City Press, 1992),12.
[903] Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu: Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions,*221.

It is the being with one another in prayer, or at one another's worship, that distinguishes the dialogue of religious experience. It is a type of dialogue that is being developed among monastics. [904] While the American group has developed a programme of hospitality, welcoming in particular monks and nuns from the Tibetan tradition, in Europe more contact has been made with the zen tradition of Japan, and various spiritual exchanges have taken place. These include periods of two to three weeks in a monastery of another tradition, trying to live as fully as possible the life of the monks or nuns, developing a dialogue without words. Yet the experience usually ends with a symposium in which observations can be communicated and questions raised.

This type of dialogue has flourished mainly between Buddhists, Hindus and Christians. It has been more difficult to develop it with other religious traditions. But it should not be thought that the dialogue of religious experience is confined to monastics. Inter-religious prayer can be considered a form of this particular dialogue, and this is a growing phenomenon. [905]Such prayer may take place on civic occasions, national days, or anniversaries. People may feel a need to pray together at times of crisis, or when faced with natural or man-made disasters. There can also be more private occasions when people of different religions will want to share prayer. It may not be possible to find formulae of prayers which can be recited together, since different sensibilities have to be respected. Yet, provided the participants are really attentive, listening with respect to the spiritual riches of another tradition as expressed in its prayers can be considered a true form of dialogue.[906] It is the kind of dialogue that serves Henri de Lubac's Principle of Auscultation.

With regard to the dialogue of religious experience, certain conditions would have to be underlined.[907] First, integrity; that there should be no compromise with regard to one's own religious convictions. Secondly, respect; not embarrassing people by inviting them to say words or perform gestures which they are not comfortable with. Finally, humility; acknowledging the limitations of human symbols and accepting the signs of God's presence. *Dialogue and Mission* highlight this:

> This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful co-operation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for his own faith. The

[904] An international secretariat has been set up to stimulate and co-ordinate this Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue (MID).
[905] The World Day of Prayer for Peace, held in Assisi in October 1986, 1993 and on 24 January 2002 have encouraged many people to come together to pray.
[906] *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions.* 35.
[907] Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu: Ecclesial Vision & Historical Interventions,*222.

> sometimes-profound differences between the faiths do not prevent this dialogue. Those differences, rather, must be referred back in humility and confidence to God who "is greater than our heart (1 Jn 3:20).[908]

5 Dialogue of Discourse

The dialogue that takes place in formal exchanges can take many different forms. As regards the number of religions, the dialogue can be bilateral, such as Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Buddhist, or trilateral, Jews, Christians and Muslims together, or multilateral, with people of many different religious traditions taking part. Each of these types has its own special advantages. Bilateral dialogue can allow greater focus not only on common issues but on divergent elements, seeking greater clarity.[909]

Meetings will also differ in the number of participants going from large congresses to groups that can meet in people's homes. If the first type allows the “good news” of dialogue to be carried to a larger public, it also runs the danger of becoming theatrical. It is often more possible for serious discussion to take place in smaller groups. A similar reflection could be made concerning the frequency of meetings. Some are unique experiences. Others may be occasional happenings, yet others may be regular occurrences with a built-in time schedule. Here again, for progress in mutual understanding certain continuity is useful.[910] There can be a difference in the quality of participants. The policy may be to work through institutions, thus leaving it to the dialogue partners to choose their own participants. On the other hand, there may be a preference for issuing direct invitations to persons who are already known. In the first case there is a greater possibility of achieving some kind of representativeness. The second option may offer a greater guarantee of fruitful dialogue.

If the dialogue of discourse is to succeed, then perhaps certain conditions need to be fulfilled. The preparation for the meeting should be carried out, if possible, in co-operation with the dialogue partners. This preparation should be serious, but there should not be too great a rigidity in the running of the meeting; it is important to leave openings for spontaneous discussion. Care must be taken to maintain a true dialogical spirit; this means not only avoiding polemics, but also not restricting the exchanges to a purely academic approach. It may be necessary to accept that there will be a certain amount of repetition, if not in the same meeting, at least from one meeting to another. New people are often brought into the dialogues, and this is a good thing, but it also means that the fundamentals have to be

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[908] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.
[909] Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu,* 221.
[910] *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions,* 32-33.

explained over and over. Very often meetings wish to end up with a common statement. Here it is elementary wisdom not to want to say everything so that at least something can be said together.[911]

6 Dispositions for Dialogue

Whichever form of dialogue is being utilised, there is a need for a balanced attitude. It is true that the Holy Spirit is at work both in the hearts of individuals and in the religious traditions to which they belong. [912] This does not mean that everything in these traditions is good. To think so would be disingenuous. On the other hand, these traditions cannot be dismissed as being evil or without value. That would be to take an overly critical stance. There is need for openness and receptivity, a readiness to discern what can be attributed to the work of the Spirit.

A further disposition required is a strong religious conviction. Without this there would be a danger of indifference to religious values, a temptation not to take others' religious convictions seriously. Another possibility would be that, when faced with challenges to one's beliefs, if these are not strong enough one might be put on the defensive. This could even lead to certain aggressiveness. When convictions are well rooted, this allows a respectful and receptive approach to the convictions and values of the other. Connected with this is an openness to the truth. If the Christian is convinced that the fullness of truth is to be found in Jesus Christ, more as something by which we are to be grasped rather than for us to grasp, then the meeting with others can help in the discovery of this truth. Dialogue can thus become a true learning process.

For this to be realized a contemplative spirit is needed. It is something which has been stressed by a number of the participants in the Asian Synod. It is through contemplation that one is able to discover and admire what God is doing through the Holy Spirit, in the world, in the whole of humanity. Prayer in which a dialogue with God is developed provides a solid foundation for dialogue with others.

Finally mention could be made of patience and perseverance. If one is looking for quick results, then one should not enter into the business of dialogue. There are a number of obstacles to dialogue: ignorance, prejudice, suspicion, self-sufficiency, as well as socio-political factors which may make genuine encounter difficult. Many things have to be explained again and again, and the weariness that this arouses has to be opposed. Nor should

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[911] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 46.
[912] Powathil, The *Ecclesial Milieu,* 221.

failures and disappointments lead to discouragement. The fruits will come in their own good time. Yet it may be true here as elsewhere, that one will reap where another has sown. It is God who gives the increase. It must be remembered that the Church's commitment to dialogue is not dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment; rather it flows from God's initiative in entering into dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression.[913]

Inter-religious dialogue is not primarily a relationship between two religions as social institutions, nor a comparison of two creeds or theologies, nor a tactical alliance for political action. It is essentially a relationship between believers, who are committed to and rooted in their own faith, but open to the other believer and the Spirit in the context of the common origin and end of all human beings. Hence, a sharing of convictions and experience is more important than is discussion of ideas. In contemporary societies, where there is a desire to respect human dignity and freedom, everyone, both as a person and as a member of a group, has an inalienable right to freedom.[914] As qualities for inter-religious dialogue, *Ecclesia in Asia* observes:

> Inter-religious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers. A willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment.[915]

India has been the cradle of the great religions. These religions are still very alive and active and are even in a process of revival and renewal, trying to meet the challenges of a new life in the post-colonial era. The Church is always in dialogue with these religious traditions in her daily life. Therefore, the leaders of the Church have to be well equipped to dialogue with other religious traditions. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, priestly formation should take account of the pastoral needs of the region: the students must learn the history, goal and method of missionary activity, as well as peculiar social, economic and cultural conditions of their own people.[916] The experience of the divine mystery in our own lives in Eucharistic celebration and in other sacraments and in the Church, a living contact with other believers in an atmosphere of openness and trust, an awareness of the universal dimension of God's

[913] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.
[914] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 47-50.
[915] *Ecclesia in Asia*, 31.
[916] *Nostra Aetate,* no 9.

salvation plan in Jesus Christ and the realization of our life as mission will help us to discover our obligation to dialogue with other religions.

