

The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism

by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

(ENTIRE BOOK) This collection of 21 papers by the great ecumenical theologian deals with the search for a new ideology in the face of the break-up of Socialism, the crisis of Secularism, and the growth of religious fundamentalism. Dr. Thomas proposes a new ideology of struggle for both social and ecological justice -- a spiritual framework for a post modern holistic humanism based on an understanding of Christ as the Suffering Servant.

Preface

Chapter 1: Common Life in the Religiously Pluralistic India

If each Faith keeps its ethics of law dynamic within the framework of and in tension with its own transcendent vision of perfection, the different religious and secular Faiths can have a fruitful dialogue on the nature of human alienation which makes love impossible and for updating our various approaches to personal and public law with greater realism with insights from each other.

Chapter 2: Religious Fundamentalism And Indian Secularism - the Present Crisis

There is a present crisis of Indian Secularism and its relation to religious fundamentalism. Freedom of propagation and conversion involves not only matters of religion, but also of culture and political ideas. Any restriction at this point will affect the fundamental rights of the human person in general.

Chapter 3: Meanings of Being a Secular State: A Critical Evaluation

Open Secularism and Renascent Religion are allies and need to reinforce each other in public life to redeem the new human values of freedom, equality and justice and enhance the quality of

national fraternity in a situation of religious and ideological pluralism.

Chapter 4: A Christian Anthropological Approach To Globalisation

Issues of ecological justice, and justice to the weaker sections of society and specifically development of social institutions cannot be taken up by the economy directed only by the market-profit mechanism in which the social objectives of the peoples are destroyed for the sake of economic growth.

Chapter 5: Technology, Culture and Religion

Two challenges seem to loom large in the modern world including India which is in the process of modernization; one, of humanizing the technological revolution to serve the poor and protect the ecological basis of life; and the other, of building a secular state and common civil society with openness to religious insights in a situation of religious pluralism.

Chapter 6: Primal Vision And Modernization

A critique both the primal and modern visions of human being and society in the light of each other and in the light of the theological vision of God's purpose for the future of humankind.

Chapter 7: Gospel to the Tribal People

It is quite clear to all historians of modern India that the story of the spiritual and socio-political awakening of the *adivasees* or indigenous people anywhere in India can be understood only by taking into account the large role played by western Christian Missions and indigenous churches in transforming their lives.

Chapter 8: Gospel And Secular Culture

The dynamics of modern "secular culture" have their roots in a concept of humanism derived from the Christian gospel but that because of the failure of the churches to respond positively to the values that emerged in Christian culture as implication of Christian humanism, they were sought to be realized in human history under the dynamic of "secularist ideologies of humanism" in opposition to the Christian faith.

Chapter 9: Higher Education in Kerala

The difference between education understood only as training in technical skills within the ideology of the economic growth and education for promoting a technical society within the framework of a culture of "scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform", is indeed great. Education that gives training in technical skills and does not help the trainees to examine and discern the false ends which may be hidden in the engineering and managing technology that they use, is not service to humanity.

Chapter 10: The Power That Sustains Us

The power that sustains us is the fellowship of other people, who are with us in this fellowship of struggle for the building of a new society.

Chapter 11: Search For a New Ideology of Struggle For Social Justice With Eco- Justice

We need a science and technology reinterpreted within a new framework which takes the organic and spiritual dimensions of reality seriously along with the mechanical. It is only then that technological development will promote eco-justice, preserve human personhood and peoplehood. It is an alternative technology that we are seeking.

Chapter 12: Towards an Alternative Paradigm

The basic central elements in the making of the counter-culture and the germ of the future society are the forces released by the self-awakening and the struggle for self-identity and justice of the traditionally oppressed peoples of India. If the church is to take the Jesus-tradition seriously and become Jesus-communities, its mission should be to build religiously pluralistic communities for concerted action for a better world in the common hope of the Kingdom of God to come.

Chapter 13: The Emerging Political Scenario: the People's Search For an Alternative

It is quite unrealistic to build our hope on the expectation that market economy is moving to any inevitable doom or that we can count on the permanence of the democratic polity in India continuing to permit agitation of peoples' movements against the present pattern of development. Capitalism has shown its resilience before; and if India's ruling class feels seriously threatened by peoples' movements there is real possibility of democratic freedoms being restricted.

Chapter 14: The Christian Contribution to an Indian Philosophy of Being and Becoming Human

It is in relation to the ensuing dialogue about a genuine Indian Humanism that does justice to the mechanical, organic and spiritual dimensions of humanness and social history, that a Christian contribution to Indian philosophy acquires importance.

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Chapter 16: Issues In Evangelistic Mission In The Present Indian Context

1. What is the Evangel, the gospel? 2. The missionary movement proclaimed the gospel to

people of other religions and cultures. 3. The evangelistic witness cannot be isolated from the total life of the church.

Chapter 17: Emerging Concepts Of Mission in Asia

The Christian is called not to convert but to witness. The Church's prophetic mission is to humanize the mechanisms of our corporate life.

Chapter 18: Mission Of The Church In The Pluralistic Context of India

Though it has existed in India for centuries, pluralism is also a modern reality. It is our common historical responsibility to build a genuinely human community, bringing peoples of all religions and cultures together within the framework of pluralism. What is the gospel for such a pluralistic situation as ours, where the common search is for the path of humanization?

Chapter 19: Re-Articulation Of Christian Identity in Higher Education

The Christian college should have some place in its structure where Jesus and his human-ness can be presented in the Scriptural context with its cultural implications, to those who wish to learn about him.

Chapter 20: The Quest for a Human Community in a Religiously Pluralist World

The question of providing spiritual fellowship to those committed to Christ in different religious communities is a peculiarly Indian ecclesiological problem which has been with us for many decades and needs to be faced squarely. If the church expects the Hindu family's toleration of any member converted to Christian faith, the church and Christian families also have to justify theologically and sociologically inter-religious marriages within their circle and deal pastorally with the persons involved.

Chapter 21: The Church - The Fellowship of the Baptised and the Unbaptised

Christ, not Christianity or Western culture, has been the slogan of many leaders of the Neo-Hindu movements in the 19th century, even as Christian Missions insisted on the three as one package.

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Preface

These papers, essays and talks deal primarily with the Indian Church's mission and Indian ecclesiology in relation to two contemporary Indian realities, namely religious and ideological pluralism and the peoples' movements against the present pattern of development under globalisation.

Text:

This is a collection of twenty-one selected essays given as papers and talks at various meetings in India during the years 1992 to 1996. They deal primarily with the Indian Church's mission and Indian ecclesiology in relation to two contemporary Indian realities,

namely religious and ideological pluralism and the peoples' movements against the present pattern of development under globalisation.

I have dealt with the first topic in my writings before. But there may be some new ground covered. The other topic was discussed in my Chavara Lectures. *A Diaconal Approach to Indian Ecclesiology*. Here I continue the reflections on it.

In editing these essays, I have tried to cut down repetitions to the minimum, but since some of them are integral to some of the essays I have left them there but have put footnotes to indicate cross references to show I am aware of these repetitions and to reduce the irritation they cause to the reader.

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Chapter 1: Common Life in the Religiously Pluralistic India

Talk given at the meeting of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture of the University of Kerala at the Syndicate Hall, Trivandrum on 17 April 1975

Pluralism is different from mere traditional plurality which was a coexistence of communities largely isolated from each other. Vice-president K.R.Narayanan in his recent speech at the Indian Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi spoke of Indian society even now as “a ‘coexistence society’ rather than a single society”; he defined coexistence society as “many groups, castes and religions living

together but interacting among each other only at the margins". He added that "what we have achieved through years of social reforms and economic changes is, that the degree of this marginal interaction has been progressively enhanced" (*Address by K.R.Narayanan, ISC Delhi 1994*). Secular ideologies which have brought a new sense of selfhood to all communities and the rights of that selfhood for full participation in the Centres of power which determine the meaning-content and goals of life in society are also a basic factor in this pluralism with parity. As religion has been constitutive of the self-identity of several traditional communities in India, the situation may be spoken of as a pluralism of religions and secular ideologies. The only path available today is, either the domination of the majority religion or secular ideology as the established framework of the State suppressing the rights of others using State coercion or open democratic secularism in which a consensus is sought regarding the values and directions of the common life of society and the State policy related to that common life, through peaceful but active dialogue among religions and ideologies. My topic deals with some lines in which the transition from coexistence to democratic secular existence in a single society may be constructively

pursued.

This Open Secularism should not be interpreted as the common acceptance of any one secular or religious faith. That will be a denial of plurality. The common unity should be sought at the level of *Values* of secular living and not at the level of *Ultimate Truth*. The traditional understanding of separation between *Vyavaharika* versus *Paramarthika* levels of truth is important. But the separation of the two levels should not be considered in any total sense. People's faiths (Truth affirmations have their implications for the values for secular living to which they commit themselves. Faith and Culture as well as Faith and Morality are different but closely related. But it is possible to hold to different Faiths and support a move towards a more or less consensus about cultural and moral values through rational dialogue among Faiths, and reinforce that consensus from different faith-standpoints. What does this mean in practice?

Democratic Secularism should not be interpreted as a common denial of belief in a transcendent religious ultimate, as when Scientific Rationalism or Marxism is made the State ideology. That would be making a Secularist Ideology the "established religion" of the

common life. It would only make for a religious vacuum in the life of the people leading to the rise of religious fundamentalism and communalism to fill the vacuum. Of course it is one thing for individuals and groups having faith in a philosophy of Secularism that denies the transcendent ultimate, but it is another to make it the established faith of the whole society or State. Indeed one may even argue that atheists are necessary in any religiously oriented society to correct corruptions and criticize superstitions in religion; they play the prophetic role when prophets who attack false religion in the name of authentic religion are not available.

Similarly no one religious faith or religious conception of the Ultimate Reality or even any one doctrine about the relation between religions should be made integral to Open Secularism. The idea that equality of religions is integral to Secularism is a characteristic of the Mystic approach to Reality that denies any ultimate reality to *nama* and *rupa* of religions. This approach is different from that of the Semitic religions which is based on the self-revelation of the Ultimate in history in unique particular *nama* and *rupa*. Here again there will be peoples affirming the mystic or revelatory approach to Reality, but any one

approach cannot be made basic to democratic secularism, though there is no harm in discussing the relative merits of each in relation to the ethic of common living. No doubt equal respect for persons holding different faiths in sincerity and equal respect and serious consideration for whatever faith held by any person in sincerity are essential to democracy. But this should not be confused with religious belief in the equality of religions. Freedom to “profess practice and propagate religion makes sense as a fundamental right of persons only on the basis of the recognition of this difference. The right of religious propagation given by medieval theocratic religious states was only for truth recognized as true by the established religion and state, It was different from the present democratic freedom of persons to pursue truth as dictated by one’s reason and conscience and to propagate the truth to which he decides to commit him/her-self. Even in States which had the ideology of Communism as established truth, as formerly in Russia and China, it was only the truth in its established sense that was originally given the right of freedom of propagation; it was a purely medieval theocratic idea in its reverse Secularist form.

The crucial question is whether a plurality of religious and secular

faiths, each of which had developed its own traditional culture. that is philosophy, morality, ideology and legal system of corporate life, can through inter-faith rational discourse create at least the basic framework of a common culture or common direction and scheme of values for peoples to build together a new dwelling, like the national community. That is, will the faith-communities while keeping their separate identities be prepared in the present historical situation of pluralism, to interact with each other bringing their respective religious and/or ideological insights on the conception of the human so as to build something of a consensus of cultural and moral values on which to build a single larger secular community? While their distinctive cultural traditions will have to be renewed, call they do it and feel that their traditions have found fulfillment through that renewal? I submit that we can.

Let me spell out two very clear ideas about the nature and destiny of human-ness. First, all religions and ideologies posit Love as the ultimate moral law of human perfection and community of love with its harmony as the final goal of human and cosmic relationships. Second, nevertheless all religions and ideologies do have a sense that humankind as they are today, is in

some kind of self-alienation which makes the fulfillment of that perfect law impossible and corruption of power inevitable. Therefore while keeping love as the essence of humanness and therefore the criterion and goal of all human endeavour, human society today has to eschew utopianism and organize itself as power-structures based on a sense of the moral law of structural justice and utilize even the coercive legal sanctions of the State to preserve social peace and protect the weaker sections of society in a balance of order. freedom and justice. That is to say, all realistic social morality requires keeping the relation between power, law and love in tension, till the sources of human self-alienation are overcome and loving relation which has spontaneity as its character is possible.

Thus in Biblical thought, there are two divine covenants with humanity operating in the face of evil created by human self-alienation. One, the covenant of redemptive grace with Abraham which ends in the Messianic-Kingdom of Love and the other, the covenant with Noah of protective law of reverence for life and later with Moses of the Ten Commandments for the preservation of realisable justice in society. In Christianity, Jesus' Sermon of the Mount expresses

the character of the ethic of perfect love characteristic of the community appropriating the reconciling Grace of God in Jesus and this is to be consummated in the Kingdom of God to come. Since this unconditioned love is impossible of practice in a world where unredeemed sinfulness must be considered the general characteristic, common civil society and its individual members as well as institutions like the family, the economic order, nationality and the State necessary for the preservation of humanity are to be ordered according to the Moral Law inherent in their nature. Such laws are ordained by God in their creation and are not destroyed by sin and therefore called Law of Nature understandable by reason in the Catholic tradition. In the Protestant tradition sin has perverted the moral law of creation more radically and therefore takes a more pragmatic approach to the laws needed in different historical situations for the preservation of civil society, its individual members and its basic institutions. But the idea of two distinct and inter-related levels of morality, the ultimate ethic of Love and the relative ethic of Law, are clearly laid down in the Christian system of ethics.

The two levels of morality is found in Marxist ideology.

Feuerbach in his *Essence of Christianity* interpreted theology as only a form of anthropology and explained the human belief in the God of Love as an affirmation of Love as the essence of being human which is denied in human existence. Marx and Engels accepted this interpretation but strongly criticized Feuerbach for assuming that this essence can be realized in human existence by morally willing it. Engels says: "But love! yes -- with Feuerbach love is everywhere and at all times the wonder-working god who should help to surmount all difficulties of practical life -- and that in a society which is split into classes with diametrically opposite interests. At this point the last relic of its revolutionary character disappears from his philosophy, leaving only the old cant: love one another; fall into each other's arms regardless of distinctions of sex or estate -- a universal orgy of reconciliation"(Quoted by Bastian Wielenga, *Introduction to Marxism* p.353). Love is not realizable until the social alienation of human beings in class-society is overcome and classless society emerges, for which of course the ethics of power-politics of class-struggle with its denials of love is to be followed. In fact Marx would say that just as selfishness is natural in class-society, love will be natural in classless society. They need not be interpreted in moral

terms. Both are natural necessities of social conditions, one of social alienation and the other of its being overcome. It looks that they do not even interpenetrate now; they come one after the other in history. It is this that Fidel Castro and Che Guevara have questioned "Let me tell you, at the risk of looking ridiculous, that a true revolutionary is led by great feelings of love" (p.354).

Hinduism also has this two-tier morality of Perfect Love and Relative Law. It speaks primarily, not of love but of Unitive Vision as the final goal of human life. But as Vivekananda has maintained, the two are ethically the same; only the Hindu system of ethics uses, not the personalist but the more philosophical language. He says. "There is no limit to this getting out of selfishness. All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness. Supposing this absolute unselfishness can be reached by a man, what becomes of him? He is no more the little Mr. So-and-so; he has acquired in finite expansion....The personalist when he hears this idea philosophically put, gets frightened. At the same time, if he preaches morality, he after all teaches the very same idea himself"(*Works I*. p.107). While striving for this end, the natural goals (the secular *purusharthas* - *artha, kama and dharma*- pursuit

of wealth, happiness and duties of ones social station) of civil society are organized according to the laws of *sadharana dharma* of *ahimsa*, *varnasrama dharma* of four social vocations and the *asrama* stages of individual life. Of course the dharmic laws of civil society got absolutised when separated completely from the final goal of unitive vision. and as a result their historical situational character was lost until Neo-Hinduism took up the cause of social reform. That is another matter. The point is that the perfect ethics of *nishkama* for the self-realized and the relative ethics of *artha*, *kama* and *dharma* of the world of plurality, were both posited in traditional and modern ethical systems of Hinduism.

India's Socialist Secularism worked out within the ethos of traditional Hinduism, pursues this two-tier absolute-relative system of ethics. For instance, Asoka Mehta writing on Democratic Socialism said that a thorough-going moral relativism would bring about chaos or tyranny. So while recognizing that there are historically conditioned morality like feudal morality, bourgeois morality and proletarian morality, there must be an absolute moral criterion to evaluate all moralities. Elsewhere he said "There undoubtedly are aspects of ethics that are relative but men's deeper

responses are to the absolute ethic, that nostalgia of man's deepest ultimate triumph overall limitations." The absolute is the "achievement of self-harmony and acceptance of the rights and reality of other persons", i.e. harmony is self-realization in a community of inter-personal love. For him it is the final fruit of all efforts and the end of all quests. It provides the "touchstone to judge and improve the historically conditioned morality. To deny validity to absolute ethics is to rob the ship at sea of its compass" (*Report-The Congress Socialist Part 1950*). Ram Manohar Lohia interpreted the relative-historical and perfect-eternal dimensions of his Socialist ethics by relating Marxism to Hindu spirituality. He wrote, "Every moment is no doubt a passing link in the great flux, but is also an eternity in itself", and added, "The method of dialectical materialism informed by spirituality may unravel the movement of history; the method of spirituality informed by dialectical materialism may raise the edifice of being" (*Marx, Gandhi and Socialism* p. 373-4.)

Islam with its central emphasis on the unity of God and God's moral sovereignty of the world, sees the universe as "teleological, growth-oriented and destined to evolve towards perfection" in which the unity of all humanity will be

realized. God has “created the potential for it through divine *hidaya* and revealed the values which would ensure growth”. God called human being to be vice-regent of God and entrusted him/her with the burden of responsibility for the future of the universe. But human beings have betrayed the trust through *shirk*, that is, by associating creatures with God. The Quran declares. “Verily I proposed to the heavens and the earth and the mountains to receive the trust (*amanah*), but they refused the burden and feared to receive it. Man alone undertook to bear it, but has proved unjust, senseless”. It is in this situation of human alienation from the path of perfection that the laws of social living which took the form of *shariat* were ordained to call human beings to God and to their vocation of witness to divine justice and mercy. Here too, there seems to have an ethic of perfection and an ethic of the alienated situation(Ref. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and its Relevance to Our Age*. Bombay 1984).