7 Dialogue Beyond the Academy

Throughout this study it has been stressed that for dialogue to prove worthwhile, it must be operative far beyond theological deliberations and the arenas of academia. Ultimately if it is to bear fruit it must find traction where Hindus and Christians share life and social spaces. Indeed, a primary objective of theological work in the field of inter-faith relationships is to inform and guide dialogue at that level. It is no surprise that for de Lubac, with his awareness of the Spirit at work beyond any human boundaries, the need to listen far and wide is crucial to producing theology that is relevant. His exploration of Buddhism took him beyond the writings of its *Gurus* past and present. In the same spirit we include within this concluding chapter, something of this writer's experience of dialogue in daily life situations with Hindus who claim no scholarship on the subject of their religion and also some writing by lay people. Listening to laypeople's view of their religion provides some awareness of those aspects of Hindu thought that matter to them, their views on the rise of the intolerant and often violent forms of *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism) that began in the 1980s, and how they assess Hinduism's underpinning of the caste system in Indian society. Lay writers, more than others, feel better able to question current Hindu practice, to point to needed reforms, to what is needed to ensure its future among subsequent generations and to address the challenges facing it in a multi-cultural and more contested country.

This writer's reading and conversations have highlighted the concern of those committed to their faith as regards the politicization of Hinduism by political leaders, in collusion with their religious allies, as they attempt to hijack the faith for their own ends; related to such perversions is the evidence of Hinduism being more and more widely spoken of as a badge of identity rather than as a system of transcendental beliefs. They are contrary to the Hindu tradition of inclusiveness:

> Today Hinduism is the target of a problematic political revival led by the religious organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R.S.S.) and the Bharata Janata Party (B.J.P), its political offshoot which is in power. Along with other branches of Hindu fundamentalism (Hindutva) these groups are trying to unify their polymorphic religion by any means possible in order to make it manipulative and receptive to their political interests.[917]

[917] Yann Vagneux, "A Marriage with Hinduism," trans. Roderick Campbell Guion (Kathmandu, May 2019), 7

They are much concerned with questionable social practices arising from such distortions and seek to rescue their belief from excesses that divert it from its deepest essence.

What consistently emerges for the author from such encounters is the potential for Christians in partnership with Hindus committed to their faith to address issues of immediate relevance to both. Both share concern about the future of religious belief among their younger generations and the reduction of religion to an issue of cultural identity. Together they share awareness of the effects on both religions of colonisation, secularisation, modernity and interaction with global currents. Specifically, the politicisation of the majority religion, beyond the threat that it poses to Hinduism itself, carries potentially serious implications for minority religions, including Christianity.

Adherents of both religions today are increasingly aware of how their respective faiths have journeyed through several millennia of enquiry and exploration and reform and how in consequence their current shape is so contingent on history. Devout Hindus are particularly alert to attempts by *Hindutvavadis* to rigidly define the basics of belief. For Christians today their concern provides them with occasion for reflection on the efforts in 4th century Europe to 'homogenise' Christianity to serve political ends, specifically the imposition of uniformity and control.

But Christians are not automatically well placed to prove helpful partners with Hindus, in addressing issues of mutual concern. They come to dialogue with a long-standing assumption of their religion being the exclusive vehicle for humans in their relationships with the divine and a relatively very recent conversion to genuine respect for other religions. Patronising attitudes persist beyond merely intellectual changes of perspectives.

Specifically, in respect of Hinduism, it is important to recognise that the modern Church did not invent the notion of respectful relationships among religions. Hindus have perhaps the most honourable tradition of all adherents of religion in terms of willingness to accept other faiths and modes of worship, and indeed to often embrace them for themselves. Shashi Tharoor, politician and international diplomat, writes:

> It is quite common for Hindus to show reverence to the religious places of other faiths, and to carry relics or sacred objects of other faiths. History is replete with accounts of Hindus thronging Sufi dargahs, Sikh gurudwaras and Christian shrines … the same reverence they might express in their own temples. My late father was a devout Hindu who prayed faithfully twice a day, after his baths. He regularly went on pilgrimages
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> ...Yet, when a Catholic friend — his life insurance agent, who had made a trip to the Vatican — presented him with an amulet of the Virgin Mary that had

> personally been blessed by the Pope, he accepted it with reverence and carried it around with him for years. That is the Hinduism most Hindus know: a faith that accords respect and even reverence to the sanctified beliefs of others.[918]

Part of the reason for Hinduism's all-embracing spirit is the fact that in itself it has no single prophet, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, no single sacred book and no governing institution. There can be no such thing as a Hindu heresy or a Hindu heretic. It is a matter of pride for Hindus that theirs is a lived faith, not one anchored in a body of doctrine.[919] It embraces an eclectic range of doctrines and practices, from pantheism to agnosticism and from faith in reincarnation to belief in the caste system. But none of these constitutes an obligatory credo for a Hindu: there are no credos, no compulsory dogmas. The name 'Hindu' itself denotes something more than a set of theological beliefs. Originally, *Hindu* simply meant the people beyond the River Sindhu, or Indus, which is now in Islamic Pakistan! Hinduism is in fact the name that foreigners first applied to what they saw as the indigenous religion of India.

The fact that Hinduism is so plural, inclusive, eclectic and expansive makes its adherents immediately conducive to dialogue. But it also constitutes an immediate problem for other parties to the dialogue if their starting point is a body of doctrine. Rigid and censorious beliefs do not appeal to the Hindu temperament. Of much more importance is accepting people as one finds them, allowing them to be and become what they choose, and to encourage them to do whatever they like (so long as it does not harm others). All this suggests that orthopraxis (in terms of both ethical and ritual conduct) is a more fruitful arena for dialogue than that of orthodoxy (correct teaching or doctrine). It has been the experience of this author that dialogue with devout Hindus about the issue of the caste system leads to more fruitful outcomes than conversations situated within theology. They often readily acknowledge that their religious tradition's adoption of the caste system is in critical need of questioning, and they see no reasons why this cannot be done; it is not of the essence of Hinduism.

There must be learning for others in Hinduism's insistence on the unknowability of God and its care to steer clear of false certitudes. A story in the Upanishads tells about a guru who is asked to define the nature of God and who, in response, falls silent. It takes his questioner some time to realise that the guru's silence is his answer. The divine is beyond thought or words. The Absolute is indescribable, that of which nothing can be said. 'It is not

[918] Shashi Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu*? (London: Hurst and Company, 2018), 11.
[919] Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu*?, 20.

understood by those who understand it,' says the *Kena Upanishad*, 'it is understood by those who do not understand it.'[920] The Western tradition, following Plato, has a difficulty with the apophatic theological tradition of the East, perceiving it as negative. This writer strongly appreciates the approach, for its acknowledgement that we humans can really only say what God is not, that God is deeply mysterious.

8 Mission and Inter-religious Dialogue

Inevitably throughout this thesis there has arisen a tension between Church's Mission and Dialogue. Many people have problems when it comes to the practice of dialogue. As a result, the question can emerge should dialogue replace proclamation? Or if inter-religious dialogue has become so important, has the proclamation of the gospel message lost its urgency? The following quotation from Dialogue *and Proclamation* clearly answers this question:

> Inter-religious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true inter-religious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognised and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both.[921]

It is up to follow us to follow these instructions, even if we find it difficult to do so. However, for maximum effect, it is necessary that dialogue is not engaged in superficially, or with an agenda to convert others to our own way of thinking, in this case promoting the proselytization of Hindus! We should sincerely want to learn the other person's perspective. We must be able to receive what is in the hearts of others, too. Indeed, in effective dialogue, we do not only hear through the ears but also through the heart.[922] If the fruits of such honest and sincere dialogue provide the context for evangelization, so be it. But there should be no evangelizing agenda as such, and of course evangelization cuts both ways.

Looking at Inter-religious dialogue from a wide perspective it is clear that it is not just a religious matter but a political matter. World Peace demands inter-faith dialogue. What is the result of no dialogue? Hans Küng addresses this: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the

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[920] *Kenya Upanishad*, III.
[921] *Dialogue and Proclamation*,77.
[922] Steven J. Rosen, "Introduction" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* in cooperation with Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies Christopher Newport University Newport News, Virginia 23606 (Virginia: Deepak Heritage Books Hampton) Vol.20 .no.2 , 2012,2-4.

religions."[923] Religious fundamentalism coupled with ethnic nationalism, has become the greatest threat to peace and harmony in the world. Liberating people from religious fundamentalism and promoting harmony and understanding among the followers of different religions is a very significant dimension of evangelization in the context of today.

Interfaith dialogue necessitates a revisiting of Christology, our understanding of who Jesus is. That is extremely challenging. One source of encouragement for me in facing that challenge has been the evidence of the many followers of Hinduism who have been attracted to the story of Jesus. Hindu faith has sometimes been categorised as "Jesus-friendly". But that being so, what is it that hinders a deepening relationship between Hinduism and Christianity? It is of course a complex question requiring many answers, but the fact is that it is the historical Jesus to whom Hindus are drawn. As a result, it may well be that the biggest obstacle to developing a deeper mutual understanding between the two faiths is how Jesus has presented in Western garb.

9 Crossing Cultural and Theological Borders

Theology and a range of disciplines can inform and guide the process but cannot substitute for right relationships and faith that emanates from the heart. Francis Clooney supports the belief that if Christians are to be able to share each other's theology they must develop the skills of dialogue. He advises participants to read the scriptural texts of the 'other'.[924] The more he reads and is ready to learn, the more the Christian theologian can discern these 'seeds of the word' in the scriptural texts and writings of other faiths. It is not merely recognizing similarities between faiths but rather understanding the differences. Consequently, if the language and symbols used in texts are different from those found in Western Christianity, it is simply because other cultures adopt different concepts. Those symbols can be portrayed by Christianity to carry similar meaning but adapted by Christianity to introduce the Christian understanding of the spiritual. Panikkar cites the examples from the *Bhagavad Gita*, [925] where we learn that the Lord (called many names such as *Isvara* and *Prabhu*) reveals himself as Krishna, a 'personal being' who is both transcendent and immanent and who is active in creation and salvation.[926] We again see the great love that God has for those who worship him and give him loving surrender ('bhakti').

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[923] Cited in Steven J. Rosen, "Introduction" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* 4.
[924] Francis X. Clooney S.J., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010),16.
[925] One of three authoritative Hindu texts of the *Vedanta* to have influenced philosophical and theological thought about the 'idea of God.
[926] Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1964),150

10 Dialogue: Living the faith

Using de Lubac's methodology has enabled us to realise that there are so many ways to dialogue, all of them central to "living the faith." Dialogue can involve being present and immersing oneself into that community and working alongside its members. This will allow for an understanding enabling theologians to share texts and become involved in debate and dialogue. Such an immersion fully validates the importance of their opinions. These can be seen as "interior dialogue" [927] which can best be described in the context of the beliefs and values of at least two religious' traditions in dialogue, in this case Hinduism and Christianity. One of the greatest highlights of dialogue is to discover God in other religions and when that occurs under the divine name "Truth", it is especially so. Panikkar views dialogue as emanating from one of Christianity's most important commandments: love of neighbour:

> Dialogue is not bare methodology but an essential part of the religious act par excellence: loving God above all things and one's neighbour as oneself. If we believe that our neighbour lies entangled in falsehood and superstition we can hardly love him as ourselves.... Love for our neighbour also makes intellectual demands.[928]

10.1 Seeing Truth with Different Eyes

De Lubac has often expressed the belief that Truth can be found in the most unlikely places as has been verified on many occasions in Hindu-Christian encounter. "Truth is Two Eyed",[929] by John A. Robinson, has enlightened the thinking of a variety of participants in the field of dialogue. However, this title does not mean really that truth is two eyed, but that he, who is looking on, must actually hold two almost opposed eyes focused absolutely on Truth. Everyone has these same two eyes available within their religious vision which might be portrayed as being prophetical and mystical. Where the two eyes view a religious truth at the same time neither religious vision will be distorted. So, one may hold two different perceptions as truth. This would be in line with de Lubac's perception of Truth being Catholic.

Similarly, de Lubac's Christocentric vision would support the view that those seeing Christ with other eyes is no indication of a limit to Christian faith since our concentration on Christ allows us to 'see everything' we need. Francis Clooney provides positive insights in

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[927] James D. Redington, S.J. "The Hindu-Christian Dialogue and The Interior Dialogue**",** Georgetown University, *Theological Studies,* no 44,(1983)587.