A. A. Fyzee in his *Modern Approach to Islam* (Bombay 1993) says that the *shariat* is “analogue of the Torah of the Jews and the Dharma among the Hindus”. One could add that they analogous to the Christian ethic of law of nature, to the Liberal ethic of individual freedom and to the

Marxist law of class-struggle.
They are all ethics of empirical historical situations alienated from the essence of humanity, in one sense witnessing to, and in another sense waiting in hope for the realization of the ethic of love. And one could further add Engineer's comment about *shariat* to all of them. He says, "Law is empirical and vision is transcendental. The balance between the two is lost if either is de-emphasized"(p.34). Once the ethic of law is totally separated from its relation to the transcendent or the futurist vision of perfection, it loses dynamism and becomes static and gets absolutised and made irrelevant to new historical situations. When that happens, there is absolute conflict between them or they join hands in defending ethics of reaction against all new conceptions of justice in law, as *shariat* and natural law did in the recent Cairo World Conference on population.

My thesis is that the many visions of perfection are more or less the same or at least analogical, and therefore if each Faith keeps its ethics of law dynamic within the framework of and in tension with its own transcendent vision of perfection, the different religious and secular Faiths can have a fruitful dialogue at depth on the nature of human alienation which makes love impossible and for

updating our various approaches to personal and public law with greater realism with insights from each other. This will help to make our different ethics of law expressive of our historical responsibility of building a common civil society for adherents of all Faiths.

Recently at a meeting in Kozhencherry, Kerala, E.M.S. Nampootrhiripad advocated cooperation between religious believers and Marxists at the action-level for the good of humanity, without interfering at the level of each other's beliefs or basic ethics. Personally I think the cooperation in action requires some conversations on each other's anthropology for the sake of arriving at a measure of consensus on an adequate common approach to what constitutes the good of humanity in the present situation and to the nature of the ethic of struggle and action needed to realize it. (At a meeting in Mavelikara on the 13th Feb 96, where EMS, gave the Bishop M. M. John Lecture on *The Significance of Dialogue between Religion, and Secular ideologies for building a New Humanism*, as chairman I raised the question whether a future Socialism would not require the following changes in the Marxist ideology so as not to fall into Stalinism. 1. That the moral dimension of human society is the

foundation and the material of the superstructure; 2. That scientific and technical rationality is only a path to one dimension of truth; to affirm otherwise leads revolutionary technology to technocratic domination over persons as in Stalinism. 3. The source of the corruption of power is the spiritual self-alienation of the human life and will remain even after class or any other instrument of it is gone: ignoring of this has led to Communism's rejecting democratic checks resulting in the Stalinist totalitarianism. EMS answered these questions from a traditional Marxist position.)

This remains true for cooperation between religions and between religion and secular faiths. For a situation of ethical pluralism, that is the only way in which a more or less common mind on empirical ethics relevant to the contemporary situation can emerge. Only then can law become an instrument of humanizing the technological culture of the global village and of meeting the demands of social liberation of the dalits, the tribals and the women whether in our separate communities of faith or at large in the country.

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Chapter 2: Religious Fundamentalism And Indian Secularism - the Present Crisis

*A Talk given at the Seminar on
the Future of inter-religious
Dialogue at Dharmaram on 17
August 1993.*

In this Seminar on the future of the inter-religious dialogue, it is proper that we start with the specific context of the present crisis of Indian Secularism and its relation to religious fundamentalism.

Indian Secularism emerged as a basic political ideology in the course of the Indian national struggle for independence. It

emerged as the concept of Secular Nationalism in opposition to the nationalism based on the interests of one or other of the religious communities, therefore also called communalism. The Hindu nationalism with its goal of Hindu Rashtra of Akhanda Hindustan drawing its strength from Hindu revivalism appeared with militancy in the latter half of the first decade of the century in the Congress in opposition to the Liberal Nationalism of the earlier period which was too weak to fight for national independence. With its weakening in the Congress, it found organized expression in the Hindu Mahasabha and later in the Rashtriya Swayamseva Sangh. The two-nation-theory that India consists of the Hindu and the Islamic nations which are to be separated at independence found organized expression in the Muslim League. The idea of Secular Nationalism became dominant under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. It provided an ideological framework within which the many religious communities of India as well as the plurality of linguistic caste and ethnic cultures (in the formation of which one or other religions had played a dominant role) could participate together with the adherents of secular ideologies like Liberalism and Socialism (which emerged in India in the framework of the impact of modern humanism of

the West mediated through western power and English education). Therefore dialogue between Religion and Secular Humanism as well as between Religions began to take place within the national context on the meaning, values and goals of modern Indian nationhood.

Gandhi represented the long history of Renascent Hinduism from Raja Rammohan Roy through Swami Vivekandnada to Gandhi himself, in which Hindu religion and culture were being renewed in interaction with Western Christianity and modern secular culture; and Nehru represented the dynamic of European Enlightenment and Liberal Democratic and Marxian social ideologies which emerged in the ethos. Thus India's Secular Nationalism was a dialogic integration between renascent religion and secular ideologies. The middle class who give leadership to the national movement was the bearer of this idea of Secular Nationalism for pluralistic India.

When India became independent it was this middle class committed to secularism that drew up the Constitution of the Indian Nation-State. They imposed the idea of secular nationalism on the Indian peoples because they were convinced that it was the best basis for unity of pluralistic India

and the best path towards building a new society based on the values of liberty, equality and justice. They also hoped to build indigenous roots for them in the various religions and cultures of India by reforming them from within and also by legal intervention and developing a composite culture supportive of a State which is common to all peoples living in India equally and a modernized society with dignity and justice for all.

Ram Jethmalani specifies the clauses in the Constitution defining Indian Secularism in his article in the *Indian Express* (Feb. 14, '93) on "Clearing Confusion". "The most important component of secularism of the Indian variety is to be found in Articles 14, 15(2) and 16(2). These Articles compel equality of all citizens before the law and entitle them to equal protection of the laws. They outlaw the discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of his religion, whether it be in the matter of public employment or access to public places and even charity. Another facet of it was in Article 19(1)a which granted freedom of speech and expression and Article 25 which preserved the total freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion. Of course this right was subject to reasonable restrictions in the interests of public order, morality

and health and the power of the State to legislate for social welfare

The partition of India and the establishment of Pakistan as an Islamic State and the Hindu-Muslim riots which happened in the wake of independence did strengthen the idea of Hindu State in India. But the assassination of Gandhi by the advocates of Hindu Rashtra boomeranged and Gandhi's martyrdom and Nehru's leadership exposing the Fascist nature of Hindutva reestablished Indian Secularism as the basis of Indian polity and nationhood. Nehru's characterization of the Hindutva of the RSS assumes that Hindu Nationalism is one way of relating itself to the modern western religion cum secular impact on India. For Fascism too is a western ideology. In fact Hindutva is a reaction in self-defence of the traditional religious and social structure utilizing the technocratic and political power-means imported from the modern West. Savarkar asked for "Hinduisation of Indian politics and militarisation of Hinduism" to establish and defend Akhanda Hindustan.

Now how do we account for the emergence of RSS-VHP-BJP *parivar* and their Hindu ideology to new strength after four decades of the working of Indian Secularism to the extent of

threatening the secular pluralistic basis of Indian polity? Their new strength is clear in their electoral successes and the appeal of their agitation and their new confidence about coming to power as rulers of India. It is their new vitality and popular support in the country of Gandhi and Nehru that needs interpretation.

There are no doubt many reasons for a complex phenomenon like this. Here I mention a few, actually three, which may be specially relevant to the theme of our Seminar.

1. Firstly, the spiritual vacuum created by Closed Secularism. Recently Rustom Bharucha's *The Question of Faith* (published as no:3 of the Tracts for the Times by Oriental Longman 1993) raises the question of the relation of Indian Secularism to religion as Faith. The Editor in the Preface says that the Tract "polemises against a form of narrow sectarian Secularism which refuses to be sensitive to tradition and faith" and argues that Secularism needs to be rethought taking religious faith seriously, that "only then can Secularism reclaim the ideological space which Fundamentalists are threatening to take over, only then can Secularists capture the minds of the people"(p.vi). And the author Bharucha explains, "If by Secularism we mean a total

avoidance of religious matters, the secular weapons may not be enough” to fight Fundamentalism. The point is that “if we do not intervene in the debates concerning the interpretation of religion, we are simply playing into the hand of Fundamentalists. Merely non-antireligious terms will only strengthen the deadlock” (p.4). The author discusses *melas* and *lilas*, Ananthamoorthy's novels, Lohia and Gandhi, to show that there is religion as faith which is distinct from religion as ideology, and that it is an ally of political secularism. His conclusion is that “a reductive Secularism that has tended to equate almost anything religious with a fundamentalist purpose” is not the best way to resist the onslaught of fundamentalism. Therefore he asks for discrimination between terms like Religious, Communal and Fundamentalist (p.88). He adds that encountering fundamentalism on rigidly political lines is not enough; “alternatives have to be explored within the larger secular drives of neo-religious forms and philosophies” (p.92). In this connection he speaks of the significance of the Liberation Theology movements in all religions and notes the significance of the radical religious movements. The tradition of Neo-Hindu movements represented by Gandhi has been a force behind Indian secularism. Nehru could

recodify Hindu personal law only because the Neo-Hindu movements had prepared the Hindu religious mind for it. Nehru saw no such neo-Muslim movement in Islam to touch the Muslim personal law. The Neo-Hinduism of Sri.Narayana Guru challenging the caste structure religiously was the basis of a good deal of the radical secular politics of social justice in Kerala. But Indian Secularism in recent years has been too closed to take any real interest in religious movements of renewal and denied religious spirituality or spiritually based morality any role in "public's life. Alternately, it has made secularism to mean keeping as vote-banks a federation of fundamentalist/conservative religious communities each resisting any social change towards equality in its traditionally sanctioned social structure and showing indifference to the reforming liberal elements working in these communities. One may point to the politics of the Congress or the Left to illustrate it.

Actually Indian Secularists in the recent past did not care to put down roots in the indigenous soil of the religious or vernacular linguistic cultures of the country. As a result, when electoral politics enlarged the political community of India by bringing the groups other than the middle class into it,

it produced popular leaders more inclined to the unrenewed traditions. That is to say, the dialogue between Religion and Secularism came to a stop leaving the field to closed secularism on the one hand and the revived communally oriented fundamentalist religion and culture on the other.

2. Secondly, Religious Fundamentalism. Whether all religious fundamentalisms emerge out of reaction to closed secularism or not is debatable. It may also arise from the insecurity of faith when its religious expressions are faced with the necessity to change. Whatever its origin, religious fundamentalism which rejects change in religion or its social structure ends up by isolating itself from the influence of other religions or the values of secular humanism, and in the long run tends to make religious community centred on its self-righteousness and eventually its self-interest. In the many quotes from Bharucha, religious fundamentalism almost becomes the basic enemy of Indian secularism. Therefore we must define Religious Fundamentalism a little more clearly.

The word Fundamentalism came into vogue in 1920 in relation to the Christian group who earlier published a set of twelve booklets under the title, *Fundamentals*.

These booklets opposed the application of modern critical historical approach to the Bible and the traditional dogmas of Christianity, because in their opinion, it would destroy their supra-national and supernatural elements which belong to their very essence. Thus Fundamentalism and Modernism, Faith and Reason, were separated into two water-tight compartments. In contrast, some other believers maintained that the interaction between them was essential to discriminate the truly supernatural elements necessary to religious faith from irrational superstitions which distort faith; that it was also necessary to make faith reasonable and to express it intelligently to the moderns so as to offer them a faith that liberates reason from becoming idolatrous and inhuman.

This debate was crucial in distinguishing and relating scientifically objective history and the mythical interpretations of it expressing the divine and subjective meaning of the same for the community of faith. This was crucial, especially in relation to the Genesis account of Creation, the story of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus in the Gospels and the New Testament accounts in which the hope of the consummation of the Kingdom of God in the future was expressed. The debate

included also the distinction and relation between the history of the church as part of the general religious history of humankind and as God's select community to be the universal sign of Divine salvation for all. In the 80s when the Fundamentalists emerged in USA with control of the electronic media and formed the electronic church, they also formed the Moral Majority movement with a conservative ideology backing Reagan's policies of *laissez faire* economics and dismantling social welfare entitlements and of opposition to equal rights for all irrespective of colour or sex. At this point, Religious Fundamentalism became a political ideological religion.

I have related this history of Christian fundamentalism to clarify what fundamentalism means and to show that it is justifiable to characterize as fundamentalist similar movements in any religion which through communal isolation from critical reason, secular humanism or through search for political power, buttresses traditional beliefs and social order from reform and seeks to destroy democratic freedoms.

In India the use of the word Fundamentalism has developed certain special nuances which are worth noting. V.M. Tarkunde,

himself a Radical Humanist, in his JPMemorial Lecture on “Communalism and Human Rights” (*PUCL Bulletin* June 93), clearly distinguishes Fundamentalism from Communalism. He says, “Fundamentalism consists of uncritical adherence to ancient beliefs and practices. Communalism on the other hand consists of animosity of persons belonging to one religion toward persons of another religion. A fundamentalist need not be communalist at all...On the other hand a communalist need not be a fundamentalist at all...Fundamentalism requires to be opposed by all Humanists and Democrats, but that opposition should not be mixed up with an opposition to communalism. In fact many members of Muslim fundamentalist bodies may be helpful to us in promoting communal amity in the country”. Tarkunde is right in distinguishing between them, but he underestimates the inability of fundamentalism to embrace people of other religions or secular humanists within their theological or community circle predisposing them to theocratic politics in the interests of “true religion and virtue”; and I would add that he underestimates the role of fundamentalism in India.

Fundamentalist Hindu opposition to change of the traditional Hindu

social order had played a large part in the creation and strengthening of the RSS ideology of opposition to other religions and to movements of Hindu reformation. This is clear from what Golwalker says in his writings on *Hindutva* and Lohia's essay on Hinduism which he wrote soon after the assassination of Gandhi. Golwalker says, that Hindutva is hostile to Islam because "Islam was the first religion to interfere with our social organization of *chaturvarna*...Islam in India challenged our scheme of class-caste organization. All post-Islamic sects sought to counter Islam by seeking to take the wind out of Islamic sails by themselves making the same challenge. That is why these sects have now become a source of national division and weakness". Here the RSS chiefs opposition to Islam, the sufi and bhakti sects and Gandhism and by extension to Christianity, liberalism and socialism, are all one piece. This led Golwalker to characterise those "who advocated Hindu-Muslim unity as necessary to fight for swaraj" as the perpetrators of the "greatest treason in our society" (Yogendra Sikand "Religion and Religious Nationalism" in *The Frontier* 9.5.92). Lohia writing on the motivation behind Gandhi's assassination coupled Hindutva hostility to Islam and to the democratic transformation of

Hindu society. He wrote, "No Hindu can be generally tolerant to Muslims unless he acts at the same time actively against caste and property and for women". To Lohia, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi was not an episode of Hindu-Muslim fight as of the war between the Liberal and the Fanatical in Hinduism ("Hinduism" in *Fragments of a World Mind*). That is, Hindutva's Communalism is closely related to its Fundamentalism.

M.N. Srinivas makes a distinction between Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism. He sees that substantial numbers of Hindus have moved into the middle class who have been most affected by the process of secularization. This process has been strengthened, not necessarily by the philosophy of secularism but by the "recent great developments in communication, transport, urbanization and education". As a result, "ideas of purity and impurity" which were so pervasive in the lives of Hindus have become much weaker, and in the life-style of the middle class they are "becoming confined to rites of passage, pilgrimages and a few festivals". Middle class from other religions are also affected, but purity-impurity ideas were "weaker among them initially". Unemployment has added economic security to the religious

uprooting. This provides the “ideal soil for sowing fundamentalist seeds”. But he adds, Fundamentalism has to be distinguished from Orthodoxy; for while the latter involves strict adherence to tradition, the former interprets tradition for political purposes” (“Towards a New Philosophy” in *The Times of India* 9.7.93). But in the light of the history of Christian fundamentalism, Srinivas's Orthodoxy is Fundamentalism and his Fundamentalism is the ideology of Communalism. Purity-impurity ideas were the religious foundation of caste and it is the return to it by the middle class for spiritual and economic stability that makes for their shift from Secularism to Hindutva. The middle class of other religions may also be showing a new passion for the securities of their religious tradition. In their case the sense of being part of a minority community may add to their insecurity.

It is necessary however to state that scholars like Ashish Nandy see no genuinely religious motivation in Communalism, and therefore avoids relating it to Fundamentalism which has a basic religious concern in its motivation. Hindutva like Closed Secularism itself “assumes the world to be a desacralised place, where only the laws of the market, history, judiciary and

empirical science work”. It is “blatantly non-Indian and recognizably an illegitimate child of colonialism”, which introduced the idea of priority of State over Religion against the Indian concept of building the State on the basis of a “secondary allegiance” as in the case of Asoka and Akbar and, in modern India, Mahatma Gandhi. It is the Semitization of Hinduism in the 19th century that now “reaches its form in political Hinduism, Brahminic, steam-rolling...The ultimate product of this process was Nathuram Vinayak Godse...”. In Nandy’s opinion, serious believers cannot use their faith instrumentally as ideology. “Hinduism is a Faith; Hindutva an Ideology”. It is “Secularism’s double, the poor man’s *Statism*” (*Indian Express* Feb. ‘90). Therefore the tradition of Hindu tolerance practiced within a world assumed to be the realm of the sacred, has no relevance for Hindutva as for Secularism. Here we are back to the necessity of religious faith and of dialogue with both Secularism and Hindutva to convert them to a genuine basis of what Nandy calls “the plural patriotism on which the most important strand of the freedom movement was based, and is now culturally orphan”. I suppose he means a return to Gandhism.

3. Thirdly, the tension between

religions on Conversion. I should mention briefly a third factor contributing to the crisis of Indian Secularism, namely the tension between Hinduism and the missionary religions on the question of conversion which continue unresolved'. Not only the Hindutva of the RSS but also the Neo-Hinduism of the Gandhian line consider the mission of conversion of people from one religion to another as religious imperialism and destructive of inter-religious harmony.

Recently H.V.Seshadri, the General Secretary of the RSS issued a commentary on the RSS's call to the minorities. In it he makes the point that Hindutva being by nature "all embracing and looks upon every sincere religious and spiritual pursuit with equal respect, is the opposite of Fundamentalism" which is intolerant of plurality.

Fundamentalism, he said, "represents a mind-set confined within one Prophet, one Book, a single way of worship" which by nature led to the "concept of believers going to heaven and nonbelievers going to hell, with a religious duty cast upon its followers to convert the rest by any means whatsoever" (*Indian Express?* 1993).