[928] Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 10

[929] "Truth Is Two-Eyed", Robinson cites as his reference in dialogue theologian Murray Rogers' work the chapter "Hindu and Christian-A Moment Breaks," in H. Jai Singh, ed., Inter-Religious Dialogue (Bangalore: C.I.S.R.S., 1967) 104-17; as cited in James D. Redington, S.J. "The Hindu-Christian Dialogue and The Interior Dialogue**"** 596.

his belief that Christians can 'lose control' when we find ourselves anew before God' seeing faces, hearing voices using words we do not know, showing us other ways of seeing Him.[930] In fact, seeing Christ with 'other eyes' provides an ideal opportunity for Christians to discern 'signs of the Spirit' working in the 'other'. The fact that other faiths may not lead us into new truths, but rather new insights.[931]

11 The Lubacian Principles and the Signs of the Spirit

The concept of mutual understanding allows Christians to 'see the other' as those loved by God and made in his image to be able to seek for the transcendent. Until they are able to hear the gospel taught and properly explained to them, they will, by God's intrinsic gift of grace be seeking Christ even if they are unaware of His name and His full gospel. De Lubac's Principle of the Catholicity of Truth enables us to become aware of the 'signs of the Spirit' because it represents the work of grace in human beings preparing them for the Gospel. It emphasises the importance of living and working in dialogue with the 'other' so as the 'other' may see Christ in us. This reinforces de Lubac's understanding of the relationship between Christ and humanity as establishing that everyone is intrinsically connected to Christ.[932] This opinion would resonate with de Lubac's vision where the figures of Hinduism-so called pagan saints- could be interpreted as the rays of light which enlighten every human being and as the signs that point and lead to Christ. "The grace of Christ is of universal application, and no soul of good will lacks the concrete means of salvation… There is no man, no 'unbeliever' whose supernatural conversion to God is not possible."[933]

This writer has met with many Hindus who proudly assert that they belong to the only major religion in the world that does not claim to be the only true religion. It is from this starting point that they feel completely at ease with the acceptance of other faiths, without having to be concerned about betraying their own. By implication then the assertion by Christians as to the uniqueness of Christ in the divine plan for humanity requires the most sensitive treatment. It is a matter of faith. Faith and certainty are not the same. It may be helpful in this respect to have recourse to Panikkar. Writing in *The Vedic Experience*, he says: 'It is precisely faith that makes thinking possible, for faith offers the unthought ground

[930] Clooney S.J., *Comparative Theology* 106.
[931] Ibid., 112.
[932] O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 438.
[933] *Catholicism,*108.

out of which thinking can emerge. It is faith that makes moral and other decisions possible, opening to us the horizon against which our actions become meaningful.'[934]

Dialogue, situated in the day-to-day realities and lived experiences of thoughtful, committed, adherents of the Hindu and Christian faiths, offers possibilities to uncover new insights for addressing the issues facing humanity and for the journeying of everyone towards the divine. It is fundamentally a matter of respectful conversations inspired by faith.

12 The Syriac Churches of Kerala and Hinduism: A story of convergence and interruption

The existence since the beginnings of Christianity of the Syriac churches in Kerala, giving expression to their faith by means of their indigenous culture and in cordial relationships with Hindu neighbours, is a legacy from history that has much to offer to Hindu-Christian dialogue throughout India today. Sadly, the moves by the Western Church authorities, beginning with the Synod of Diamper (1599),[935] to regulate and control the direction of travel of the Church in Kerala, served to extract the Christian community from the cultural space and the unhindered harmony which they had shared with Hindus. But legacies are resilient; Hindu-Christian relationships today continue to draw on that legacy. And there are very important learnings for present and future to be gleaned from both the story of convergence and that of its interruption. The identity of this particular Church has to be established to assess its role in inter-religious dialogue in India.[936] *Thomas Margam* (the way of Thomas)[937], is the Indian Christian way of life, established by Apostle Thomas between 52 and 57 AD. This ancient oriental Catholic Community in Malabar, Kerala, India - called the 'Thomas Christians', is known today the 'Syro-Malabar Church'.[938] Originally the word *margam* was used by the Buddhists to denote their way of life for the attainment of *Nirvana* (liberation from suffering).[939]

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[934] R. Panikkar*, The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjari: An Anthology of Vedas for Modern Man* (Berkely: The University of California Press, 1977),18.

[935] The Synod of Diamper, (1599) created rules and regulations for the St Thomas Christians of the Malabar coast which brought them into formal union with the Catholic Church. They came under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Goa, leader the Latin Rite and operating under strong Portuguese influence.

[936] Coward, *Hindu- Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, 14-18.

[937] *Thomaude Niyamam* (the law of Thomas). See, Andrews Thazhath, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church*: *A Historico- Juridical Study* (Vadavathoor: OIRISI Publications, 1987), 1-6.

[938] 'Syro' refers to Syriac (East), their liturgical language, and 'Malabar' refers to their region surrounded by mountains, known also as *Malankara* or *Malanadu*, the present Kerala, at the south coast of India, which the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century names '*Serra*'(Malabar).

[939] *Nirvana*, a Sanskrit word Buddhist context, literally means 'blowing out' of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. Later the Aryans sanskritised the word, as *margam* with the meaning," the way".
See R.F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism,*63. It is a central concept in Indian religions, which means the state of being free from suffering. In Hindu philosophy, it is the union with the Supreme Being through *moksha* (bliss).

The Thomas Christians adapted the customs used by high caste Brahmin to mark points of transition in a person's life, from birth to death; they Christianized these in their religious and cultural activities. The various aspects of this process are well expressed by Placid J. Podippara in his work: ''Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, and Oriental in worship."[940] Thomas Christians were well received by their Hindu neighbours. In such an atmosphere of mutual respect, there was no reason not to remain within their native cultural milieu and every reason to express their faith by means of cultural resources already used by Hinduism. The external architecture of their churches followed the model of Hindu temples known as *pagodas.* The word *Pali*, originally used by Buddhists for their vihara or pagoda (place of worship), is still used by the Thomas Christians in Malabar for their church buildings, the only difference being the cross on the top and in front of the church. Some of the ancient churches were built close to the Hindu temples, and Hindus used to make offering in the church, manifesting their brotherly love.[941]

The interior church walls were decorated with paintings of hunters, peacocks, mermen, elephants, and of course lotus flowers. The floor of the Church, like that of ordinary Christian or Hindu houses, was daubed with cow-dung, the cow being a sacred animal for Hindus. Not surprisingly the Hindu tradition of pilgrimage, for the forgiveness of sins and for obtaining the blessing of the gods, is mirrored in the Syro-Malabar Christian tradition. In particular there was the pilgrimage to the tomb of St Thomas in Mylapore followed by a long period of prayer, fasting and abstinence. The unique and abiding symbol of St. Thomas Christians is *Mar Thoma Sliba* the St. Thomas Cross. In being without a Jesus figure, the Cross proclaims the resurrected Christ. Of cultural significance is the lotus flower on which the Cross sits. The lotus flower is both a symbol of Buddhism and India and is the holy flower of Hinduism. The cross, resting on the lotus flower, richly symbolises first century Christianity in India.

Hindu ritual is very much home centred. Most of the religious practices and rituals are conducted at home under the leadership of the head of the family.[942] Emulating the examples of their Hindu brethren, the St Thomas Christians also developed many domestic rites in connection with birth, the beginning of education (*vidyarambham*)**,** marriage, death, funeral

[940] Podippara, Placid J."Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship" in George Menachery ,ed., the St. *Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*. Vol. II. (Madras: BNK Press, 1973), 107-112.
[941] Andrews Thazhath, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church,*46.
[942] Bernard Thomas, *Mar Thoma Christianikal* (St Thomas Christians) 2ne edition (Kottayam: Deepika, 1992)168-69.

and memories for the dead. In Hindu families every day *nama japam* (praying the name of their god, such as *Rama, Rama*) was recited at the evening before a lighted lamp. In the same way among St Thomas Christian families, lamps were lit, and prayers were recited in the evening.[943]

While Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were always at the very core of Christian initiation events, in the case of Baptism it was accompanied by complex rituals related to childbirth that corresponded very much with Hindu rituals. Some hours after the child's birth the father of the child would place a mixture of honey, ghee and gold into its mouth and whisper *Maran Iso Mishiha* (Lord Jesus Christ) and the child's name into its ears (*Namakarana*). A black thread was tied around the waist of the child on the twenty-eighth day. *Punul* or sacred thread, similar to that worn by Brahmins, was blessed at the baptism of a male child and put on him; it was removed when the child attained boyhood. Six months after the birth, the rite of *annaprasanam* or feeding the child with boiled rice was observed.[944] Regrettably the Synod of Diamper brought an end to these rituals.[945]

Prior to the Synod of Diamper celibacy was optional among the priests of St Thomas Christians and diocesan priests were mostly married. This custom was in harmony with Eastern discipline and with the Hindu (and Muslim) traditions in India[946]. But the Synod of Diamper ''desiring to restore this church to its purity, and the usage of the Roman Church'' abolished the Eastern discipline of married clergy (optional celibacy) and imposed the Latin discipline of obligatory celibacy.[947] The diocesan statutes promulgated in 1606 by Francis Ros SJ, the first Latin archbishop of the St Thomas Christians (1599-1624), reiterated and perpetuated the norms established by the Synod of Diamper (1599) concerning obligatory celibacy.[948]

The system of education prevalent in India was *Gurukula Vidyabyasam*, according to which the students were assigned to an illustrious *Guru* or master and resided with him throughout the training period. For the education and formation of those aspiring to the

[943] J. Chalassery, "The Spiritual Life of the St. Thomas Christians" in P. Pallath, ed., *Catholic Easter Churches: Heritage and Identity*, (Rome, 1994),289,293.
[944] Andrews Thazhath, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church,*52.
[945] Synod of Diamper, session IV, decree 16.
[946] There was of course within the Hindu tradition, *sannyasa* (a life of total renunciation), the high point of which was expressed through a celibate life in a hermitage (*vanaprastha).*
[947] For details see, *Synod of Diamper, session VII, The Doctrine Sacrament of Orders, decrees 16-18.* See also F. Rose, *Diocesan Statutes* , Vatican Library, *Codex Borgiano, Indiano* 18,ff.100-101.
[948] F. Rose, *Diocesan Statutes* , Vatican Library, *Codex Borgiano, Indiano* 18,ff.100-101.

priesthood, the Thomas Christians developed their own institution, called malpanate[949], adapting the system of Hindu *Gurukula Vidyabyasam* and using elderly priests renowned for their learning. Malpanate was characterised by the practise of austerity, simplicity, poverty and obedience. It helped very much to ensure the maintenance of the Eastern identity and ecclesial traditions of the St Thomas Christians.[950]

The sacrament of Extreme Unction as understood in the West did not exist among the early St. Thomas Christians.[951] However, they had their own Indian rite of conferring the grace of the same sacrament on the sick faithful. The priest blessed the sick through the imposition of hands, with appropriate payers and readings from the Gospels. Verses from the Holy Bible written on palm leaf or paper were laid on their bodies. Sometimes the sick person was given water to drink in which was mixed some earth taken from the tomb of the Apostle Thomas.[952] The placing of the Gospel passages on the body of the sick may be an imitation of the Hindu practice of wearing a palm leaf on the body on which a kind of prayer (*mantra*) has been written.[953] The Synod of Diamper abolished this Indian rite and ordered the administration of Extreme Unction according to the Latin rite.[954]

Local customs in connection with death, burial and commemoration of the dead were adopted by the St Thomas Christians. The dying person was laid on a bed facing east and the people around would chant prayers. The corpse was washed in warm water and anointed a few hours after death. Socio-cultural practices connected with death and burial adapted from their Hindu brethren included repast (*pattnikanji*), for breaking the fast after the burial, mourning for eight days, and ritual bathing on the eleventh day after burial (*pulakkuli*) for purification from defilement due to contact with the deceased person. Likewise, they practised rituals for commemoration of the dead including anniversary rituals (*chatham* or *sradham*).[955]

Before the Synod of Diamper, the St Thomas Christians were hardly distinguishable from their high caste Hindu neighbours in respect of dress and ornaments. Like Brahmins they had a tuft of hair (*kudumi),* to which they added a cross on the top and in some places,

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[949] Malpanate comes from the Syriac word *malpana* which means master, teacher or guru.
[950] J. Pallickaparampil , " Formation of the Clergy in the Syro-Malabar Church", *Acts of the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church ,* Held in the Vatican from 8 to 16 January 1996.
[951] Paul Pallath, *The Liturgical Heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church* (Changanacherry: HIRS Publications,2019),24.
[952] L. Arrangassery, "The Anointing of the Sick, Eastern Perspectives,"392-393.
[953] Pallath ,*The Liturgical Herritage of the Syro-Malabar Chruch*, 23.
[954] *Synod of Diamper, session* VI, *Extreme Unction, decree*1, see also article Two, no. 2. 4.
[955] J. Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage of St Thomas Christians* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 200), 49-50.

they attached the cross to ‘‘the sacred thread’’ (*punul),* which they wore like the Brahmins. Like the high caste Hindus, they used to pierce their ears and wear ear lobes (*kadukkan*). The women wore white jackets (*chatta*) with long white fan-like trains behind them.[956] Besides, the Christian women had a pair of golden ear ornaments worn on the upper part of each ear, a substitute for the *vails* of the Brahmin ladies.

The ancestors of the St Thomas Christians who had embraced Christian faith from different religions and races formed a single community and all of them enjoyed the same dignity, privileges and rights. When, after the tenth century, the South Indian society was restructured according to the caste system, the indigenous Christian community also became inadvertently part of the spontaneous evolution and began to be considered by other groups as one of the high castes with special privileges and incomparable prerogatives. This was a consequence of the compartmentalization of the South Indian society and an extreme level of cultural adaptation and natural contextualization for self- existence and survival. Soon people began to regard the Christian community also a *jathi* and its royally privileged national head, the archdeacon of all Indian as *Jathikkukarthavian.*[957]

While the St Thomas Christians followed the East Syrian liturgical tradition, they developed an ‘‘Indian rite’’ of marriage, adapting and Christianizing the religious and cultural items of Brahmin marriage ceremonies in South India. They adapted many Hindu rites and other indigenous customs such as the manner of engagement, the tradition of arranged marriage and the system of dowry from their contemporary society, while keeping intact the specificity of Christian matrimony and what was necessary for the validity of the sacrament.[958]The essential religious rite of marriage in the church consisted of the blessing and tying of the *thali* or *minnu.* The *thali,* a small golden cross of 21 tiny beads, which the bridegroom tied around the bride’s neck during the marriage celebration, was a clear adaptation of the Brahmin marriage ceremony.

The Synod of Diamper prohibited many of the Indian marriage customs and traditions of the St Thomas Christians as ‘‘devilish, superstitious and heathenish ceremonies.”[959] In spite of five hundred years of Westernization the St. Thomas Christians have not abandoned

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[956] (Their Brahmin counterparts had this fan like fringes in front). Ornaments such as bracelets (*vala),* anklets (*thala*) and girdles (*aranjanam*) were the same for both Christians and Brahmins.
[957] Ibid., 44-45.
[958] Thazhath, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church*, 54-57
[959] The Synod of Diamper, session VII, Sacrament of Matrimony, decrees, 14-16. . Francis Ros SJ, the first Latin archbishop of the St Thomas Christians, in his 1604 Report, about four years after the Synod of Diamper, gives the detailed information about the marriage ceremonies among the St Thomas Christians.