The more liberal Krishna Kanth, the Governor of Andhra Pradesh,

in his address to the Assembly of the National Council of Churches in 1991 and following it in a press interview with Neerge Choudhury (*Indian Express* 21 Oct. 1991) “called for an end to religious conversion in the country, not by law but by a voluntary consensus of religious leaders”, because in his opinion, communal strife is closely linked to conversion. His main argument is as follows: “The word Hindu which had essentially geographic and cultural meaning began to acquire religious connotations” and communal overtones when missionary religious began converting the untouchables and lower castes of Hindu society with promise of their liberation from caste indignities. It produced in Hindus the feeling that “in an age of competitive politics” in which power-sharing is “determined by numbers”, conversion would reduce them to insignificance. In any case, says Kanth, conversion did not bring liberation to the converted people from caste, because caste is not just a Hindu phenomenon but an Indian reality and is practiced by all religions in India. So, the “social logic” of conversion is no more there. But it is with conversion that the “false concept of majority and minority emerged making Hinduism a religion and caste a Hindu phenomenon”. Only a stopping of conversion will be “a starting point for harmony in society and for lessening mental

insecurity, fanaticism and prevalent climate of confrontation”.

The fundamental law of religious freedom in the Constitution of India includes the freedom to “propagate” religion. But the debate on it was endless. It was the announcement by Mukherji and D’ Sousa that the Christian Community had decided to forgo special communal representation in the legislature and other communal safeguards so that there would not be political exploitation of increase of numbers through conversion that there was a spontaneous decision in the Constituent Assembly to include propagation of religion as a fundamental human right of the citizen. Though the Court has ruled that the right to propagate does not include the right to convert, that right is the right of the one who hears the propagated religion. But even afterwards there were attempts to restrict this freedom by law in Parliament. It was Nehru’s opposition to them that defeated them. The O.P. Tyagi Bill got the support of then Prime Minister Morarji Desai and it was the fall of the Desai ministry that prevented it from getting passed. But the question has continued to agitate Hindu minds. It raises many very sensitive theological as well as social issues on which Hinduism with its mystic orientation and

Christianity and Islam with their prophetic historical orientation differ in a fundamental sense. But the ecumenical inter-religious dialogues in recent years have been exploring new paths to break the deadlock. The Indian situation certainly calls for mutual understanding at depth and consensus about permitted parameters of religious practices, for which inter-faith dialogues among religions and secular ideologies at various levels may be necessary, specifically within the Indian context. Since freedom of propagation and conversion involves not only matters of religion, but also of culture and political ideas, any restriction at this point will affect the fundamental rights of the human person in general. I suppose that must be the reason for Governor Kanth proposing a consensus of religious leaders on this matter outside the law.

In fact the difference in the character of mystic and prophetic, Indian and Semitic spiritualities needs to be discussed at depth. Nehru used to say that he preferred the cultural attitude related to the spirit of Paganism which allowed many gods including an unknown god to coexist; it reinforces democratic tradition. He also thought that the totalitarianism of Communism and Fascism was a secularization of the Semitic religious outlook.

Lohia saw the same difference but thought if the attitude of coexistence of gods is allowed to go to extreme in matters of society and politics, it would cut active dialogue between different points of view and bring about stagnation. He realized that the other approach brought about strife. So he asked for a synthesis of the two, failing which he would prefer strife rather than stagnation. This discussion shows that there are clear political and cultural implications for all religious attitudes. So inter-faith dialogue must include these implications also.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerala). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerala, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 3: Meanings of Being a Secular State: A Critical Evaluation

A talk at the Seminar on the topic at Kottarakara, Kerala on 18 November 1995

The word "Secularism" is used in India usually in relation to the idea of the Secular State which has been established in the religiously pluralistic context of India. The Constitution of India when formulated by the Constituent Assembly did not have the word "secular" to denote the character of the State in independent India, but it was assumed in several of its clauses. But the word was added later in the seventies through an amendment. The Supreme Court of India has declared it to be a basic character of the Indian state which should not be changed.

It essentially aims at avoiding the medieval pattern of state which was "theocratic". All traditional states and societies in the medieval period have been theocracies. State and

society were integrated with the authority of one or other single “established” religion whose sanction determined the law of citizenship and social structure. In medieval Europe it was Christendom, and in the Arab countries it was Islamic, and in India it was Hindu or Islamic. A theocracy gives first class citizenship only to the adherents of the established religion; the others are legally restricted in their religious practices and discriminated adversely in social life and in the provision of social opportunities. The Secular State is anti-theocratic in the sense that the State has no special relation to any one religion. Therefore the adherents of all religions and no religion have the same status and rights of citizenship including freedom of religion/belief and freedom from discrimination in civic life on the basis of religion/belief. It gives all citizens in the land, irrespective of their religious or ideological belief or affiliation,

1 This historical part has already been given in essay No. 2

2 Characterised as “Closed Secularism” in Essay No. 2

the right to cooperate in the building of the national community as a “fraternity” of individual persons and peoples on the basis of equality before the law of the land.

In the Indian national movement, from the time national struggle for freedom became militant, there has been a conflict between “secular” nationalism and “theocratic (Hindu/Islamic)” nationalisms. Gandhi with his reformed Hinduism and Nehru with his secular humanist belief reinforced the secular idea of politics and state, against the theocratic. Though partition of India and the communal (Hindu/Muslim) killings at the time of Independence and the Hindu ideologist assassination of Gandhi showed the strength of the theocratic ideology in Indian politics, the Union of India established itself as a secular nation-state¹. Even today the secular versus theocratic political ideology is an important part of the Indian political scenario.

There are various approaches to religion and religions which have gone into the make up of Indian secularism.

The advocates of each of these approaches have their own interpretation of the political meaning of it. Three of these deserve special mention.

1. The idea that secularism confines religion to the private realm and bars it from any relation to the public life which is to be guided purely by secularist ideologies which deny any religious view of reality²
2. That secularism is based on the doctrine of the equality of religions.
3. That secularism means that the State guarantees the security of the laws and structures of family and society of religious communities which have the sanction of traditional religion.

We shall evaluate these critically to point out their lopsidedness in the light of a more adequate definition of secularism. A positive idea of secularism will, I hope, get clarified in the process of this critical evaluation.

Firstly, the approach of anti-religious philosophy of secularism. The early Liberal Rationalist Nehru and Dialectical Materialist E.M. Sankaran Nampoothiripad have maintained the position that Secularism means that religion is a “private” affair, of individual’s belief and worship and that it should not have anything to do ultimately with “public” life of state or society. EMS often quotes Jesus’ words, Give to God and Caesar what belongs to each, with this interpretation.

There is a good deal of truth in this interpretation if we look historically at the emergence of the idea of the secular state in Europe and India. In the former, the Catholic-Protestant War to secure domination of public life lasted three decades before they listened to the rationalist proposal to build nation-states which were common to all who lived in the territory irrespective of their religious affiliation or their atheistic faith. The Hindu-Muslim communal riots in India also made a certain separation of religion from public education and party-politics a necessity for public peace in

India. And if we look at the dominant influence shaping modern Indian public life, it has been the impact of Liberal or Marxian secular humanist ideology. The Preamble of the Constitution of India speaks of “We the People” committing ourselves to build a nation-state as the instrument of a new society based on liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. The first three comes from the slogans of the French Revolution and the last is inspired by the Russian revolution.

Nevertheless, the logical goal of this “secularist” (as different from an “open secular”) interpretation is that the State should be a sort of anti-theo “theocracy” with some anti-religious ideology as its established “quasi-religion”, promoting secularization of all public life. Kamal Pasha tried this in Turkey, Stalin in the Soviet Union and Mao in China. In these countries the right of individual to practice religion in the privacy of their religious group was legally granted, but the right to propagate it (either to educate children and youth in it or to make its insights the basis of a prophetic role in politics, economics or society) was constitutionally banned. That right of propagation was given only to the official ideology. Of course the attempt failed.

In any case, no religion worth the name would accept this interpretation of religion as limited to individual's piety. If religion is concerned with ultimate Truth or God, it cannot but have its implications for the whole of life, private and public, and therefore the fundamental human right of religious freedom should include the right to express religious faith in prophetic ministry in society and politics in the name of justice. Gandhi has given expression to his position that he cannot conceive of religion and politics in separation.

In fact, the religious view considers the secularist “mechanical materialist view of reality as too reductionist and as leaving out the “organic” and “spiritual” dimensions of human being and history and therefore as unable to renew the values of humanism and its reverence for life and the dignity of the human person in society in the name of

which secularism started to protest against religious authoritarianism. Hitlerism and Stalinism have proved beyond doubt that even secularism can be authoritarian, even totalitarian which leaves no room for any other effective stream of thought and life. Further, secularist ideologies have created a spiritual vacuum in the life of the secularized people, leading many to return to religious fundamentalism and communalism in militant forms. The only answer to such a situation is the witness of the relevance of reformed religions with their holistic view of reality for public life.

Pandit Nehru himself, though remaining skeptical of institutionalized religions, had in later years, given expression in his Interview with Karanjia, to the idea that material advance, if it is to become meaningful and to enhance the quality of life, should recognize the spiritual real iii of eternal values towards which religions point. The Socialist Lohia spoke of the necessity of a synthesis between Indian spirituality and dialectical materialism. Jai Prakash Narain in his last phase, gave up materialism and accepted Gandhian spirituality as the basis of his politics of the Total Revolution.

But that does not mean that religion must enter politics for the purpose of securing power for the religious community. Religion is concerned with the meaning of life and with faith expressing itself in bringing forgiving love in inter-personal relations and justice for the poor and the weaker sections of society in inter-people power-relations of public life. If religions thus eschew separate "communal power" and seek justice in society, there is no reason why for this purpose, they should not bring their specific faith-insights regarding public morality into dialogue and common action through secular multi-religious groups open for faith-interaction among themselves as well as with secular ideologies. Of course, religions should have their separate explorations of their separate theologies of public life, and also their education of the laity for their ministry in the realm of secular public society and state. In institutions of service to the poor, where no issue of power is involved, separate action is legitimate. But in public action involving

power, especially in politics, it is better that they work through open multi-religious political parties rather than through political parties confined to the adherents of one religion which runs the risk of falling into the danger of being swayed by religious communal self-interest and search for communal power over against other religious communities. What is called for here is that the religious concern for public life be expressed through the faithful laity and not through the institutional authority of religions, that is. in a secular and not the traditional theocratic manner in a religiously pluralistic situation.

In fact, religions will also be more truly religious if they are not tied to the State and its exercise of power. The insight of the Free Church traditions that the Constantinian establishment of Christianity has perverted the Christian church is important for Christians to remember.

What is called for is a spiritual reinforcement of "Open Secularism" by the renascent religions.

A second interpretation of Secularism is by the advocates of Gandhism and other ideologies of Liberal Hinduism like Radhakrishnan. It declares that the idea of Indian Secularism is an expression of the toleration based on the traditional Hindu doctrine of the equality of religions. Gandhi's opposition to the two-nation theory of the Muslim League based on religious difference between Hinduism and Islam and the partition of the country arising from it was indeed religious. Gandhi said. Partition means a potent untruth. My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines. To assent to such a doctrine for me is a denial of God....we are all, no matter by what name designated. children of God". Radhakrishnan says, that secularism is based, not on irreligion or atheism, but on "the universality of spiritual values which may be attained by a variety of ways". Unity is the ultimate reality and not Plurality

Donald Smith In his study of Indian Secularism points out the significant contribution made to the idea by the attitude of toleration arising from the Hindu doctrine of equality

and unity of religions.

However, this toleration of plurality is on the spiritual assumption that plurality, (that is, all differences). is unreal. It is a characteristic of the religions which elevate mystic realization of the formless and nameless Spirit as the ultimate human destiny; they consider historical religions with their *nama* and *rupa* as belonging to the world of *maya* to be transcended. For this reason, they cannot comprehend the prophetic religions (the Jewish, the Christian and the Islamic) which emphasize that the ultimate destiny of human beings is to serve God's Purpose in human history, which Purpose He has revealed in some unique historical Person. Law or Event with *nama* and *rupa*. Since Hinduism as a mystic religion cannot comprehend this historical nature of prophetic missionary religions, it gives them also a mystic interpretation; so much so, Hinduism cannot tolerate them until these religions themselves accept the mystic interpretation of the unity and equality of all religions. (This has been clarified by Fr. Sebastian Kappen in his booklet on Understanding Communalism, about which reference is made in several essays.)

Of course democratic toleration is toleration of real plurality and differences. That also requires a doctrine of equality. But it is equality of "persons" and not equality of "gods" or even "ideas". Persons who in their moral integrity pursues truth may come to accept one religion or another or may reject all religions and acknowledge the truth of atheism; and they should be free to propagate and give expression to the truth as they differently see it. It is in the freedom before the challenge of ultimate Truth and penultimate truths, human persons are equal, an equality that should be recognized by the law of the state so long as a person respects the same freedom of other persons.

This does not preclude the exploration of mystic and prophetic religions to dialogue with each other regarding the character of interfaith relations. There is a common recognition of the religious dimension of human selfhood in which they are united. Beyond that there must be mutual

interpenetration as a result of living together. Certainly equality of religions is one doctrine of inter-religious relations which needs to be discussed among religions. Missionary and prophetic religions have been quite intolerant of other religions in their history; and Hindutva is Hinduism taking into itself the worst inhuman features of that Semitic intolerance which these historical religions are now seeking to shed. Indeed, all prophetic religions have to learn a great deal from the mystic religious approach which emphasizes unity and equality. But when many in India are attracted by atheistic ideologies and their emphasis on the historical dimension of human destiny, mystic religions can also learn a great deal from prophetic religions which affirm the religious significance of the historical dimension. In fact, all religions and secularist ideologies have a common task which unites them, namely the humanization of the modern technological culture through the development of a common post-modern humanism which incorporates the valid insights of all religions, ideologies and the sciences.

The third interpretation of Indian Secularism is from the point of view of the minority communal consciousness of the Muslims of India. They consider the constitutional right of religious freedom given to all citizens under the Secular State as guaranteeing all religious communities the right to follow their traditional "personal" law regulating family and community relations which are sanctioned by religion. It is on that basis that the Muslim authorities guarding their family laws opposed the judgment of the Supreme Court in the Shabano case and continues to oppose the idea of a Uniform Civil Code which will entail modification of their religiously sanctioned Shariat Law. I suppose the advocacy of Sankaracharya of Pun to preserve laws of untouchability and sati which were religiously sanctioned in Hinduism also come from the same interpretation of the religious freedom under India's Secularism. The opposition of Christian bishops to the revision of the family law of the Christian community also arises from the same source.

This however is a clear misinterpretation. The Constitution in guaranteeing religious freedom to citizens spells out

clearly that it will not preclude the state from recodification of family and community laws which go against the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice in man-woman and inter-caste relations even if they are sanctioned by religion. These social relations are declared secular areas calling for change in new directions. In fact the fundamental rights of the citizen require that all traditional communities change, breaking traditional hierarchies and patriarchies, to bring about social justice by giving the dalits, the tribals and the women who were excluded from the traditional power-structures of society, fuller participation in the power-structures; and the State is called upon to assist it by suitable legislation and other means.

Of course that does not mean that the diversity of social codes related to diversity of cultures should be destroyed. But all have to acknowledge the common framework of egalitarian justice and recodify their traditional civil codes which were formulated in other times and under other principles. This is by no means an infringement of religious freedom which is given under Secularism.

In fact, all religious communities in all parts of the world have been making changes to respond to the new conceptions of egalitarian justice to which the subject peoples have been awakened. Religions can rightly claim that these new democratic values which Secular Humanism has brought to light are derived from the religious conceptions of the dignity of human beings in society but which they neglected in the past; and that therefore in assimilating them into their religious reformation they are only claiming their own and preventing their getting perverted in the secularist framework of Materialism and Individualism.

Summing up. one may say that Open Secularism and Renascent Religion are allies and need to reinforce each other in public life to redeem the new human values of freedom, equality and justice and enhance the quality of national fraternity in a situation of religious and ideological pluralism.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 4: A Christian Anthropological Approach To Globalisation

A Paper presented at the Seminar organized in connection with the tenth Anniversary of the Dept. of Social Analysis of the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi.

Ten years ago, I was invited to open the Dept. of Social Analysis at the TTS (Tamilnadu Theological Seminary). I am grateful to the Dept. for their invitation to me to participate in the celebrations of its 10th anniversary. Thanks to the leadership of the Dept. and the

relevance of it in our time, the concern for social analysis has taken root as an essential aspect of the Christian theological enterprise, not only in the TTS but also in most other Indian theological schools and in the Serampore University curriculum itself. The TTS can legitimately take the credit for being the pioneers in this trail.

I have been asked to speak here on "Power and powerlessness of Christian Faith in the present Indian political situation". I have interpreted it in a broad manner, as an invitation to talk about the Christian Faith in its relevance to social analysis of the present political situation and social response to it. It was Augustine who spoke of Faith as the foundation for understanding. I remember that a long time ago I wrote on the evolution of my thought under the title *Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility*, which was not published; and later I published a book on my *Ideological Quest within the Christian Commitment*. Today, to be relevant to the theological dept. of social analysis, I am rephrasing the topic as "The Significance of Faith for Social Analysis and Responsible Action in the Indian Situation".

My paper has two sections. One, a longer section on the theological basis of social analysis and social

response; and two, a brief analysis and response to the present political situation created by globalisation.

I

Hinduism speaks of God's three-fold action in the world as *shriti*, *sthithi* and *layana*, as creation, preservation and reabsorption into the Universal Spirit. In the Biblical scheme, it is *shriti*, *sthithi* and *udharana*, creation, preservation and redemption. Biblical anthropology is derived from this.

The Bible starts with three covenants of God with all Humanity (Gen. 1-12)- namely, with Adam. Noah and Abraham symbolizing God's creating, preserving and redeeming activity in the world. At the same time they symbolize three aspects of the universal vocation of Humanity, namely its vocation to be creative, sharing responsibility with God in the continuing creation and re-creation of the world, in the preservation of the fallen world from chaos through the promotion of legal justice based on reverence for all life and especially human life, and in sharing the suffering of God's Messiah mediating the Grace of God that redeems the creation. Thus human beings are persons called to responsible existence in the community of persons in the

context of the community of all life on the earth. And in the Colossian Christology (Col. 1.15 - 20). all these covenants and the accompanying human vocations and responsibilities are seen as fulfilled in the Divine Humanity of Jesus Christ. Through Him all creation comes into being and develops, and in Him all creation today remain united in spite of the forces of human self-alienation and disintegration, and by His Cross, He redeems, renews and perfects all humanity into a new community of persons in the context of the community of life and all creation. I find Henrik Berkhof's combination of continuing development with continuing redemption of creation (of Tiedhard de Chardin and Karl Barth) interesting. He defines the Gospel as "a great movement from lower to higher, going through estrangement and crises, but also through atonement and salvation, and so directed towards its ultimate goal, a Glorified Humanity in full communion with God, of which goal the Risen Christ is the guarantee and first fruits".

It is from these Biblical truths that Christian anthropology and its various insights about the human situation are derived. What are some of the more important insights which are relevant to our current political situation? I list a few.

1. Faith and its opposite Unbelief presuppose a universal spiritual dimension of human selfhood in which the self sees itself as poised between the world and God i.e. at once as an integral part of the world of matter and the community of life governed by the mechanical and organic laws of development respectively on the one hand, and having a limited power to transcend these laws through its spiritual relation to the transcendent realm of God's purpose on the other. This human self-transcendence provides the self its power of self-determination to choose its own path of self-fulfillment and to bring the world process to serve it. Since in the insecurity arising out of its awareness of its finite freedom, the self tends to absolutise itself and puts itself in opposition to its own nature as given by God in Creation and Redemption, self-alienation is an ever-present aspect of human reality.

Therefore no human situation can be analyzed in its totality purely as the working out of a mechanical or organic necessity, or for that matter, purely as a relation between Divine Spirit and the human souls. No doubt, scientific analyses have their relative validity and help understanding provided they are recognized as partial. But a full analysis requires that we interpret

the situation in the light of a theological anthropology which takes seriously the dimension of human spirit's orientation and disorientation to God's purpose active in the situation in its interaction with and taking hold of the mechanical dynamics of matter and the organic processes of life in the world of nature.

Actually the rational scientific analyses of the situation will not only be partial but also be distorted, because the human reason seeking to observe the situation is not unconditioned enough to see the full objective truth of the situation. Marx, Freud and Nietzsche have proved that reason is conditioned by the unconscious urges of the individual or the collective self for power and self-justification in its self-alienated state and that they distort the truth. Therefore any rational knowledge to be true must overcome the self-alienation of human existence. Theological anthropology would agree with this but would add that it is too superficial to interpret the self-centredness in human beings as a mechanical disorder or as an organic maladjustment easily corrected by the mechanical or organic processes to come; and that the condition of rational objectivity also requires overcoming of the spiritual alienation of the self from God which is behind all psychic and

social alienations. He who does the Will of God shall know. It is in this sense that Faith is a condition for true understanding.

2. The interpretation of the present nature of human beings in any situation, as “made in the image of God” and as “brothers for whom Christ died” should be as Persons-in-Relation and destined to become Persons-in-Loving-Community with each other in the context of the community of life on earth through the responsible exercise of the finite human freedom reconciled to God. Since the Christian Faith holds that as a law or an ideal, it is impossible of realization because of human alienation from God and that where it is realized even partially in history, it is realized as the result of the Divine Forgiveness freely given in Christ providing the motivation for mutual forgiveness among persons and peoples in their historical setting. “Forgive one another as the Lord forgave you”.

This leads Christian anthropology to a Moral Realism which recognizes the Human Community in the ultimate sense, like the human experience of friendship and love, is a gift of Divine Grace, and that therefore there is no final path towards it through technological, political or legal organization. What such

organization can do is to make the structures of our corporate life more just, that is to say, able to check the forces of exploitation, corruption, tyranny and war and minimize their threat to human life and also maximize the space for mutual responsibility so as to receive the spiritual gift of communion. Moral Realism inherent in this approach is to avoid two absolutist positions of utopianism- one, the approach of political religions which seek to bring perfect community on earth through political action, which ends in tyranny because it asks the impossible from power-politics; and the other, a withdrawal from politics because it cannot bring perfect community on earth, which ends by tolerating the worst tyranny and oppression without resistance. Utopianism is based on the conviction that human beings can justify themselves before God without God's saving Grace. This, to Christian Anthropology, is also quite unrealistic.

We humans are called to be involved in the use of imperfect means to realize less than perfect ends of justice which alone history offers. God's covenant with Noah which asks fallen humanity to establish a society based on reverence for life and a legal justice that protects the innocent human beings from the murderer who is around; and

God's call to Moses to liberate the Israelite people from Pharaoh's slavery; and God permitting monarchy with new perils of oligarchy to destroy the more human Tribal Federation to liberate the Israelites from the technically superior Philistines in Palestine; and Paul's doctrine that the Roman State, which he knew had its role in crucifying Jesus. was ordained by God and given the "sword" to punish the evil and promote the good in society as His Minister of Justice (Rom. 13)- all these point out that politics of law and justice has a positive role in a sinful world in relation to the ultimate human destiny.

The State is indeed the reflection of human imperfection. Though a stateless society is the ultimate goal of human community. it is never put forth by Christian anthropology as a realistic possibility in history where sin and death exist. But since the State tends of become the Beast that makes war on the saints (Rev. 13), i.e. to become totalitarian, it needs the checks of tradition, law and judiciary as well as opposition and revolution, to keep it a servant of justice.

In fact one has the feeling that the New Testament sees realms of society and state as both capable of being transformed by the ferment of the church, the community of Divine forgiveness

and the hope of the coming Kingdom, to become foretastes and signs of ultimate human destiny, namely the Kingdom of God.

3. Christian Faith has in it a positive affirmation of the human vocation of creativity. The calling to create, recreate and develop cultures arises out of the involvement and transcendence of the human self in relation to nature and to other human selves under God's purpose. At the same time, since human creativity is involved in the spirit of self-alienation, creativity has in it the seeds of turning it into destructivity. Human *shriti sakti* is good but it tends to turn almost inevitably into *samhara sakti* which in history needs to be constantly checked by law and redeemed by Grace. Nicholas Berdyaev the Russian philosopher was most critical of the traditional Christian ethics which confined itself to the ethics of law and ethics of grace and ignored the ethics of creativity, while secular modernity to which Christian modernism succumbed, elevated the human vocation of creativity as supreme and as capable by itself of solving the problem of destructivity within it without the need of grace and even of law in the long run Anthropology got perverted on all sides by converting Creation into an order of static laws which are only to be

obeyed and perfected by grace in Catholic thought and by getting validated for collective existence without criticism but to be rejected as totally irrelevant in the realm of existence in grace in Protestant thought.

This means that any society that is static or stagnant will be disturbed by the human spirit waking up to its vocation of creativity.

Reinhold Niebuhr says that medieval religions and societal ordering under it in Europe could not comprehend the new creativity of Renaissance and Enlightenment and therefore had to break up. Marx and Engels emphasized the creativity of capitalism and prophesied that it would break down because it would soon become a fetter on production, that is, on further creativity. In fact Stalinism broke down in Eastern Europe partly for the reason that it became a fetter on production and other creativeness of human freedom. I have the feeling that so long as the Multinational Corporations remain the sole source of technological creativity, it is impossible to replace it however inhuman they become, unless a similar technical creativity is shown by an alternative human pattern of society.

Rammanohar Lohia used to compare the western spirit which had creativity but produced strife

with the Indian spirit which was quite peaceful but produced stagnation. He was in search of a spirit which would enhance creativity without producing strife . It is simply unrealistic to speak of returning to a pre-modern tradition of community life lacking dynamism and creativity as an answer to the tragic perversion of the dynamism of modern technological and cultural creativeness. We have to go forward to a post-modern humanism that takes the dialectics of the human spirit at work in human creativity and destructivity more seriously. We have to build up structures of law which will control destructive uses of human creativity more effectively and conceive of new ways of relating the ferment of Grace to redeem human creativity from its perversions. At the same time we have to work towards a more humane alternative pattern of creative technological and social development. One hopes that this is possible within the framework of the movements of peoples like that of the dalits, the tribals, the fisherfolk and women who are today victims of modernity turned destructive.

4. Christian anthropology's emphasis on human personhood fulfilling itself in interaction with persons, leads it to give priority to preserve and develop small-scale social institutions which enable

face to face relations to promote personal values and humanize people. A Papal Encyclical calls it human ecology. Hannah Arendt writing on the Human Condition speaks of three elements which make the lives of people truly human- namely “social life in its plurality. ..relationship with the earth...and a relationship with time”, that is, the other, earthiness and sense of participation in contributing to a meaningful historical future. Only social institutions like the family, village and neighbourhood community and decentralization of modern big functional organizations like the State and Trade Union can provide them. This has been the emphasis of Gandhism. Therefore politics and economics should be seen as means to social development as the end, rather than reverse it as modern politics and economics tend to do.

II

Now, how do these anthropological insights apply to our Indian political situation, created by the new economic policy of Globalisation and Liberalization?

1. Firstly, Market-economy has made its contribution to economic growth in the world. Its contribution to economic creativity and dynamism cannot be denied. Christian anthropology

as I have defined it does not allow us to oppose it for its utilization of self-interest and profit-motive. That would be succumbing to utopianism which I have rejected in the name of the Christian understanding of reality. In fact, it is the resurgence of the utopianism associated with the traditional *laissez faire* capitalism in the contemporary globalisation that we have to oppose as idolatrous in the name of Christian realism.

From its very beginning in Adam Smith the Free-market was set within the framework of an idolatrous utopianism, individualism and mechanistic world-view which were characteristic of the ideology of humanism that informed the political and economic movements of that period. According to Goudzward and Harry de Lange in their book *Beyond Poverty and Affluence* (WCC. 1995), 'the fine working of the market is close to the heart of western society's self-definition' and they speak about its underlying presuppositions thus: "Indeed for Smith, the market played a role in *all* forms of human progress. It stimulated industrial culture and desire to save. Moreover the market itself, led as if by an Invisible Hand ensured the participation of the poor in the expanding wealth....These premises ...are

misleading in content, displaying the colours of the Enlightenment's naive belief in human progress and a Deistic vision of society. They have in their undertone the mechanistic world-view that suggests that a good society must function like a machine whose operation is controlled by the laws of nature" (pp. 44-5). Ronald Preston who argues that the market is an efficient mechanism for the limited purpose of economic growth. and should be used as such by the Third world countries also, agrees that the original and continuing premises of the market was that "if each pursued his own advantage through the automatic device of the market, an Invisible Hand would ensure that the result was the promotion of the common good". Further, he adds that it is bound to a "possessive individualism" which is clearly false. Preston comments, "It is important to separate (the premises) from the concept of the market as a useful mechanism for solving some economic problems if it was set within a different value commitment and an extensive structural framework" (*Church and Society in the late 20th Century*. 1983, p.42). According to him, the capacity of the market to maximize the productivity of relative scarce resources "above any other consideration" makes it useful if it is limited to that function and made to serve other

considerations through State control of it. He says: "The institution of market needs to be put into a fine political framework. Left to itself it is cruel and callous". He adds, "In short, the market is a human device set up to serve human purposes, to be servant and not master. We must not bow down to the idol we ourselves have created. It is a political decision as to which areas of economic life are left to the impersonal verdict of the market and which to be decided by public discussion, as it also is to decide the broad parameters of economic guidelines within which the economy has to operate. No government however devoted to *laissez-faire* can escape that responsibility" (pp. 114-5).

Preston's almost looks like Jawaharlal's economic policy. But in the present policy of globalisation and liberalization the function of the state is only to make the climate safe for the market and withdraw almost completely from the realm of economic goals, leaving the market alone to determine them. This means that economic goals like liquidation of poverty and unemployment, distribution of welfare, narrowing the gulf between the rich and the poor, people's participation in the economic process, accountability of economic centres to the people, economic self-sufficiency and

similar other economic purposes are jeopardized because the market is not concerned with them. M.A. Oommen says that globalisation achieves along with economic growth, globalisation of poverty.

More importantly, issues of ecological justice, and justice to the weaker sections of society and specifically development of social institutions cannot be taken up by the economy directed only by the market-profit mechanism.

As Rajni Kothari points out, high-tech industrialism under the market system (one should add, within the framework of individualist and mechanistic ideology) not only globalises pollution of soil, air and water but especially also it “leads to a wanton exploitation of the natural resource base of the country, especially based on the forest and the sea. In human terms, this has a disastrous consequence for certain groups of people like the tribals, scheduled castes, traditional fishermen and such other groups who depend on them to eke out a living... They would also be torn away from their natural roots as well as from their community and cultural ties - producing in them a sense of isolation” (Quoted from *ISA Journal Dec. 94*). The social objectives of the peoples are destroyed for the sake of economic growth.

It is here that the state as the organ of the whole national community has to intervene rather than withdraw. As C.T. Kurien has written, the State has to discipline capital both domestic and international if capital is not to discipline the state to serve its purposes; and for it the State needs not only political power but also some economic power derived from public corporations. Today Manmohan and Rao have surrendered the state to the ideology of the free-market with the backing of the greedy middle class (which includes also a good part of the organized working class) who have coopted Indian Nationalism to serve their vested interests.

Where then is the source of power to discipline the nation-state and through it the national and transnational capital in the name of social justice? The peoples' movements of dalits, tribals, fisherfolk and women in India are too feeble politically to make a dent. But it is possible that such movements acquire a transnational character, because the problem we encounter in globalisation is world-wide.

In fact this has been evident in the Copenhagen summit on Social Development. The reports on the Summit indicate that the market economics of the G7-TNC-IMF-WB-WTO combination

dominates through their “global governance” not only the political UN but also the UN Special Agencies for *social* development and justice like ILO, UNESCO, FAO, Commissions on Human Rights, Women's Development, Indigenous People etc for their goal of economic growth.

The seeds of a transnational opposition to that dominance is also present in the world situation. Perhaps the time of relevance of the nation-state is past with the smaller micro-units of peoples within the nations and the transnational united peoples expressing their political awakening in relation to each other in new ways of mutual protection.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 5:. Technology, Culture and Religion

*Graduation address delivered at
the Christian Medical College,
Vellore on 11th Oct. 1993*

I must first of all thank Drs. Booshanam Moses and Molly Thomas for their kind invitation to me to be present here with you for this year's Medical Graduation as your Chief Guest. I deem it a distinct honour to have been so invited.

What shall I say to you on this important occasion in your life when you have finished securing the basic degree in medicine and considering your future course? I am a person belonging to an older

generation having graduated in chemistry from the University of Madras in 1935, that is, 58 years ago. But through the years chemistry has changed and I have moved away from it into researches and writings on Religion. Culture and Politics. It has been said that old people dream of the past and young people see visions of the future. So I have been wondering how I could speak some words of relevance to you who are visualizing the future both of yourselves and the world which you enter.

I understand that this is the 51st year of the starting of the MBBS programme and the 46th Graduation Day. I was reading the College Prospectus for 1993 which was sent to me and it speaks of a Tradition laid down by the founder Ida Scudder which has been moulding you through the years you have spent here. I thought I would serve the occasion best by enlarging on some aspects of the relevance of that tradition for the contemporary post-modern world situation. It comes nearest to my own concerns.

The three themes emphasized in the college tradition from the foundation are: modern medical technology, the humanist culture of service and justice to the community of the poor and the

needy, and religion as the source of the humanist culture. Building a proper relation between Technology, Culture and Religion was very much present in the mind of Ida Scudder when she founded this academic institution. If I interpret the prospectus of the CMC correctly, the objective of the CMC namely to “impart to men and women an education of the highest order in the art and science of medicine and to equip them in the spirit of Christ for service In the relief of suffering and promotion of health”, that is, the idea of a combination of training in professional skills, moulding the technically trained in a culture of human values and motivation, equipping them to utilize technology to serve “with compassion and concern for the whole person”, the people especially the weaker sections of society, and giving spiritual reinforcement of that culture by the “spirit of Christ” and the motto “Not to be Ministered unto but to Minister” derived from him, goes back in tradition to the founder herself (*Prospectus MBBS Course p.5*). Of course she could not have realized at that time fifty years ago that some specialized medical technologies could be so fully integrated with the materialistic-mechanical reductionist view of human being and with the profit-consumerist motives that it would be impossible to convert them to the holistic view of human

personhood or to be made an appropriate tool for promoting health of poor communities. That awareness has come only in recent years with the destructiveness of technological culture becoming expressly manifest. Today of course medicos engaged in community health services are critiquing high-tech medical technology itself as class-biased and exploitative and call for technologies more appropriate. One should also appreciate the fact that though an institution founded by Christian Missions, considering the inter-religious character of the academic community of the college, the founders emphasized the Christian "values" of self-giving service to the poor and concern for the whole person rather than Christian salvation, thereby somewhat separating the common "culture" and values of humanism of academic community of the college, from the Christian "religion" and thus relatively secularizing it to keep the academic community free from discrimination on the basis of religion.

Of course, for a Christian college it was right to emphasize the special role of Christianity to reinforce the humanist values. But one does not know whether the founders remembered the historical fact that it was the movement of Secular Humanism

associated with the European Enlightenment that brought the humanist values of liberty, equality and fraternity to the forefront in the French Revolution and helped Christianity to discover them and their roots within the Christian tradition and the gospel of Christ. The implication is that a dialogue between Religion and Secularism is necessary to keep a culture of Humanism alive. The American democratic constitution came into being and is sustained within the context of such a dialogue between Christianity and Secular Humanism. And if the Indian Constitution begins with affirming the humanist principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice it has behind it the impact of liberal and socialist secular ideologies as well as Renascent Hinduism from Raja Rammohan Roy to Gandhi who absorbed these values and made them part of the Renascent Hinduism itself. And today, the threat to the further development of common humanist culture comes from religious fundamentalism and communalism which deny the reality of religious pluralism and the possibility of a composite human culture reinforced by many faiths and ideologies.

It is the contemporary situation of the relation between Modern Technology, Humanist Culture and Religious Pluralism that I

want to highlight today. Here I see two challenges which seem to loom large in the modern world including India which is in the process of modernization; one, of humanizing the technological revolution to serve the poor and protect the ecological basis of life; and the other, of building a secular state and common civil society with openness to religious insights in a situation of religious pluralism. These are challenges to the present generation of youth looking towards making their contribution to the shaping of the future of humanity.

Firstly, how to make technological developments in the modern world instruments of justice, rather than exploitation, to the poor and the needy in society and also serve to protect and not destroy the ecological basis of the community of life on earth? There is no doubt that the scientific and technological revolution of the modern period has been a tremendous expression of human creativity, It has eliminated distances and created the global community materially. It has given us the knowledge necessary to produce goods and services in abundance. It has given us power for social, psychic and genetic engineering, to control disease and death as well as birth. But as we survey the world situation today, the general feeling is that along with many benefits, many

of the promises of technology stand betrayed and there is evidence of a lot of technology having become instruments of exploitation of peoples, destruction of cultures and dehumanization of persons and pose threat of destruction not only to the whole humanity through nuclear war but also to the whole community of life on the earth through the destruction of its ecological basis.