Christianized Indian elements like the use of *thali* or *minnu* and *manthrakody*, although the use of ring has been introduced in some places. The West and the Christian were in some ways models for some 19th and 20th century reformers; even Mahatma Gandhi early on imagined imitating British Christians (e.g. eating beef) though he rejected this idea later.

Just like their high caste Hindu brethren, the food of the St Thomas Christians was normally vegetarian. They rarely ate meat and always shunned beef. Alcoholic drinks were considered unbecoming to their social status. During feasts they ate with their fingers while squatting on long mattresses, their plates being plantain leaves folded into two; these signified privileges and were in imitation of the brahmins.[960] On fasting days they did not use even fish, egg or milk products, but only pure vegetarian meals. After the arrival of the Portuguese and the construction of a fortress in Cranganore, the St Thomas Christians left that town and settled in other places, because they were ‘‘forced to begin the fast of Lent on Ash Wednesday and to eat fish, whereas they do not eat fish in times of the fast.[961] Gradually the residence of the Metropolitan was also transferred from Cranganore to Angamaly for fear of the Portuguese. The Christian community lost most of its former honour and prestige among (high) caste Hindus, and it became difficult to have contact with them, as the custom of eating beef was slowly introduced among the Christians.[962] It seems the Western Missionary efforts in India in the 19th century was backed up by power and dominance. As a result, Gandhiji points out:

> When I was young, I remember a Hindu having become a convert to Christianity. The whole town understood that the initiation took the shape of this well-bred Hindu partaking of beef and brandy in the name of Jesus Christ and discarding his national costume. I learnt in later years that’s such a convert, as so many of my missionary friends put it, came to a life of freedom out of a life of bondage, to a life of plenty, out of one of penury. As I wander about throughout the length and breadth of India, I see many Christians almost ashamed of their birth, certainly of their ancestral religion, and of their ancestral dress. The aping of Europeans on the part of the Anglo Indians is bad enough but aping of them by Indian converts is a violence done to their community, and should I say, even to their religion.[963]

The negative attitudes of this European missionaries towards other religions has been severely criticized by several leaders like Dr Radhakrishnan.[964] The fact that Christianity is not an export from Europe but is a religion whose historic origins lie in Asia rather than in

[960] J. Podipara, *The Thomas Cnristians*, 91
[961] M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India,*178.
[962] Pallath, *The Liturgical Heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church* ,44.
[963] “Young India”; cited in A.T. Hingorani,ed. *The Message of Christ* 25-27.
[964] A former president of India and a well-known philosopher.

Europe.[965] It seems that the worship and spirituality of Oriental Churches may have more appeal to the Asian mind. The purified sense of the sacred, the sense of the unworthiness of the believer, the use of hymns and incense for divine praise which permeates Oriental liturgies are something akin to Asian forms of worship. People like Bede Griffiths and Francis Acharya have taken this road because they found that the Syro-Oriental pattern was a more suitable way of presenting Christian mysteries in the East.

It is sometimes said that cultural adaptation among the St Thomas Christians was limited to superfluous socio-cultural customs. A proper examination contradicts this assertion. Adaptation was profound and unique, touching the most essential elements of Christian life and ritual. Believing as they did that their forefathers had received their prayers and rites from Apostle Thomas in Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic) they faithfully preserved the established rites of East Syrian tradition as part of the way of Thomas, in particular with respect to the administration of the Sacraments. The ''Indian rites'' which they developed for Marriage and Extreme Unction were entirely consonant with their basic liturgical tradition. Almost all the sacramentals were either of Indian origin or were thoroughly adapted to the Indian situation. But, beyond the domain of liturgy, those people in South India who had accepted Christ, in the first instance through the evangelizing ministry of Apostle Thomas and subsequently their own missionary, had no sense of needing to forsake their cultural identity. It made absolute sense to them to maintain the very same customs, traditions and *modus vivendi* of the indigenous population, adapting only those elements of Indian culture which were not compatible with the Christian faith. In fact, the St Thomas Christians could not be distinguished from their Hindu brethren except in those aspects which were specifically Christian.

For this writer the parallels between the early history of the Syriac Church and that of the Church's simultaneous insertion into the Greco-Roman world, powerfully led by the Apostle Paul, are striking. The early Church, in its efforts to proclaim itself to Hellenistic culture in ways that people could understand, needed to move out of its cultural Jewishness. In doing so it was itself shaped by that culture. So too with the Church funded by Thomas. Inculturation is about incarnating Christian faith and life within ideas, values and behaviours that make up different cultures. It is about planting a seed that, nourished by the earth around it, reflects the place where it grows. In the context of India's religious pluralism that cultural space in which the Church seeks to flourish is a shared one. Tragically the Synod of Diamper

[965] Sebastian Brock "Two Poles of Syriac Tradition" in *Homage to Mar Cariattil* (Rome: P. Institute, 1987),61.

proved blind to that reality, resolved as it was to impose a Western character on the Syro-Malabar Church. To some extent the Church today remains stuck in its still-Western character. The examples set by Paul and Thomas remain to be fully replicated around the world. The prime example of inculturation is when the Jesus movement, was in turn shaped by that culture. The mandate from Vatican II needs reactivating.

13 Inter-religious Dialogue is Not an Optional Extra

Inter-religious dialogue is a term which is closer to the heart of the post- Vatican II Church. It is true that the Church was hesitant to engage in serious dialogue with other religions for a long time. It could be conceived that the deep fear that it would be inconsistent with some indispensable beliefs. But since Christianity is not static entity, it has also developed and shown shift in attitudes down through the centuries.

This study involved many key areas of learning including the fact that inter-religious dialogue is not an optional extra. The importance of inter-religious dialogue in the development of theology across the modern world has been reinforced for us through this exercise. However, beyond the domain of theology, there are global, political considerations that we need to take into consideration. In the realities of globalisation, interculturalism, and multi-ethnicity, religions have become next door neighbours. Without efforts to build trust, conflict can ensue. Religion is not the sole cause of many of the ethnic and cultural conflicts in the world, but it is a contributory factor. On the other hand, the world needs the vast resources for peace that are at the heart of all religions. This is very challenging for the Christian Churches who have assumed for centuries that Christianity was the only true faith. Any change in that perspective raises issues about mission and evangelisation. There can be fear that our faith might be contaminated by dialogue.

This exploration of inter-faith dialogues has been not only challenging but also enriching of our Faith. It has become an experience of change. We had to revise and re-vision my understandings and my 'God-talk' because of the larger context which my studies presented. It must be a starting principle in all theology that God is not confined to or controlled by any faith tradition. Otherwise God would cease to be God and would be merely a human construct – a projection of our own wish list.

As noted, earlier Hinduism has a tremendous capacity to respect other faiths and to incorporate religious practices of others. Not having a creed or a catechism it does not have to defend a settled orthodoxy. They are more likely to subscribe to the view that behind the many exists the One which in a way is at the core of the thinking of Henri de Lubac!