In India's "ten percent economy" as economist C.T. Kurien calls it, 40 to 50 percent of people are living below the poverty line; and the present pattern of development through globalization with economic growth as the only criterion will lead to large-scale cuts in welfare measures and to the capital-intensive industries under the auspices of the multi-national corporations and consequently to more poverty and unemployment as it happened in Latin America. The dalits, the tribals, the fisherfolk and women who have been outside the power-structures of traditional society and state have become more oppressed through technological advance giving their traditional oppressors more power. Class, caste, race, ethnic and sexist oppressions and violence have become more intense with people getting awakened to demand their just rights. In fact, Narmada, Chilika

and other people's struggles are against technological development which have become inhuman and destructive of not only peoples' livelihood but also of their self-identities.

There was a time when people thought that technologies were morally neutral and that if peoples' purposes were changed all technologies could be utilized for the good of the community. There may be some truth in that approach with respect to the earlier stage of the technological advance and probably also with respect to small-scale technologies. Today however many knowledgeable people are saying that many of the high-tech developments have produced technological systems in which the mechanical-materialist view of reality, human greed and ecological destruction are built in; and that therefore a new paradigm of development with technologies integrated with a more holistic understanding of human personhood and peoplehood and recognizing the organic natural and spiritual dimensions of human community are called for. The WCC Conference of technicians and scientists in Boston on the Future of Humanity in a Technological Age held sometime ago, asked for the development of an Ethics of Appropriate Technology. This was of course Gandhi's approach.

Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful* is a technologist's restatement of Neo-Gandhism as an ideology of humanized technology.

Since the CMC was started in response to the village women's situation, it is worth mentioning that today the feminist movement on the whole (as represented by the recent recipient of the Right Livelihood award Vandana Shiva's book *Staying Alive*) considers modern science and technology as essentially an expression of masculine chauvinism intent on "raping" nature and woman; and therefore they call for a reorganization of society on the traditional "feminist" principle of production, reproduction and sustenance of all life for saving the future. There may be exaggerations here but there is little doubt that the relation between technology and justice needs to be rethought.

Secondly, how to recognize the religious dimension of public life in a society of many religions and secular ideologies without allowing society to fall into the dangers of religious fundamentalism and communalism? Religious and linguistic and ethnic plurality we always had. But then they lived in more or less isolation from each other. Today what we have is

pluralism where the old isolation is gone and we are thrown together to recognize each other and even to relate to each other on an equal footing in a democratic set-up and build society together. Thus religious plurality has moved to religious pluralism which has its own dynamics. We have sought to keep the unity of India as a nation-state in such a situation through the idea of the secular state. It guaranteed freedom of religion and freedom from religious discrimination in civil society to all but allowed religion to enter vital areas of public life only through the inspiration religion gives to individuals. This framework of unity in pluralism has been developed through the movement of national struggle for independence under the leadership of Gandhi, the leader of Renascent Hinduism and Nehru, the advocate of Secular Socialism. In fact, Gandhi became martyr to preserve India a secular state with equality for all religions under law. The threat to this idea of secularism arises from religious fundamentalism which is afraid of insecurity through change in traditional religious dogmas, ritual practices of purity and impurity in social laws; the threat also comes from communalism which seeks political power for one's religious community or in the case of Hindutva wants to establish a Hindu state. This communalist

path will lead, as Rammanohar Lohia said long ago, to the break-up of India.

Minority consciousness or majority consciousness are dangers to both religion and politics because they arise as defensive reactions stifling creativity. The real struggle in all religious communities is for spiritual reformation opening themselves to enter into dialogue with other religions and with secular humanist ideologies regarding the nature and rights of the human person and the meaning of social justice enabling to build together a new spiritually-oriented humanism and a more humane society. Opening up is the only path for the humanization of religion which will also enable it to communicate its message of spiritual salvation in relation to the humanization of society itself.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 6: Primal Vision And Modernization

*Paper presented at the
Madras Gurukul Seminar
on Theological
Implications of the Primal
Vision”*

The wording of the topic as indicated in the programme for me was, Primal Vision as a Critique of Modernization. I have changed it slightly to indicate that our goal is

to critique both the primal and modern visions of human being and society in the light of each other and in the light of the theological vision of God's purpose for the future of humankind. I do not think that we can get away from the fact that modernity has come to stay and that the task is to humanize it. Any idea of going back to the pattern or world-view of traditional societies either primal or medieval or even early modern is doing violence to the historical nature and social becoming of human beings. Human future both historical and eschatological is a valid theological category and so is the idea of historical development. Therefore any society we envisage for the human family should be post-modern in nature and form.

The theologies of Creation

and Redemption point to the newness of the future of humanity. Human creativity building culture out of nature is inherent in Creation according to Genesis and this creativity remains an essential expression of the image of God in human beings bestowed in creation even when all human creativity has become perverse and come under divine judgment. And St. Paul interprets the new Adam Jesus Christ as belonging to a higher spiritual order than the original Adam of Paradise. It is therefore not wrong to interpret cosmos itself as a movement from mechanical matter through organic life to the spiritual human selfhood, and to interpret human history itself as the evolutionary or revolutionary enlargement of the human selfhood and its spiritual self-determination and its social and cosmic

responsibility. I should add that such a historical approach is not wrong provided it is clearly understood that self-determination and responsibility whether in the early or later historical stages, has a tendency to get perverted by the false position of self-centredness in relation to God and others. So cosmic history does not experience fall till human beings appear, since matter, vegetable and animal do not have the spiritual freedom to fall. And every new stage of growth in creative selfhood is accompanied by a new fall; and even at the end of history, the New Testament speaks of a Last Judgment before the Kingdom is established. So in the course of history every growth in spiritual freedom and responsibility is not a growth from bad to good but from a lower

capacity for good and evil to a higher capacity for them. And Divine Redemption is to be understood as necessary at every stage of the spiritual expansion of the human self-consciousness, more so at the higher stages of self-consciousness.

In this approach, there is a distinction between two theological criteria to evaluate societies. One is in terms of goodness and other in terms of the intensity of self-consciousness. Some societies may not have high sense of selfhood and the right of self-determination, but may show a great measure of social virtues; and others may have high sense of self and its freedom but may show greater perversity in human relations. The question is whether we can have some kind of a balance between goodness and self-

determination in social ordering. It is here that I see the necessity of a synthesis between tradition and modernity in the development of peoples in our sinful world. Any society in history will need structures which balance enhancement of freedom and self-determination with checks on it by long-established legal and moral traditions of keeping power in the service of order and mutual responsibility, as well as creation of new structures of public morality.

Nevertheless it is important to recognize that God's vision of the future of humanity is the Community of Persons in which persons have the highest sense of selfhood but are redeemed of self-centredness and therefore are also good and responsible; and the

foretaste of it is the church, the community of people who know themselves to be forgiven by God through Christ and therefore forgiving one another and growing towards love which is the mark of perfection, as Col. 3 puts it. The pressure of the church in a society should help reduce the tension between spiritual freedom and social morality and therefore the influence of the church in society should produce a larger community which also may be spoken as a first fruits of the Future, God intends for human beings.

II

I have given this rather long theological-sociological introduction because it provides a framework for us to consider the relation between primal and modern visions of reality

and society and to see what kind of a spiritual framework will help develop a post-modern society.

The forces of modernization need not detain us. But I would just mention them, namely the science-based technology which gives power to humans to control and engineer with material, social and even psychic forces to achieve purposes and goals for the future chosen by humans; the revolutionary social changes produced by the revolts of the poor and the oppressed in all societies; and the break-up of the traditional religious integration of societies and their reintegration by the State. They have no doubt produced a global society and revolutionized all traditional societies one way or the other. Since however modernization has brought with it a good

deal of dehumanization betraying the promises it held forth, the spiritual vision behind it is now under challenge. The criticisms come from all the traditional visions of society including the primal tradition. Our concern in this study is with the spiritual vision behind modernity and the nature of the critique which primal vision brings to it and to evaluate the same from a Christian theological view-point and to see how the spiritual vision of post-modern society may incorporate what is valid in it.

The spiritual vision of modernity as we know it in ideology and practice has emphasized three aspects of reality, namely progress through differentiation and autonomy of individuality; the concept of the world as history moving towards the Future through the

creativity of human rationality; and the ethos of secularism as the basis of social ordering. At all three levels modern vision challenged and even broke the primal vision.

The primal vision is that of what may be called Undifferentiated Unity. John Taylor's *Primal Vision*, a study of African culture speaks of "a total unbroken unity" of the cosmos as characteristic of African spirituality. In it there is the vision of a spiritual continuum within which the dead and the living, natural objects, spirits and gods, the individual, clan and the tribe, animals, plants, minerals and humans form an unbroken hierarchical unity of spiritual forces; and the human self is not an individual self but an extended universal self present and actively participating in all parts of the totality. This is

generally descriptive of
the primal vision
everywhere I presume.

Modernity is a spirit that
seeks to break up this
vision of an unbroken
continuum to produce
individuals and groups
conscious of their
individual selfhood and
different from other
individuals and groups. It
emphasizes the difference
of humans from gods and
nature; it also separates
religion, society and
government and the
functionaries within them
and gives them autonomy
to function according to
the laws inherent in each.
In one sense the discovery
of human individuality
was necessary for the
development of human
rights, the economic
individualism orientated
to profit and free market
produced the modern
economy; the separation
of human being from
nature coupled with the

autonomy of the world of science helped the development of technology; and the autonomy of different areas of life like the arts and the government, each to follow purposes and laws inherent in it, did make for unfettered creativity in the various fields. Of course, now we have become conscious of the destructive effects of these developments and therefore of the one-sidedness of the vision behind it. It is this one-sidedness we have to correct because we do not want to give up the human achievements of the modern period. So it would not be right for primal vision to ask for a return of humanity to the traditional undifferentiated unity. But it is right to criticize the spirit of modernity for its exaggerated individualism which made the individual a law unto itself and deny

any moral or spiritual responsibility to the social totality and destroying even the traditional egalitarian community-values to further the power and interests of the individual in isolation.

Here the theological understanding of human being as person-in-community must help develop the incorporation into modernity of certain traditional cultural values in the pre-modern spiritual vision. Also in the face of the ecological disaster created by the modern ideas of total separation of humans from nature and of the unlimited technological exploitation of nature, it is proper for primal vision to demand, not an undifferentiated unity of God, humanity and nature or to go back to the traditional worship of nature-spirits, but to seek a spiritual framework of unity in which

differentiation may go along with a relation of responsible participatory interaction between them, enabling the development of human community in accordance with the Divine purpose and with reverence for the community of life on earth and in harmony with nature's cycles to sustain and renew all life continuously.

One may take up the modernist vision of world-as-history as contrasted with the primal vision of world-as-nature. The latter sees social life as a cycle like the cycle of natural seasons which is the basic framework for life; therefore nothing new enters the scene, and any creativity that affects the harmony of life and nature is considered a spiritual evil. Since every point in the circumference of a circle is equidistant from the centre, there is nothing

radically contradictory in life and therefore all things and values and gods are allowed to coexist without encounter. The situation has been criticized as productive of stagnation. But modernity has emphasized that human personhood involves freedom understood as creating new forms of nature and life in the light of future fulfillment of the meaning of life. Thus new ideologies of the Future and of being a chosen people and commitment to a mission in world history to bring about that future, taking sides and fighting to determine the world's future in one's own terms, have become essential expressions of the spirit of modernity. But this historical dynamism has brought with it the idea of conquest and the consequent results in absolutisation of State power, world wars and

threat of nuclear holocaust
quite unknown to
traditional societies.

In such a situation even
Pundit Nehru has said that
it is better to have the
spirit of paganism which
tolerates many gods
including an unknown god
than to have a self-
righteous belief in one god
or ideology for the world.
This of course is an
argument for a return to
primal vision. But it
would amount to giving
up the search for meaning,
not only of one's own life
but also of the whole
humanity and even the
cosmos. Search for
meaning is essential to
human personhood.
Therefore while the
criticism of modernity
with respect to its idea of
history is valid, the answer
has to emphasize the
fulfillment of the meaning
of history in suffering
service, solidarity with the
poor and forgiving love.

Here the theological understanding of Christ as Suffering Servant and bearer of the ultimate purpose of history is of great significance.

In this connection I quote Nirmal Minz about the tribals of India awakening to their responsibility to world history through Christianity. He says, "They did not find themselves playing their role in the history of the nation or of humanity as a whole. But Christ has given them a right to claim a history which goes back to the creation of the world and of the human race, and they know now that their history is the history of the new Israel which is connected with the old Israel in and through *Christ*" (*Tribal Awakening*, Reprint, p.221). The theological anthropology inherent here is relevant, not only for the tribals but for all

peoples.

Or take the third element in the modern vision, namely its emphasis on the secular ethos in contrast to that on the sacred ethos in all traditional societies.

Modernity's emphasis on secularism involves three elements- a) the desacralisation of nature which produced a nature devoid of spirits preparing the way for its scientific analysis and technological control and use; b) desacralisation of society and state by liberating them from the control of established authority and laws of religion which often gave spiritual sanction to social inequality and stifled freedom of reason and conscience of persons; it was necessary to affirm freedom and equality as fundamental rights of all persons and to enable common action in politics

and society by adherents of all religions and none in a religiously pluralistic society; and c) an abandonment of an eternally fixed sacred order of human society enabling ordering of secular social affairs on the basis of rational discussion. There is no doubt that such secularism (or secularization to be correct) has enhanced the dignity and rights of personhood in the modern world. But many ideologies of secularism by aggressively denying any transcendent spiritual dimension of human person or society and interpreting human selfhood in the framework of a mechanical materialistic world-view cut at the root of its own humanism. It not only denied the sacredness of the human person and the religious dimension of human culture; it also had little recognition of the

organic natural basis of life in general. The problem was not secularization but reductionist interpretation of reality by ideologies of closed secularism that brought about the problem. The emergence of religious fundamentalism and the political ideologies of religious communalism is often a reaction against such closed secularism. (This reaction to Closed Secularism was already mentioned in earlier essays.)

Primal vision is right to criticize the too neat compartmentalization of life into sacred and secular which is characteristic of the ideology of closed secularism: the sacredness of the human person and the sacramental and sacrificial view of all activities and functions of the human person go together so far as

theological anthropology is concerned. In a society which is religiously and ideologically pluralistic, this view has to be mediated to public life through the church and other voluntary groups committed to it. What one may expect from the State and other public institutions is that they follow the path of secularism which is open to such mediation.

To the growth of such post-modern spirituality, the tribal peoples with traditional primal vision, can make a very significant contribution. But it depends upon their giving up both their uncritical acceptance of the present ideology of modernization identifying it with Christianity and any revival of primalism in a militant and fundamentalist way in the name of their self-identity, and evaluating both

modernity and tradition in the light of Christian personalism i.e. the idea of human beings as persons in community, and all natural and social functions as sacramental means of communion in the purpose of God. This will help not only them but the whole national community to build up new indigenous idea and pattern of development incorporating what is valid in the primal critique of modernity gone destructive. No people can forget their cultural past. What they can do is to interpret it in the light of the present forces impinging on their lives so that the new pattern of life may be continuous with their cultural tradition. It will also be their contribution to the idea of post-modernism.

It is also necessary to insist that any pattern of development for the

tribals and others who still have cultures and communities predominantly based on the primal vision of undifferentiated unity, world-as-nature and cosmic spirituality, should introduce differentiation and individuality, historical dynamism and secularism gradually and without violently tearing down but grafting on to the stabilities of traditional spirit and patterns of life and living followed by them In fact from my experience, I have found that modernized educated tribal leaders are the worst offenders in this respect.

Christianity which had in the past facilitated the process of modernization in several tribal communities of India is finding it difficult to cope with the destructive forces the process has brought into being. There is need of serious theological

rethinking to build up the
prophetic and constructive
function of the Church in
the present situation.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 7: Gospel to the Tribal People

Message to the Tribal Rally in Ranchi on November 2, 1995 on the occasion of their celebration of the 150th anniversary of the coming of the Gospel to Chotanagpur.

I deem it a privilege to have been invited to participate in your celebration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Gospel of Christ in Chotanagpur. I thank Bishop Minz for his kind invitation.

My involvement with the tribal peoples of India began in the sixties when as Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of

Religion and Society (CISRS), I participated in consultations of Christian tribal leaders and researchers on the manifestations of their self-awakening. Nirmal Minz who was on the CISRS staff for a period before he left for Chicago for his doctorate studies gave the leadership. It led to the publication of a Christian group-study under the title, *Tribal Awakening*, with several leaders of the tribal people and churches from different parts of India, including Dilbar Hans and Nirmal Minz from Chotanagpur as authors. In fact the Writing Party which produced the book was held at Hazribag. It is significant that the objective facts and the subjective attitudes the book represented were considered relevant for the book to be reprinted in 1981. Later as secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference, the council of churches of East Asia (now called Christian Conference of Asia), I organized an all-Asia consultation of Christian tribal leaders in Sagada, in the Mountain Province of the Philippines; and Bishop Lakra from Chotanagpur and Pastor Zarema from Mizoram were participants. It produced a report on the self-awakening of the "cultural minorities" of Asia, which was the term used in the Philippines to denote the tribal peoples. Much later in the nineties I had the privilege of serving

Nagaland as its Governor, which I interpreted as a call to be a sort of “secular pastor” of the Naga people. These are my humble credentials which made me accept the invitation to this celebration.

We are celebrating today the coming of the four missionaries of the Gossner Mission to Ranchi in 1845. As a result of their work, four Oraons were baptized in 1850 and the first church was founded; and two Mundas were baptized in 1851. The Anglican Mission established its work in Ranchi in 1869 and the Roman Catholic mission started work in Chotanagpur in 1887. Thus Christianity spread in the Chotanagpur area. The church, for over a century has been an essential part of your corporate life and a mould in which the traditional pattern of your social and cultural living has been getting transformed.

It is quite clear to all historians of modern India that the story of the spiritual and socio-political awakening of the *adivasees* or indigenous people anywhere in India can be understood only by taking into account the large role played by western Christian Missions and indigenous churches in transforming their lives. Of course Christian Missions, English education and colonial administration went together. But Christian missions introduced the

Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ as Victor over cosmic forces of evil, which released the people from fear of malevolent spirits. They introduced Christ also as the revelation of God's purpose in world history and as the Messiah who fulfilled that goal in the end; it brought the peoples out of their traditional isolation into the realm not only of universal church history but also of secular national and world history. Ever since then, you have been seeking to define your self-identity and historical vocation of your peoplehood and to acquire the political power to realize it.

No doubt the western missions interpreted and communicated Christ in association with their western culture and religious divisions along confessional lines, which had their creative aspects but also their destructive side; and the goal of displacing traditional culture and religion by western culture-Christianity brought some cultural uprooting. But they had also the wisdom to realize that Christ preserved whatever was not integrated with traditional animistic spirituality. So Christianity became the source of renewal and development of your tribal languages and codes of community-life. In fighting for the land-rights of the tribal people, Christian missions brought justice to them and also without being fully aware of it,

reinforced the central place of land in your traditional way of life. Therefore, what Julian Jacobs says about Nagas would be true for most Christian tribes. He says, "It would be wrong to see the Nagas as passive victims of a process of deculturation. Rather we may discern the ways in which Naga ethnicity is being actively and consciously moulded in the present era. What emerges is a vigorous sense of history and identity at the level of individual, tribe and nation"(The *Nagas: Society, Culture and Colonial Encounter*, 1990 p.176).

Awakening to self-identity and sense of history brings tremendous potential for human creativity. But creativity also has within it the seeds of destructivity. Any new stage of creation has its fall. *Srishti* and *samhara* always go together in human existence, because the self-alienation produced by the spiritual alienation of finite human self from God sees history as the realm of self-aggrandizement and conquest. Therefore much new evils are to be found among tribal peoples which were not there in the traditional society- evils created by lawless individualism, irresponsible exercise of power and money. Self-giving love is possible only where there is freedom for selfishness and self-righteousness. Therefore any idea

of a simple return from modernity to tradition is to be ruled out, though redefinition of the traditional community-values relevant for the post-modern society is to be welcomed. It is here that the Christian understanding of the relation between the Law and the Gospel becomes relevant in a new way in meeting the forces of perversion produced by the human self's rebellion against its finiteness. Moral codes and power-politics are necessary to check evil and promote legal and social justice that protects human rights of the weak; and redemptive power of Divine forgiveness helps to create a community of mutual love that transcends historical divisions of society.

Within such a spiritual framework, the *adivasees* of Central India have to work out the paths of their future witness to the Gospel in India.

Firstly, I am sure that while you are celebrating this anniversary of the coming of the gospel, you are also looking towards your part in realizing the unity of the Indian church, transcending not only inter-tribal but also tribal-nontribal rivalries. Christ reconciling cultural diversities is equally important as Christ taking indigenous form in every culture Secondly. in the context of the present government policy of high-

tech development based on the global free market, the dalits, the tribals and the fisherfolk are increasingly getting alienated from the Land, the Forest and the Water-sources respectively which have been giving them their living, and are also getting uprooted from their habitat and culture; and women are commoditized and their sexuality, fertility and labour are increasingly commercialized. In this situation, the awakened tribal people of Chotanagpur have a special role, not only to fight for their political autonomy within the unity of the nation, but also to affirm their solidarity with all their bellow-victims of the lopsided processes of modernization in their struggle for political and social justice. Thirdly, in the world setting in which the protection of natural environment and organic processes of production and reproduction of life have become crucial for the continuation of human life itself, there is the felt need for a revival of the spirit of reverence for nature which you had preserved in your culture for ages. Here there is need for a re-evaluation of your traditional spirituality itself which was earlier rejected. Perhaps it may have to come back not in its earlier pantheistic but in a new Christ-centred pan-in-theistic form.

I wish the churches and peoples
of Chotanagpur a bright future.

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Chapter 8: Gospel And Secular Culture

*Presented to the meeting of
theological students of the
Federation of theological
seminaries in Kerala at the
Orthodox Theological Seminary,
Kottayam on 14 Dec.95.*

I

What is Secular Culture? I suppose what the phrase denotes is the modern culture which gives great emphasis on human being as a creator of culture and of history out of nature and which also believes that human being and history require no transcendent

reference to a Divine Creator or a Divine Redeemer from self-alienation to bring about the realization of the community of love which is the ultimate destiny of humanity. So, what we have in mind is a “secular culture” within the framework of a closed “secularist” idea of human progress.

My aim in this paper is to argue that the dynamics of modern “secular culture” have their roots in a concept of humanism derived from the Christian gospel but that because of the failure of the churches to respond positively to the values that emerged in Christian culture as implication of Christian humanism, they were sought to be realized in human history under the dynamic of “secularist ideologies of humanism” in opposition to the Christian faith. In fact, these ideologies of inevitable human progress whether in Liberalism or Marxism had the character of a secularization of the Kingdom of God envisaged as the goal of history by the Christian gospel; they were a kind of Christian heresies. This alienation between secular culture and the gospel led to the dehumanization of the forces of secular culture and has reduced Christianity to a kind of individualistic pietism or a spiritual cult to sanctify some self-centred communal existence. Therefore the contemporary

Christian responsibility is to redefine the secular culture in the light of a more holistic anthropology built up through the dialogue of Christianity with secularist ideologies in the context of the religious pluralism of the present situation.



Firstly, let me clarify three aspects of modern culture. We have to distinguish between the Secular Forces, the Human Values and Faith-presuppositions of self-redemptive humanism within the framework of which, the forces and values of modernity are defined.

The three basic driving forces that have created modernity are firstly, the revolution in experimental sciences and the application of its findings in the development of modern “technology”; secondly, the awakening of the individual to the rights of “personhood” and of the oppressed groups of people to a new concept of justice based on equality; and thirdly, the break-up of the traditional institutional integration of religion, society and state in European Christendom, defined as “secularization” which removed state and society from the “control” of religion and made religion a “private” option for citizens as individuals and groups.

What was the reaction of European Christianity to these forces? Generally speaking, Catholic Christianity opposed modernity as a revolt against God and Protestant Christianity became a subjective spirituality of individualistic pietism. Between them the Christian understanding of human being and society as created, fallen and redeemed by God was made irrelevant so that these forces of modernity were left to be interpreted solely within the framework of the humanism of the Enlightenment which at best had a Deistic faith coupled with a mechanical view of the world and a self-redemptive idea of history making for an optimistic doctrine of inevitable progress. It was a "secularist" view because its concept of the human self-alienation had no spiritual roots in human alienation from God (sin) and therefore needed no redemption of the human spirit by the Grace of God in Christ. Self-alienation was a mechanical disorder corrected by technical rationality. Marxism of course had a more organic interpretation of self-alienation as social but still able to be corrected by class-revolution.

Starting in Europe, the modern forces and their Enlightenment secularist interpretations, have now become global in character. Western imperialism, English education and Christian missions

introduced secular culture into India. Modern reformation movements in traditional Indian religions especially the movements of Neo-Hinduism indicated the impact of modernity on Indian life at its religious level, and India's liberal democratic and leftist ideologies guiding the struggle for political independence and nation-building in independent India, indicate the assimilation of Enlightenment humanism at the ideological level, though qualified a great deal by the reformed religious view of Gandhism. In fact, modern Independent India has moved away from Gandhism in the direction of scientific and, technical rationalism. It is significant that the Preamble of the Constitution of India spells out transformation of Indian society in the light of the values Liberty, Equality, Fraternity (taken from the French Revolution) and Justice (probably derived from the Soviet Union) as the goal of secular India. Perhaps it may be right to say, that in general the politically conscious educated middle class of India were guided more by the Liberal and Marxian ideologies than the Gandhian or other versions of reformed Hindu thought. After the era of Gandhi, India does not give much emphasis on the renaissance of Hinduism as the dynamics of social justice. In Kerala it seems it has stopped with Sree Narayana Guru; even he has been

interpreted by SNDP largely in the light of secularist thought.

The forces of destructiveness and the dehumanization which have become manifest from the late 19th century onwards have put a question mark on the secular modern culture. The two World Wars, the threat of nuclear holocaust, mass poverty in the midst of plenty, the moral anarchy of individualism, the States given to totalitarian planning, new technical theocracies under Hitler and Stalin, the destruction of natural environment and above all the mechanization of life changing persons into things and emptying inter-personal bond of family and community of love reducing them into manipulative relations of utilitarian functions, may be mentioned in this connection as offending the human dignity of persons and peoples which modernity affirmed as values.

III

There are two or three reactions in this context. One is to give up the whole package of modernity and return to the traditional pattern of religion-society-state integration with a new militancy and strengthening it with modern technology. Eg: Return to Christendom and the Moral Majority movements, the Iranian Islamic revolution and its export,

India's Hindutva politics of Communalism and Hindu Rashtra, the revival of primal vision and other expressions of religious fundamentalism and neo-theocracy. Two, there is the acknowledgment by many noble people that human community awaits a tragic doom from which there is no escape but they will fight to defend human values on the basis of the faith that there is no support for them behind or within the universe and therefore building their lives on "unyielding despair" as Bertrand Russell once said.

However, there are groups of tamed adherents of secular ideologies and religious faiths who feel that in the dialogue between religions and secular ideologies they must find some alternative path to save the positive human values and what modernity has realized of them through the last three or four centuries. They are seeking what has been called post-modern paradigms for "an open secular democratic culture" within the framework of a public philosophy (Walter Lippman) or Civil Religion (Robert Bellah) or a new genuine realistic humanism or at least a body of insights about the nature of being and becoming human, evolved through dialogue among renascent religions, secularist ideologies including the philosophies of the tragic

dimension of existence and disciplines of social and human sciences which have opened themselves to each other in the context of their common sense of historical responsibility and common human destiny.

In the Life and Work movement of the non-Catholic churches in their search for social justice and international peace (which is now part of the WCC) and in the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Church, Christian Ecumenism has given up the church's traditional pietist and negativist approaches to modernity and has been involved in the attempt to redefine the forces and values of secular culture within the framework of Christian anthropology. Dialogue between Faith and Modernity has been taking place within the church between the Christian theologians and the scientists and politicians committed to work out the implication of their Christian faith in their profession, and later through some formal dialogues with secularists open to dialogue with Christian tradition. After religious pluralism and ecological issue have been recognized as realities of the present, the ecumenical movement has widened their internal and external dialogues to include adherents of both ideological and religious faiths who have provided their insights to the

churches in clarifying their contribution to humanizing modernity. Ecumenism in this process has been dealing at different periods with concepts of goals like “responsible world society”, “a just participatory and sustainable society” and “justice peace and integrity of creation”. The Vatican II document on the “Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World” has been of crucial significance in the ecumenical approach of a positive character to the redefinition of the forces and values of secular culture within the context of Christian faith and ethics, themselves renewed in the modern context.

Of course there is a lot of confusion in the churches and the ecumenical movement regarding the distinction that has to be maintained between the integrity of the Christian faith and mission and that of a secular culture which has to be based on a syncretism of varied insights about the humanum drawn from many religious, ideological and scientific sources. There is always a conflict between Fundamentalism and Liberality in maintaining this distinction. More so in a country like India with its religious cultural and ideological pluralism.

I believe that the Christian contribution to a “secular”

concept of humanity as essentially a Community of Persons can be best made if we maintain the message of the gospel that God became incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ to overcome the alienation of humanity from God and to create a *Koinonia in Christ* around the Eucharist, a Community of divine forgiveness and mutual forgiveness acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, transcending all religious cultural and ideological divisions with a mission to build a wider *Secular Koinonia* of mutual forgiveness and justice among the peoples of the world, as witness to the ultimate goal of creation, namely the Kingdom of God.

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Chapter 9: Higher Education in Kerala

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A paper presented at a Seminar at Santhinilayam, Thiruvalla on 28 Oct. 95 under the joint auspices of the Kerala Council of Churches and the Mar Thoma College, Thiruvalla.

I. Conceptual Shift in Higher Education - A Critique

The conceptual shift in Higher Education which this seminar is considering, I suppose, is the one that is reflected in the policy of the government to permit self-financing colleges of higher

education, specially meant for giving training in technical and managerial skills to those who can afford to buy them. This however is not a shift merely in education. It is in fact an extension into the field of higher education of the government policy of globalization, that is, of letting the global market decide the pattern of economic development of the nation without intervention from the government in the name of social justice, protection of the natural environment or national self-reliance; it is a decision to make economic growth the ultimate criterion not only of economic development but also of social and cultural development of the peoples of the country. This calls for converting not only economic but also cultural and educational goods and services into commodities salable in the market for profit, and therefore producing such of them which have demand from those consumers who have the most purchasing power. It is necessary therefore to evaluate this “ideology” of the market-economy if we have to evaluate the commoditisation of education which is now adopted as the government policy as a part of its policy of giving priority to economic growth.

Markets have been in existence in every society from old times. It was used by society as a means to

achieve social objectives. Even when Adam Smith made markets the providential order, it was never the only criterion for deciding economic activities. “The view that markets and the price signals they provide should be accepted as the only criterion for all economic decisions and actions became doctrine or ideology only much later”, says C.T. Kurien (*The Economy*, p.108). Even when market with its goal of economic growth became decisive for economic activities in capitalism, it was never accepted as decisive for the lion-economic areas of social or cultural life. The ideologisation of the market which commoditises and values everything including culture and morality in terms of its demand and price in the market, is more recent. After the disintegration of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe it has become the dominant ideology globalised through the Brettonwood Institutions, the IMF and the World Bank, in an unipolar world.

Of course, Individualism which elevates the individual as a law unto itself denying the larger dimension of personal fulfillment through responsibility to community, and the mechanical-materialistic view of the universe characteristic of the Newtonian age which denied the organic and spiritual dimensions of reality, have been the ideological

framework of the modern market from the beginning. But it is strange that they have become globally reaffirmed after all the Social Sciences have proved the social dimension of human nature beyond doubt, and after Einstein has brought about a revolution in the philosophy of even the physical universe, displacing the mechanical by the organic.

The Constitution of India formulated by the founding fathers of India's nation-state, has clearly laid down both in its Preamble and in its Directive Principles of State Policy, that politics and economics are instruments of social objectives rather than the reverse. Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are the goals to which "we the People" commit ourselves in establishing the nation-state. The word "socialist" which was added later to indicate the character of the Indian Republic only clarified this. But the "socialist pattern of society" was the declared goal of the Nehru era. Further, education was conceived as an instrument to realize the goal of a casteless and classless society. The State shall "make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education"(Part IV, 41), provide "free and compulsory education for all children"(45), and "promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of

the people”(46). I am not saying that the Nehru era realized these goals. Far from it. But it never repudiated them as goals to be striven for. The shift today in the first place is in the ideology of the leadership of the nation-state and as a corollary in the objective of education. The ultimate commitment of the political community today is to the “ideology” of market-economy with its prime objective of economic growth which inheres the promotion of class society keeping as much of the patriarchies and hierarchies of the traditional society and culture intact as are possible; and education is conceived as an instrument of this end.

Even in the meaning given to Privatization of education, there is an equivalent shift. Earlier, it was a call to private agencies to enter the field of education, at the primary level of helping the State in imparting education to the poorer sections of society, and at the level of higher education in imparting liberal education for leadership of political democracy and social change. In fact the “fundamental duties” of citizens, (enshrined later in the Constitution) gave priority to the development of “scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of enquiry and reform”(Part IVa). Today the State is closing down the state primary schools for the

poor, and they are not interested in aiding private agencies to conduct such schools, because they see it as a costly exercise in social welfare which reduces money for investment in hi-tech development aimed at economic growth. Privatization today is for conducting self-financing technical and managerial professional colleges for the rich to take advantage of the TNC's hi-tech growth-oriented pattern, of development.

The difference between education understood only as training in technical skills within the ideology of the economic growth and education for promoting a technical society within the framework of a culture of "scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform", is indeed great. It is the difference between promoting technical rationality which concentrates on "means" of living and promoting revolutionary or critical rationality which examines critically the "ends" of living often embedded but hidden in the so-called neutral means. It is the difference between pursuing knowledge as power only and pursuing knowledge as power at the service of values and responsible to social and ecological justice and to the people whose welfare is affected by the exercise of that power.

The famous German woman liberation theologian Dorothee Solle in her essay on “A Christian Critique of Ideology” (in *Confronting Life- Theology out of the Context ISPCK Delhi*) speaks about a German film by Lanzmann, where the technicians follow the instructions of the Nazi ideologists in building a suitable truck to gas the Jews without any question because they are interested only in scientific technology and “brushes aside all questions about side-effects, victims and interests as unscientific” The technicians spoke technical words like load, loading, units, and operational period ignoring the meaning of these words in the context (The “load” meant children women and men in mortal terror, “loading” meant the herding of these creatures by their executioners into the trucks using dog-whips, the “units” were people who knew they were going to be killed, the “operational period” was the time during which the people utter death-cries as they got suffocated by the gas). She comments, “As I see it, the technical experts or the managers who are totally free of ideology, are the ones who are gaining ground. And this supposed freedom of theirs from ideology and their detachment from traditional myths is at least as dangerous as the blinding of the masses by an outspoken ideology such as Nazism”(p.33). Technocrats and bureaucrats

unconcerned with values can easily go along with tyrants.

I must explain however my statement above of the “so-called means which embodies but hides false ends under neutrality”. No technological system is just neutral. It is always technology integrated with some end in its very structure. Therefore, an education that gives training in technical skills and do not help the trainees to examine and discern the false ends which may be hidden in the engineering and managing technology that they use, is not service to humanity. Gandhi used to insist that violence was embedded in large-scale technology. Vandana Shiva finds that much modern science and technology are patriarchal projects. Philosophy of knowledge affirms that scientific knowledge is the result of the subjective self observing objectified nature, and that therefore the subjectivity, the subjective purposes of the self, always plays a part in the knowledge attained. That part is greater in social sciences and social technology. If this is true, then technologies themselves need reshaping to make them acquire a human face and embody values of justice and community of life. It is this that gives relevance to the idea of “technology with a human face”.

Any higher education which ignores discourse on knowledge of social objectives and human values must end in creating what the Radhakrishnan Report calls a *Rakshasa Raj*. Of course you might well feel that this is the situation in our institutions of liberal education even today, and the new shift is only revealing the truth of our present situation. But realization of this truth is itself healthy if it calls for a proper response to the challenge of the situation.

With these words I inaugurate the Seminar and wish it success.

II. Self-Financing Higher Education- its Cultural Effects

Based on the Valedictory Talk at the Trivandrum Seminar organized by Vichara, Mavelikara on a critical evaluation of the Kerala govt's policy of promoting self-financing of Higher Education, with "Higher Education in Kerala-Financial Crisis" by Dr.K.K.George (professor of the School of Management Studies, Cochin University.) as the paper for study.