Clearly this work is largely about preparing the ground for meaningful mutual dialogue. Within the context of that aspiration there are many questions that will need to be addressed. While my research has emphasised the need for auscultation it has not explored how the language used by interlocutors has common currency. We have already seen for instance that Hindu religious titles such as Avatar, Guru, and Prajapati, while at face value offer a way into dialogue about the centrality of Christ in Christianity, they are in fact mere shadows of reality. When we try to compare Christian Scriptures with Hindu scriptures we enter an area of some mystery particularly in relation to the Upanishads and the role of gurus. What is meant by emanations of Ultimate Reality in Hinduism as compared to the Incarnation? This suggests that the whole area of semantics need to be explored as part of the auscultation process.

At a practical level there are a number of possibilities for an uncontracted dialogue where both traditions share much in terms of respect for divinity, the practice of prayer and rituals, the striving for perfection and the acknowledgment of the need for a saviour. This level of convergence here could be seen as a time of preparation to allow both traditions to cherish common beliefs and practices in the hope of building a stronger bond which could lead to ever greater sharing.

14 Conclusion

Dialogue can bring to light points of divergence and points of convergence. However, in the final analysis it is the centrality of Christ and his mission that has to be proclaimed while at the same time inviting our Hindu brethren to inform us how such a central figure can echo with their religious beliefs. In this way de Lubac's Christocentric approach provides a bridge for promoting fruitful and respectful dialogue. His vision of radical inclusivity has influenced the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Catholic thinking as his main principle of engagement with the world lay in the connection between truth and inclusion. He would be fully supportive of the idea of including figures of Hinduism, often referred to us pagan saints, who could now be reviewed as rays of light which enlighten all of humanity attaining salvation, in an almost anonymous way. De Lubac has always intimated that there is a pre-Christian character in the human person in virtue of creation in the image of God. The persons of other religious traditions "can be saved because they are an integral part of

that humanity which is to be saved."[966] Christ is the Mediator enabling the human person to move from image to likeness; from "natural dignity" to "supernatural dignity". De Lubac's transcendental anthropological vision acts as a clarion call to all respond to the challenges presented in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic world. No finer statement could be found to define his Christocentric inclusivist outlook than this:

> If Christ is not her wealth, the Church is certainly destitute; if the Spirit of Christ does not flourish in her, she is certainly sterile. If Christ is not her Architect, and His Spirit is not the mortar which binds together the living stone of which she is built, then her building is indeed fallen into ruin. If she does not reflect the unique beauty of the face of Christ, the Church is without splendour. All her teaching is a lie, if she does not announce the Truth which is Christ; all her glory is vanity if she does not find it in the humility of Christ. If she is not the sacrament, the effective sign of Christ, then she is nothing.[967]

[966] *Catholicism*, 232.
[967] De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 160-161.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Central to our problematic involved using the theological method of Henri de Lubac to promote dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity in India.

We began with an analysis of inter-religious dialogue in an Indian context. Drawing on the directions of the Indian Theological Association, we explored the radical change in attitude brought about by Vatican II and embraced by the world-wide Church and not least by the Indian Church. Having considered Vatican Council documents that are of relevance to inter-faith dialogue, together with the writings of various authors on the subject, we established that the Church has moved resolutely away from previous exclusivist perspectives. We now believe that through highlighting the uniqueness of Christ while positing the possibility of salvation for adherents of non-Christian Faiths, the Church is adopting an essentially inclusive approach which is at variance with pluralist perspectives. However, there is an element of semantics required in choosing between the rankings of religions in order of superiority or considering them to be of equal validity where it would seem that an attempt is being made to intrude into the mind of God with respect to His plan of Salvation.

We proceeded then to explore the theological research method of Henri de Lubac. His approach, underpinned by a profoundly inclusive vision with respect to other religions and his own work on Buddhism, offered a path to devise a way of promoting mutual understanding and acceptance in any dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity. His methodology entitled him to relate to the era in which he was working while being aware of the limitations of defensive apologetics and of the inadequacy of neo-Scholasticism to respond to the needs of his time. Just as de Lubac responded to the needs of his time we need to do so now. His exercise in comparative theology with respect to Buddhism has left an indelible imprint in the field of inter-religious dialogue and is a specific resource for this particular engagement with respect to Hinduism.

As early as possible we embarked on an exploration of the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism, seeking to understand the richness of Hindu thinking, and its emphasis on the God who is beyond describing. We in turn have sought to identify points of relatedness and differences, with a view to presenting Christ as surpassing, fulfilling, completing or correcting these Hindu concepts. In all of this, in company with all those who have been concerned to offer Christ in Indian garb to its people, we have tried, within theological

considerations, to facilitate an inculturation process informed by Hindu and Indian culture and values. While the use of Hindu titles involved a certain danger in Indian Christology, considering that they might have limited the person and mission of Jesus, these limitations should not stop us in our Christological endeavour, but rather challenge us to handle it with care and prudence in our Christological reflection, being faithful to the unique identity of the person and mission of Jesus Christ. At the same time the development of Indian Christology, whether with or without reference to Hindu titles has challenged Christianity in India to be more Indian than Western.

Religions express the hope for and offer paths towards salvation for its adherents. Dialogue between them necessitates a search for the respective understandings of salvation in both religions. But it especially requires us to be clear as to our own understanding of Christ, as a starting point for our dialogue with Hinduism. De Lubac's validation of bringing methods of historical criticism to bear on Biblical interpretation and also his taking issue with some elements of Catholic apologetics, has encouraged us to do likewise. None of this has diminished our faith in Jesus Christ as saviour of all mankind.

The nebulous nature of Hindu belief, the diversity of its component traditions and its lack of a central corpus of dogma presented some challenges, but none that were insurmountable. Hinduism's all-embracing spirit is partially the result of not having a single prophet, compulsory beliefs, rites of worship, sacred book or governing institution. They have every right to feel pride in being part of a living faith.

De Lubac's own use of the approach in his study of Buddhism has provided a template for other such studies. We learned from the use of this method that it demanded great sensitivity especially when trying to find common cause in those areas of particular complexities. It seemed to the writer in the course of the work that the emphasis which de Lubac placed on faithful adherence to the teachings of the Early Fathers, which is understandable in the context of his time, might now more usefully be placed on the Scriptures. Such change of emphasis would facilitate harnessing what modern scriptural exegesis has uncovered concerning Jesus, the context in which he lived and out of which he preached, as well as the contexts in which the Gospels were written.

It is the writer's hope that, if anything, such change of emphasis, from the writings of the Fathers towards Scripture, can serve to highlight the Christological insights which together with his methodology, constitute de Lubac's key contributions to theology. While not systematically constructed, his Christology can be gleaned from his opus. It posits that

every human being has an organic link to Christ, a link that precedes the Incarnation, that has its origins in creation and that cannot therefore be lost. It is here, in this assertion that all of humanity is connected to Christ. The implication, and it needs to be emphasised, is that it is not the institutions of Christianity but Christ Himself who is central to the Church's engagement with other religions. The Church has a key role in dialogue but it is not 'in charge' of it. Christians have no superior status in the process. De Lubac's Christology places Christ at the heart of the matter. This position provides release from the semantics that often emerge around whether one religion is 'superior' to another, or whether one is 'as good'. People of all Faiths need to guard against attempting to intrude into the mind of God with respect to His plan of Salvation.