The basic points which I wish to draw attention to in the paper of Dr. K.K. George are contained in his "summing Up" part on p.24. There he says, one, that the shift from the concept of "the State's

role as providers of equal opportunities to every citizen” to that of providing education, health and other social services “to those who can afford to pay” is a U-turn in public policy which “has been made surreptitiously by administrative action without public discussion and legislative sanction”; two, that the total commercialization of social sectors is “alien even to free market societies”; and three, that “the ready acceptance of self-financing concept in social sectors alien even to free-market societies is the end result of gradual disenchantment with the Kerala Model of Development”, which has been emphasizing the social dimension rather than the economic, but that it is quite false to present the situation as calling for a choice between social development and economic growth. Social development has already made a contribution to the economic development of the state and he has a long quotation from his earlier writing to affirm that it is possible to develop a Kerala Model of Economic Growth on the foundation of its Model of Social Development by a new State strategy of “transforming its expenditure on education and health from merely a social welfare expenditure into an investment in human capital”, and that in fact any other path of economic growth is full of risks for Kerala which has only “limited raw material and fuel

resources”.

The classical economists are responsible for the general disenchantment of the Kerala people with the Kerala model of development. It is in striking contrast to the enthusiasm with which the Harvard economist Amartya Sen supports it in the book *India-Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Oxford 1995) which he wrote with Jean Dreze and published recently. It presents the Kerala model as something from which the Union Government and other Indian states like UP and Bihar have to learn their lesson that without a basis in social development like literacy, health and women's education and social security there can be no *participatory* economic expansion which is necessary if economic growth has to serve society. This is also the lesson they draw from the successful strategies of economic development of China, Korea and other Asian countries. It is also the lesson the study draws from the failure of Brazilian strategy of economic growth to achieve “little reduction of poverty particularly in terms of social backwardness and sectional deprivation”. The book warns that “India stands in some danger of going the Brazilian way rather than South Korea's”.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 10: The Power That Sustains Us

Talk to the gathering of social activists in the Annual Get-together of the Programme for Social Action at Pithora 1992. Transcribed from the tape and published in the report in edited form.

What is the power that Sustains us?

I am sure all of us have our own different answers to the question. My own feeling is that it is the fellowship of people committed to transformation of society that keeps us going. It is the team, it is

the fellowship of self-commitment. I think most of us will be lost if we are alone and isolated. The sustaining power is the fellowship of other people, who are with us in this fellowship of struggle for the building of a new society.

What is it that we altogether are committed to? *The Nagas* by Jacobs is a recent publication from Stuttgart - a study of the Nagas by anthropologists. At the end of their thesis, there is a description of what is happening now in the Naga culture and society. They say two things. One is, that today the Nagas have a vigorous sense of history, which means looking towards the future, the dynamics of the vision of the future. And secondly, they say there is the awakening of the people to their self-identity, to the search for their unique self-identity.

In fact, they speak about three levels of awakening to self-identity viz., the individual, the tribe and all-Naga nationality. These are three levels of self-awakening of the same people. The individual is brought to a sense of his/her unique identity, the consciousness of being a person. The different Naga tribes have become conscious of their separate tribal identities, their separate cultures and history. Then all Naga tribes together are

saying that they are one nationality, unique in its characteristics and separate from other peoples of India. Of course this is happening within the framework of an all-India nationalism. The point is that this is not peculiar to the Nagas, but it is the characteristic of all the peoples of India today. A vigorous sense of history looking towards future and an awakening to self-identity at various levels, individual, tribe, all-tribal and all-India. Of course it is the same people who have this three or four levels of self-awakening. And among the Indian peoples, we find various other levels of self-consciousness emerging. We see the self-awakening of women to their new self-identity and to a vigorous sense of history looking towards the future. We have the caste groups, not only the castes at the lower levels but also at the higher levels of the hierarchy becoming conscious of their self-identity and looking back to their history to affirm their uniqueness as people. The fisherfolk experiences an awakening to selfhood.

Where self is involved, there personhood is involved: spirit also is involved. That is why we have to talk of it as a spiritual awakening. Spirit and self go together. Spirituality is the way we manage the self-consciousness. Of course it is also

a materialistic awakening, because people, when they become awake ask for bread to live. But it is not just to satisfy their hunger that they are asking for bread, but that material thing itself is taken up as part of the awakening to the dignity of their personhood. Some people feel that if you give bread to the people they will all be satisfied. No. Because it is as part of their self-awakening to human dignity that they want to overcome hunger. Bread is sought as an integral part of justice to their human dignity. Hunger is not merely a material thing, it is a material means of expressing the self-awakening. That is why it has to be related to justice.

There is a search for overcoming poverty. But it is not just to overcome poverty, but to really overcome the destruction of selfhood, of personhood which poverty points to. Our humanity is destroyed by poverty and therefore it is for the sake of justice to our humanity that we want bread. We do not want to take the question of bread merely as a commodity. Bread is an expression of selfhood. Take the question of women, women's self-awakening. Sex can be understood as a material thing, as bodily interaction and can be utilized as a commodity for sale, as in prostitution. But the new situation is that sex, both for

woman and for man, awakened to personhood, has to be part of their personhood and exercised as integral to the inter-personal relation of love. It is the commoditization of sex that feminist movement opposes most, whether in marriage or outside it. Only when woman's personality is recognized that she feels she can have sex with personal dignity. Even in marriage, immediately as the wife feels that her person is ignored and used by the husband for sex in isolation she revolts. So sex is not merely a material nor even an organic reality. So far as human sexuality is concerned, it becomes part of human personhood and can be expressed personally only when there is love or mutual recognition of personality.

You can have a materialistic interpretation of all these things. It will only be a half-truth. You can have an organic interpretation of it all. Though it is more comprehensive it will also be only partly true. Because in hunger as well as in sex, human personhood has come into play, they have become part of the personhood. You are not prepared to separate them from the personhood to make them commodities. If you do it, self-alienation takes place. Materialist interpretation is correct at a certain level. The organic interpretation is correct at a certain level. They become

reductionist if they are taken as the whole truth. If you want to see the whole truth about human sexuality and human economics, you have to take the body and its hungers as related to the self-awakening to personhood.

The same thing with respect to culture. New consciousness of tribal culture, caste culture, needs to be interpreted in terms of people's awakening to selfhood. Therefore it has to be a spiritual interpretation, because where the self is concerned the question of meaning comes. Personhood, what does it mean? I have a self, what is it for? What is its future? The future dimension is not available to animals and plants and least of all rocks. It is possible only for humans, who are awakened to bring a self with spiritual freedom and transcendence. The question of sacredness also comes along with it. The search for a structure of meaning and sacredness is a peculiar characteristic of self-awakened human beings and peoples. And what we are looking towards is ultimately a community recognizing personhood of individuals as well as the unique self-identity of different ethnic groups, cultural groups, work groups. Justice to humanity means that the structures of society should be such as can help us to move towards communion of love

between persons and peoples. But of course, that requires structures. Sex has to be structured, food has to be structured. So we are talking about structures of justice which are oriented towards love. This is our goal in economics, in politics, in social life, the transformation of structures which helps and not hinders the dignity of human persons and the community of persons in justice and love.

Love is the ultimate goal we are looking for. That is, the recognition of persons in community. That is where human dignity is revered. It requires not merely inter-personal relations, but also structures of economics, politics, culture etc., transformed in such a way that they help and not hinder interpersonal love. A community of persons supported by structures of justice is our goal.

The second point is that this self-awakening is pluralistic. M.J. told us about diversity. The working class, ethnic groups, caste groups, women -all are awakened and a tremendous diversity is there. Because of that diversity self-awakening can create conflict. So it is the source, not only of creativity but also destructivity. An individual or a people becoming awakened to self-identity has tremendous creativity; but absolutised or frustrated, it can also destroy. So we have to work for "reconciled

diversity” within the framework of universal human rights, including the rights of persons and peoples.

We are not able to find one category in which to describe these diverse awakenings. Class is one category, caste is another, and so many of the Indian Socialists have been affirming what has been called a class-caste interpretation of the awakening in India. But the complexity is increased with other categories brought in. So the interpretation has to take into account class-caste-gender and ethnic realities of society. It is very difficult to say which is basic and which is superstructure. The ultimate basis is the self awakened to self-identity and self-transcendence. It has tremendous creative and destructive potentialities built into it. That is why the poem of Tagore recited here is very important. The dance of life always goes along with the dance of death. The death forces are stronger at this higher level of awakening. We would never have had a Hitler or a Stalin in the pre-modern days. Today the dance of death is as powerful as the dance of life. But then our commitment is to life. If that is so, there must be a reconciled diversity within this context of spiritual awakening. Women interpreting everything purely in terms of women's awakening or the poor

people interpreting everything in terms of economics etc. does not help the larger interest of the whole community. The basic approach of Niyogi of the Chattisgarh Mukti Moksha was to integrate all of these. He saw these several spiritual awakenings together and sought a reconciliation within the same movement. It is very necessary. Our commitment is to life.

I must also go on to point out that the enemy of life cannot be identified outside us somewhere in the Establishment as Mi said. Which is the Establishment? As a male, with my traditional male chauvinism I am part of the Establishment. But I may be very strongly favouring the struggle against poverty. So we ourselves are part of the Establishment, though in part it is the enemy outside. So the struggle against the enemy which is the Establishment is also against ourselves.

So far as we want to keep ourselves as a team because of the pluralism and diversity tending to conflicts, some kind of mutual forgiveness is necessary. How do we keep ourselves as a community of commitment to this revolution for life.? We must be more humble and say that we need to forgive each other. If there is no forgiveness, the team will be broken. Of course

forgiveness cannot be carried to the extent of saying that the enemy is not there. Forces of death are present and need to be fought. But as I said, the forces of death are mixed up with the forces of life. It is the absolutisation of one particular self-awakening that can be destructive. This is the danger of deification of reformers and revolutionary heroes. Once deified we won't be allowed to discuss the person as a human being later. The main point to emphasize is that person's contribution to the human awakening. But if we begin to deify later on we won't be able to discuss his/her humanity. Then he/she becomes untouchable from the point of view of humanity. They are all brought into infallible divinity. Actually what we are talking is about a spiritual awakening and a spiritual end on this earth. So we must keep our heroes also on this earth.

If we are committed to this kind of revolution, self-commitment to transformation of life on the earth and in society, sometimes we have to be anti-religious, sometimes anti-god because religion and god sometimes really take us away into interior places or heaven away from the earth. Then we shall need transformation or renewal of religions and gods so that they talk about the earth, the self-

awakening of peoples and its fulfillment. So we have to make them earth-centred. God is for man. "Sabbath is made for man", religion is to be about the future of humans and of their earthly existence. If you take the prophets and reformers, they have been anti-religious and anti-God to make religions and gods look towards the earth.

In the *Gitanjali* Tagore tells the devotee in the temple: Open your eyes and see that there is no God inside the closed temple. "He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and path-maker is breaking stones. Stand with Him there". That is the denial of a certain god for the sake of a new God or for a God beyond God. That is the essence of religious reformation, which is related to this struggle. There is need for atheism, because protest atheism is a necessary part of any true search for God. Job in the Bible talks like an atheist. He asked God what He was doing when all these miseries and injustice were taking place in the world. It was a protest against God in the name of divine justice; a protest atheism in search of a God who is for us, for humanity, for social justice. Anti-religion, protest atheism, are all in terms of a positive fulfillment of the new spiritual awakening to justice.

I always considered Tagore's

poem as the beginning of all modern liberation theologies. The Latin Americans took that path later. What I am driving at is that in this fellowship of ours, we can have religious people and secular ideologists, anti-religious people and atheists, and people who are renewing religions and ideologies- all within the context of this common commitment to the transformation of society with justice to the self-awakening of people in our time. That is what makes our spirituality a secular spirituality. That does not mean that each one of us will not go aside to renew his/her religious spirituality or anti-religious ideology or atheistic or agnostic world-view. What is common to us is this commitment to the transformation of the world around us. For that we are together as one fellowship. It is very important that we keep this goal, which can be interpreted in various ways. We cannot allow reductionist interpretations to monopolize the fellowship. We shall accept the materialistic interpretation within the spiritual interpretation. We will accept the organic interpretation within the spiritual interpretation. And we cannot accept a spirituality unrelated to justice in society and love in community and to the renewal of the earth. All this because ultimately the self-awakening we witness today is the search for the dignity of personhood and for a society

which recognizes persons and justice to persons in the functional orders of life like economics, family, community etc. All these orders have to be structured, but structured with the recognition that ultimately our goal is the transformation of society into a community of persons. If we emphasize Individualism alone, in reaction very soon the pendulum swings to Collectivism and then back to Individualism. That is what we have in Europe now. Both Individualism and Collectivism are devoid of spiritual depth. Community of persons is something which transcends Individualism and Collectivism. It is holistic, integral and reconciled. We should not forget this search for wholeness even when we are involved in struggle for partial particular issues of justice e.g. women issue, caste issue etc. Struggle requires this particularization. But they must be waged within the framework of the world-view which is conscious of the final wholeness and realizes it, in fragments.

The ultimate spiritual question is, is human being with his/her awakening to self-identity and personhood an accident in the evolutionary process and earth's history or is it really the result of the working of some purposive cosmic force, God or whatever? Bertrand Russell in his "Free

man's Worship" describes his visit to the zoo. He sees the monkeys and says that they are our brothers who lost their way and we by accident came through another evolutionary path to become humans, all by chance. There is nothing in the universal framework which purposed the emergence of humans or support the human struggle for personhood and self-awakening of humanity. He says, I shall work for humanity to the last but I am quite sure that humanity is slowly but surely moving towards darkness and doom. I have built my life on "unyielding despair".

I repeat the question: Is it by chance that human beings have come into being or is it by Purpose? The answer to it is an essential aspect of the faith in the Power that sustains the human struggle. Ultimately my answer is a matter of blind faith. Nehru once said, that he could not find any scientific reason for saying that human beings would succeed in realizing the goals of humanism. In fact history does not give any proof. In a sense any conviction at this level is *andha* in the sense that it transcends rationality. But it is not blind for those who see it as the sight of the self, the vision of God by the self at depth. It is the whole selfhood that sees it, not merely reason. It is the self committing itself to this faith, namely that there must be a

Force that sustains this revolution for human self-fulfillment in Justice and Love. Such faith is not irrational. Though there is no rational proof that human being has come on this earth not by chance but by divine purpose, it is reasonable to suppose that human being's search for human living in community must have the support of a Power in the universe or beyond the universe sustaining it. Certainly here, I am going beyond our common commitment as fellowship of secular social activists. We have to accept plurality in matters of faith, but we shall share with one another our religious, secularist or agnostic faiths. That is a concern for mutual openness within the fellowship.

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Chapter 11: Search For a New Ideology of Struggle For Social Justice With Eco-Justice

Address to the Get-together of Social Activists of the a Programme for Social Action at Chilika 1993 expanded from notes taken at the time and published in the PSA Report: Strike a New Note: Student Power. 1994. An edited version is given below.

What I have been asked to do as a silent observer and listener of all what you have been saying through song, dance and comments, is to make a presentation on the subject of our Consultation, as given to you by K.M.Thomas on the first day. It was Ecology, Human

Rights and Student Initiative in search of alternatives. We are all from social action groups which are working in different fields with different techniques. Some are with the dalits, some with the tribals, some with the women's movement and some work for the preservation of ecology. So also we may have different ideological approaches. But we are all concerned with both Ecology and Human Rights and we are all concerned with the search for an alternative to the present pattern of development.

Though we have different work, different programmes, different techniques, the question is whether we can have a common ideological approach. And what are some of the elements of that approach? Now, we all have been involved in the struggle for human rights for several years. There are two types of human rights- one is the peoples' rights, the rights of tribal peoples, rights of dalits, of women, the fisherfolk i.e. the rights of peoplehood of certain sections of society; and two, within each people, the rights of each person. In this latter, we are concerned with the fundamental rights of the human person for freedom and equality irrespective of gender, language, culture, race, caste, creed or anything else. The relation between man and woman on the basis of equality of personhood comes within it. So rights of peoplehood and rights of personhood are our main concern.

In the more recent past, we have also become conscious of the rights of nature. So we have eco-justice, i.e. justice to nature. Nature also must be given its due if you want to live properly. The ecological basis of life, rights of people and persons, of peoplehood and personhood are the concerns which have brought us to fight against the present pattern of development because it exploits and destroys nature and does injustice to nature and human's organic relation to nature. And we are looking for an alternative pattern of development, a more healthy pattern which will do justice to ecology, justice to peoplehood and to persons within the people.

But does our fight against the modern pattern of development mean that we want to go back to the traditional pattern of society? No, because yesterday in the group discussion, women complained that all traditional societies were patriarchal in character and were oppressive of their personhood. The dalits said the same thing; the traditional caste culture has not been doing justice to their personhood or peoplehood. So, we have to have an alternative, not only to the modern pattern of development but also to the traditional structures which have not done justice to these rights. Or, we need a new pattern which takes

the good community values of the tradition and good values of modernity, like freedom of human persons and equality between them. So we have to take from the traditions as well as from modern developments certain values which do justice to the wholeness of human existence and find a new way of going forward fighting against both the traditional and modern injustices. So what is asked for is a new, completely new pattern transcending both traditionalism and modernism.

Here we are also emphasizing the role of the students, the intellectuals who have a vision of the future. Not only in the Chilika movement but also in many of the movements we are involved, students and other intellectuals have a place.

Social justice was very much the emphasis of the Socialist movement of India in its opposition to capitalism. But now, socialism has broken down in one fire. We have to find a new socialist ideology emphasizing social justice and along with it justice to nature. For this we have to ask why socialism failed in the past. We have also to take into account the ecological factor which socialists or capitalists never took seriously.

In yesterday's dramatic

presentation of the Chilika movement. the role of the woman was quite impressive. It was not really a woman but the representative of the feminist principle drawing the people, the male of the species from surrendering to Tata. It was the feminist principle that was in a way protecting the environment in the drama. I think it is very interesting to see who are the protectors of the environment today. The protectors of the environment are people who live by nature. For instance, the fisherfolk who live by the sea, the rivers and the lakes, the tribals who live by the forests and their produce. the dalits and the peasants who live by the land, and women who are in a sense the creators and sustainers of life are protectors of ecology. One may say, the natural basis of life was protected in the traditional societies by the fisherfolk, the tribals, the women and the feminist principle of their living by nature. As these people are the protectors of ecology, justice to ecology is best realized through doing justice to them as people. That is the new starting point for considering the new pattern of development, the new idea of socialism.

The old socialism considered the industrial working class as the bearers of the new society. There may be some truth in that

approach even now. The general feeling at present is that with the breakdown of socialist regimes of Eastern Europe the industrial working class has lost their nerve. And of course that class has imbibed the values of the capitalist consumerist society too much to bring about a new society embodying values of personal freedom, social justice and ecological wholeness by themselves any more. Now the dynamism for the struggle for the new society has to come from the people who are victims of the pattern of modern development and who have the nearness to nature and therefore able to protect it and do justice to it. They are against the traditional society in some respects and also against modernity which has treated them badly. So they may be the people who are the bearers, mediators, of the new pattern of development.