It is accepted that within theology Christology has other dimensions: a high Christology which deals with messiahship, divinity and the pre-existence of Jesus all subsumed within the doctrine of the Incarnation; a low-ascending Christology which begins with the historical Jesus as found in historical enquiry. It is important to note that both Christologies are complimentary and not contradictory which fully justifies de Lubac's approach. So, in this thesis we avoided exploring the complexities of both high and low Christologies, preferring instead de Lubac's method which speaks to areas of common interest between the two religious traditions.

De Lubac's guiding Principle of Auscultation has been central to this thesis. The relevance of auscultation, that deep non-judgemental form of listening has been essential in planning a way forward towards mutual understanding of Hindu-Christian relations. This deep listening echoes what Jesus said in Matthew 11:15, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In Lubacian terms we are invited not just to engage in deep listening to New Testament sources in relation to the person of Jesus, but we need to engage in deep listening to each other in inter-faith dialogue. Throughout this thesis much has been made of the need for Hindu-Christian dialogue. Mention was made, in practical terms about particular forms of dialogue, viz. of life; of action; of theological exchange; of religious experience. It would be possible to engage in such categories at a superficial level but as this thesis has demonstrated a much deeper engagement has been proposed, precisely to meet the Lubacian principles. This engagement is more than about promoting social togetherness between Hinduism and Christianity: it is centrally about promoting theological understanding. This study has reiterated the need for Christians to be clear as to their own understanding of Christ, so as to have an authentic starting point for dialogue with Hinduism.

The ‘permission’ accorded by de Lubac to search for the Spirit at work far beyond the confines of Christendom, strongly encouraged the inclusion in the literature review of the writings of Hindu scholars both from the 19th century renaissance period of Hinduism and subsequently. While remaining faithful to their religious tradition, many of these have shown interest in the person of Christ, paying particular attention to the sources about Him in the New Testament. It is not unreasonable to identify these Hindu scholars as pioneers of Indian Christian theology; their thoughts became the seeds for the later Indian Christology, in particular, through trying to look beyond the Western Christ and to interpret him via the many Hindu titles, ascribed to their manifestations of the deity, such as, *Guru, Avatar and Prajapati*, they were the first to construct a bridge between Hinduism and Christianity, with Christ as its foundation. De Lubac is to be again acknowledged for encouraging this writer to seek in ‘unexpected places’ the workings of the Spirit of God who knows no boundaries.

It has been a concern of this study to make connection between the domain of theology and the world of daily living, which must be the primary locus of dialogue. Also, within theological considerations, this study has attempted to indicate ways to offer Christ in Indian garb to its people, and to try to utilise dialogue with Hinduism to facilitate a process of inculturation within the Church, informed by Hindu and Indian culture and values. There are certain elements that are ‘of the essence’ of religious belief and the cultures with which each religion is associated provide added richness to that religion. However, some aspects of culture might be more accurately assessed as ‘baggage’. This is an issue that concerns not just the Church’s mandate to enable Indians to become members of the Christian community, should they desire this, without fear of the risk to their cultural identity and tradition.

It is important to acknowledge the influence that this writer’s identity, as an Indian National, has had on this work. However, as a priest of the Syro-Malabar Church who exercises his priestly ministry in the Latin Church, one feels entitled to claim an appreciation of the overlapping cultures of East and West. More than that one lives with profound appreciation of the formal affirmation of the Oriental communion of Churches as part of the universal Church by Vatican II. It has specifically motivated this writer to play his part in seeking to be part of the wider inter-religious outreach to people of all faiths in one’s own country. Growing up as a Christian in a country with 79.8 % (966 million) of the population identifying themselves as Hindus, one is conscious of the ‘foreignness’ that still attaches to the Eastern Church and the need to correct that reality and perception. One objective of this thesis is to try to inform the Western Christian mind with Eastern Christian concern.

Just as de Lubac responded to the needs of his time we need to do so now. His exercise in comparative theology with respect to Buddhism has left an indelible imprint in the field of inter-religious dialogue and is a specific resource for this particular engagement with respect to Hinduism.

We in turn have sought to identify points of relatedness and differences, with a view to presenting Christ as surpassing, fulfilling, completing or correcting some Hindu concepts. In all of this, in company with all those who have been concerned to offer Christ in Indian garb to its people, we have tried, within theological considerations, to facilitate an inculturation process informed by Hindu and Indian culture and values.

Our concluding chapter has attempted to make connection between the domain of theology and the world of daily living, which must be the primary locus of dialogue. We have suggested a framework of definitive steps that can be taken, with due account of the current state of inter-religious dialogue in India, guided by Lubacian Principles of inclusiveness and deep listening. The voices and writings of Hindu believers have been signalled as central to such dialogue.

Foundational to de Lubac's way of doing theology is his conviction that the Spirit of God knows no boundaries. Not only the Scriptures but the wisdom of the ages, religious, and philosophical, as well as the empirical sciences, are all channels through which God is free to speak. De Lubac's Principle of Auscultation has profound implications for every department of theology, but perhaps none more so than in the field of inter-faith dialogue. In the writing of this thesis the author has found that the permission or rather compulsion accorded by de Lubac in this respect has been decisive. It has sent him in unexpected directions in search of resources that might enhance Hindu-Christian relationships. At the conclusion of the work the author is conscious of having merely touched the surface in this regard. In the first instance there is need to listen more to the Laity in our own Churches. They have much to share from reflecting on their experiences of living and working in a predominantly Hindu society. There is also listening to and learning from the Hindu world – its literature past and present, its social analysts, and of course its theologians and spiritual writers. Let him who has ears listen. In the first Chapter we made reference to the concept of *Sensus Fidei*. We conclude that we may now be being challenged to count among "the Faithful" more than those of Christian Faith. Henri de Lubac would surely agree.

This thesis, in its examination of how to promote theological dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity identified a number of promising avenues of exploration that

identified points of convergence. However, on closer scrutiny it became apparent that the points of convergence had within them certain ambiguities, e.g. the complexities surrounding the concept of incarnation and the subtleties of title definitions. In inter-religious dialogue clarity of meaning is essential but can be elusive. Acceptance of this problem prompts the writer to recommend further research into how in inter-religious dialogue de Lubac's method of Auscultation requires us to interrogate religious concepts at the very level of semantics within each tradition.

Another area for future research involves examining the implications of de Lubac's universalism. How, within Hindu-Christian dialogue does one avoid the implicit paternalism of the claim that Hindus are beneficiaries of the Christian God's creation, incarnation and redemption? Further research in this area will be challenging not least because it reflects a Christology so far removed from central Hindu tenets.

In summation, on the basis of de Lubac's theological method, through dialogue and mutual exchange of theological concepts, a greater understanding and rapprochement 'has developed' between Hinduism and Christianity. Henri de Lubac, this seminal, creative thinker, was ahead of his time in his belief that the Catholic faith should not be kept separated from the modern world. Thus, de Lubac has shown the way and it is for new generations of theologians to take up and rise to the challenges in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic world using his Theological Principles as a guiding light.

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