I would say that Lohia, Ambedkar and others saw the need of renewing tradition on the one hand and protecting the humanist principles of modernity on the other. In other words, they saw clearly that along with the struggle for justice for the industrial working class, we must simultaneously go forward with the liberation of dalits, tribals and women if we have to realize an Indian socialism. They saw that there was a common point of justice towards which all these

movements were moving and emphasized also the interaction among them. Though each group may be concerned with struggle for justice for itself, interaction between them, between the movements for women's justice, dalit justice and tribal justice would produce a new common ideology for the struggle for justice. No single movement of liberation can solve the whole problem of injustice, only an interaction between struggles simultaneously pursued; and the one common ideology developing through this process can solve the general inter-related problem before us.

The present Indian government is committed to a pattern of development which is destructive of ecology and destructive of social justice and it has to be fought. Manmohanomics, the economic policy which Manmohan represents is purely a free market economy which has only one criterion, namely profit. With the profit criterion anybody can go anywhere, any part of the world, and destroy nature for profit, destroy people for profit. The kind of capitalist development which has been globally accepted has only one principle viz, profit in the transactions in the free market leading to economic growth. Which means it can destroy rights of peoplehood and personhood as

long as it brings profit. We have to oppose it.

Nehruism had at least paid lip-service to social justice. It had welfare ideals and some welfare measures to realize them. But now, Manmohan economics has taken all of that away. Even food rations for the poor are no more subsidized. Prime Minister Rao speaks of helping the poorest of the poor. One does not know whom he means. Kerala Chief Minister Karunakaran says that he cannot distinguish between the poor and the poorest of the poor and therefore he will cut all subsidies. So, that is the way it is going. In other words, the State has no concern for the people and is therefore withdrawing from the economic field in favour of the dictates of the market.

Does it mean that the State always has an anti-people character and has to be fought? Some people think that way. But I do not think along those lines. The present anti-people State with its policy of globalisation giving itself up to the profit-oriented market economy and to the ideology of high-technology development under the auspices of the multinational corporations from outside and inside which are free to exploit nature and people, has to be fought. But we should work for a people-oriented state while doing so.

When I was in Nagaland for two years as governor, one thing I noticed was that the modern pattern of development destroyed all the forest timber. Outside agencies started a large number of timber industries, and after all the big trees have been cut and deforestation has taken place they closed them. With deforestation water sources also dried up. So from December to February no water is available even in the capital Kohima. In other words modern development was very destructive in Nagaland. In Kerala, the fisherfolk know how fishing by modern boats destroys not only the livelihood of the fisherfolk but also the fish in the sea since unlike the traditional fishing community the boat fishing has no sensitivity to the natural cycle of fish life. The same is with the tribals and dalits. They all got increasingly alienated from forest and land which gave them their living. So the pattern of high-tech development has increased the oppression of these people-the tribals, the dalits, the fisherfolk and women.

Their oppression of course did not start in the modern period. The traditional religion had divided the people into those who were ritually pure and those ritually impure. The dalits were impure because they had to deal with land, and with organic nature and

its wastes. It also made women impure because women had to deal with blood every month. After child delivery they were considered impure. The purity-impurity divide within the traditional society had excluded the dalits and women from its power structure and its decision-making processes. Now the new pattern of development alienates them still further.

Tradition cannot be fully destroyed. Therefore it should be renewed. Yesterday somebody said that if all traditions were destroyed we would be in chaos. In fact, there is a whole tradition of renewal of the Hindu tradition from Raja Rammohan Roy through Swami Vivekananda to Gandhi and others. Sri Narayana Guru in Kerala and Ambedkar in Maharashtra have been renewing tradition. Both cultural and religious traditions are involved in the renewal. Religion and culture always go together. They need renewal so that new traditions may be created which will help the process of justice. More especially I would emphasize embodying the principle of equality in the tradition through renewal of culture and religion-equality between man and woman and equality between castes and peoples. Equality is the one most important principle which has to be absorbed by the traditional cultures of India. Many young

people rightly feel that religion has only been a source of injustice. For instance, from the women's point of view, all religions have been built on patriarchy to a large extent, and therefore women were never given justice properly. So naturally women feel they should go against religion for their liberation. But even they have to see that there cannot be a total religious vacuum. Therefore they have to work for renewal of religion through religion assimilating gender equality and feminist principles and values. The same is true of the dalits. Religion has been a very anti-dalit force and for this reason many dalits would reject religion. But they cannot go on without some kind of spirituality. They too have to work for renewal of religion, for a new spirituality and tradition, for a spiritual vacuum cannot exist in the world.

I would even say that there can be a secular spirituality. Nehru was never religious, but he always said that we should have not only material development but also a structure of meaning for life. He meant a spiritual and not a religious pursuit. That is also possible. Some kind of spiritual dimension is necessary to sustain the self in devotion to justice. Since traditional dharma has supported a lot of injustice we want a renewed dharma for

supporting the struggle for justice. Manu dharma has been no good, but a new secular democratic dharma may help. It may be an open secularism with insights from secular humanism and from religions. Perhaps we shall work for a kind of humanism with technology on the one hand and spirituality on the other, bringing these together so that we have a new tradition and also a new pattern of technological development.

Science and technology themselves have been interpreted in purely materialist and mechanical terms. Capra raises the question in his books, why modernization has tended to destroy people of their humanity. He sees the reason in the mechanical materialist interpretation of science and technology. The organic and the spiritual dimensions have been forgotten. Therefore technology has to be reinterpreted in more holistic terms. Gandhi was not against technology, but he wanted technology which was appropriate to the organic character of society and the spiritual character of the human person. We are not against technology as such but we want a technology which will preserve eco-justice and social justice. We need a science and technology reinterpreted within a new framework which takes the organic and spiritual dimensions

of reality seriously along with the mechanical. It is only then that technological development will promote eco-justice, preserve human personhood and peoplehood. It is an alternative technology that we are seeking.

Books like Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* consider the present technology as purely masculine, without any feminist principle in it. Hence it is seen as exploitive of women and nature. Here I would see the students' role. As students of science and technology they have to reconceive them in relation to this search for alternatives, by renewing traditions as well as transforming technology, make them human. Traditions and technologies have to be humanized so that they support eco-justice and social justice.

Student participation is a reality in many movements of social change. For instance in Nagaland, tribal students are in the forefront in the agitation for Naga selfhood. It is the same with dalit movements, I am sure. What we need is not sectarian student participation but student participation with the whole complex of movements consciously, without self-interest but with self-surrender to justice. I know that students have played a large part in the national movement for political

independence. Students can now play a similar role in the struggle for justice, provided as Gramscie said, they have an organic relation with the peoples' movements.

In the search for alternative patterns of development we are not starting from scratch in India. We have Gandhi, Lohia. Ambedkar and others who have been on the trail before. We certainly have new challenges calling for new responses.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 12: Towards an Alternative Paradigm

A talk at the Fr. Kappen Memorial Seminar on 3 January 1994 on the topic at Bangalore.

It is in the fitness of things that the various Christian and other voluntary organizations in Bangalore have jointly convened this Seminar on the 70th birthday of the late Fr. Sebastian Kappen, to reflect on the theme, An Alternative Paradigm. This theme was very much a central concern of Kappen's thinking and

teaching over the years. The Seminar is an expression of our deep gratitude and appreciation of the life and thought of one who was friend, philosopher and guide to a lot of young people as well as social activists in their search for a holistic pattern of social renewal injustice and of cultural creativity in support of it, in our time.

I express my thanks to David Selvaraj and his colleagues for their kind invitation to me to participate in the Seminar. I consider myself, along with many others of my generation, as a “friend and intellectual companion” of Kappen. I remember the many private and public occasions in Bangalore. Trivandrum and Thiruvalla, of our relaxed conversations on the theme and its related theological issues. Many years ago, probably in the late fifties or the early sixties, I remember him taking me to a Bangalore slum to meet a group of AICUF students including a much younger Rajen Chandy, who were in the search of a new paradigm of socially relevant higher education as an alternative to the existing University structure. Kappen was with them inspiring their search. It was last October that I met him last. He came to see me in the UTCollege Annex where I was staying for a few days, some time before he was going to lecture to the theological college students

on an alternative cultural paradigm and we talked about it and other matters. Many of us gathered here have similar perhaps more intimate personal remembrances. We seek today to celebrate the spiritual and intellectual inspiration Kappen gave us and others through his life and teachings, and to resolve together to continue the work of the renewal of religion, culture and society in India to which cause he was committed.

In this presentation my aim is to outline the thought of Kappen on the theme as I understand it. I have not done any systematic study of Kappen's writings, but I have kept touch with them in a general way. So I hope I have not totally misunderstood him, but I apologize for the inadequacy of my attempt.



Kappen wrote a great deal on the development of a counter-culture as a necessary path towards the transformation of society with justice to the people. By culture I suppose he meant the structure of meaning and sacredness, of values and world-view expressed in symbols myths metaphors and artistic images and legendary stories and rituals and liturgies within which a people creates and utilizes technology to earn their

living from nature and organizes their social institutions relating men and women to one another within the community and builds communication with other peoples. What he wanted was the development of a counter-culture which would subvert the existing culture of modernization, because the latter is too lopsided to understand what he called the Total Man, that is, the pluralistic dimensions of the being and becoming of the humans. Because of this lopsidedness, it produces a one-dimensional technocratic approach which increasingly becomes depersonalizing to all humans involved, oppressive to the people at the bottom and destructive of the ecological basis of life itself on earth. Its ultimate inhuman character is symbolized by the "technology of genocide" characteristic of Fascism, communal riots and modern war. The culture and the social process it gives support, have to be totally negated. The quarterly which he edited for some years was called *The Negations*. The present has to be negated in the name of the future in such a way that the negation has in it the presence of the future now.

Of course the basic central elements in the making of the counter-culture and the germ of the future society are the forces released by the self-awakening and the struggle for self-identity

and justice of the traditionally oppressed peoples of India. He has stated categorically, “The forces that can recreate Indian society can emerge from the repressed cultures of the lower castes, outcastes and the tribals” (*Jesus and Cultural Revolution p.51*). But there are traditional elements in the past history of the Indian peoples which have the potential to strengthen the counter-forces. He specially notes the great significance of three movements expressing the Indian tradition of dissent- “first voiced by the Buddha, later taken over by the social radicals of the medieval bhakti movement and finally re-echoing the messianic movements of the low-castes, outcastes and tribals in colonial and post-colonial times”. And he adds, “Any future cultural revolution will have to maintain continuity with this tradition of contestation. This forms the basis for a counter-cultural movement and a subversive creative practice” (*Religion Ideology and Counter-culture p. 31*).

At the same time he points out that these movements have to be saved from the forces which have smothered them. For instance, the Buddhist protest tradition, was “sucked into the whirlpool of cosmic religiosity of the Tantric-Saivite version” and needs to be liberated from that whirlpool to

regain its prophetic ethical character. Perhaps the same is true for the protest character of bhakti. As for the dalit-tribal messianic movements of colonial and post-colonial times they emerged within the framework of Indian nationalism which has three strands, namely the Communitarian, the Secular and the Hegemonic. of which the Hegemonic ie. Communalism, Hindu Nationalism in particular, seeks to suppress them or coopt them and make them toothless. Communitarian and Secular ideologies of Indian nationalism provide the only framework within which religious and cultural pluralism and movements of weaker sections within the nation are permitted to contribute to radical counter-culture and social change: therefore they need strengthening so that the messianism and the project of hope inherent in the search for self-identity of India's oppressed groups may be saved from Hegemonic communalism.

Kappen has given a good deal of thought to the contribution of the Marxist tradition and what he calls the Jesus-Tradition to the emergence of counter-culture and alternative society in India. For he was spiritually committed to the essence of both, severally and in their synthesis as sources of his prophetic faith, ultimate hope, ethical social humanism and aid

in his faith's search to understand religious cultural and social realities and the revolutionary responsibility in relation to them. But here too, Kappen maintained that they had to be redeemed from the Communist and Christian Fundamentalisms respectively, if they are to serve the project of the liberation of peoples.

Regarding the Marxist tradition, Kappen says, "it must be borne in mind that over a century has elapsed since Marx gave us the classical formulations of the Socialist idea. It therefore needs to be rethought in the contemporary world context" (*Future of Socialism* p.10). He acknowledges the prophetic ethical spirit and the scientific rationality which led Marx to his critique of Capitalism as "exploitive. tendentially imperialist and dehumanizing"; and adds, This criticism remains "by and large valid even today". For, the exploitive neo-imperialist and alienating nature of capitalism is very much part of our contemporary experiences" (p.13).

It is the attitude of Marx to science and technology that needs radical correction, in the light of modern developments. Says Kappen, "Marx was a child of the Scientism of the 19th century when it was widely believed that modern science would solve all

human problems and herald a new age of plenty”(p.14). This “soteriological view of science and technology” has become problematic in the light of the ecological disequilibrium it has brought about and the mechanization of life technocracy has produced. Modern science and technology have revealed their “instinctively violative nature” in that they have, by refusing to recognize the organic relation between humanity and nature, have tended to “reduce everything -beauty, art, interpersonal relations, psychism etc- to the measurable and the calculable; their end-result is a one-dimensional technocratic society from which all mystery dimension will have fled”(p.15). In such a cultural framework, technocracy without humanism takes over the State marginalizing the people and their participation; and nationalization of means of economic production instead of socializing economic power tends to achieve the opposite.

Further, universal suffrage and increasing participation of organized labour in the political process have made the modern State more than the executive of the bourgeois class, which Marx opposed. Also, many problems of human estrangement like ecological destruction, technocracy and absence of democratic checks to power have

turned out to be the concern of all classes and can be tackled only through “trans-class struggle”. The emergence of such trans-class realities limits the role of proletarian struggle which now has to be subordinated to “broad-based peoples’ struggles” in the construction of an alternative to the present society (pp. 26-27).

Stalinism has deviations from original Marxism, but it cannot be said that its anti-human trends are totally discontinuous with Marxism, for the reasons stated above. But Marxism redeemed and redefined in terms of social democracy, is a very important contribution to the peoples for the transformation of culture and society.

In his approach to the Jesus-tradition and its relevance for the search for an alternative paradigm, Kappen sees Jesus of History as “the revelation par excellence of ethical prophetic religiosity”. Jesus has introduced a new humanism into the main stream of Indian history affirming equality of persons a religious value and changing the cyclic view of history inherent in Gnostic and Cosmic religiosities which were traditionally dominant bringing an Orientation to the new and the future. He says, “Cross becomes the most telling symbol of man’s refusal to be enslaved and his resolve to march forward

to fuller life. The dialectic of negativity governing universal history finds its concreted concentrated expression in the personal life and death of Jesus of Nazareth” (p 56).

But Kappen sees that the picture of Jesus of the Church dogma is one which is distorted and “recast in the cosmic mould of magic myth and cyclic time” with his spirit of ethical prophecy lost (*Religion Ideology and Counter-culture* p.26). By the end of the third century, Jesus’ message of the Kingdom was spiritualized and Christianity was reduced to “subserve and legitimize Roman power” (p.32); and Christian Mission since then aimed merely at extending the boundary and communal power of the Church (p.130). The social message and historical and eschatological hope of the Kingdom were preserved by dissenting and/or heretical Christian communities. In fact, Kappen interprets Hindutva and its theocratic and hegemonic communalism as Semiticisation, even a sort of Christianization, of brahminic Hinduism under the impact of medieval theocratic Christianity (*Understanding Communalism* p.90).

The Jesus-tradition must be saved from this distorting complex and be made alive by letting it enter into dialogue, not so much with the Hindu deities in their present

form or with the Brahminic Sanskritic tradition of Hinduism but with what he calls “the primordial matrix of the collective unconscious” whence they emerged. I suppose he means the religiosity of the village communities of the dalits, the tribals and other weaker sections now struggling for justice. He adds, “The waters of the unconscious need to be churned with the tree of the Cross in order to separate out the poison and distill the new age. This can be achieved only through a revolutionary praxis. Only from a total revolution will be born an ethical prophetic Hinduism and a cosmic Jesus movement” (p.28).

If the church is to take the Jesus-tradition seriously and become Jesus-communities, its mission should be to build religiously pluralistic communities for concerted action for a better world in the common hope of the Kingdom of God to come. Kappen tells the churches, “The primary mission of the ecclesial community is to create basielic (Kingdom) communities” (p.25). “Jesus’ blood must mingle with the blood of the sudras, the outcastes, the tribals and the dissenters of today” (p.27).

In this process, we shall build a composite culture “characterized by the tensional unity of the different religious-cultural

traditions” within the framework of the struggle for a new society. He envisages that, eventually a time would come when every religious tradition itself would “become composite incorporating elements from other religious traditions”. This might become true of individual religious experience as well. And he adds. “I for one am weary of being called a Christian. I see myself as a disciple of Jesus who has been profoundly influenced by the teachings of the Buddha and in theology at least by the Siva-Sakti concept of the Divine going back to the pre-Aryan culture” (*Understanding Communalism* p.96).

Kappen has this word regarding the evolution of religions in the struggle for an alternative culture and society. According to him, Jesus stands for “the supersession of all religions including Christianity and heralds a future when human beings will worship God not in man-made temples but in spirit and truth. That future is also the future of India”. But it is far off. Meanwhile says Kappen, “what I claim is not the superiority of Christianity over the Indian religious tradition but the superiority of the religiosity of the Buddha, the radical bhaktas and Jesus over the magico-ritualistic religiosity of orthodox Hinduism and deprophetized religiosity of tradition-bound

Christianity. Jesuan prophecy must appropriate Indian religiosity's sense of oneness of the cosmic, the human and the divine while India makes her own the Galilean dream of the Total Man"(*Jesus and Cultural Revolution* p.71).

I think on this day of celebrating Kappen's thought on India's march towards an alternative paradigm, it is appropriate that we seek to understand and appreciate his teaching. Certainly critical evaluation of it is necessary to appropriate its truths by us in our life and action in the future. But I must say that I find Kappen's line of thinking on religion, culture and society in India most challenging. I leave it at that.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 13: The Emerging Political Scenario: the People's Search For an Alternative

A paper presented at a Seminar organized in Delhi by the Delhi Forum on the topic.

“A global economic system does not just fade out. It will have to be replaced. But at the present a feasible global alternative does not exist. But then alternatives have to be contextually evolved rather than taken out of any ready made blue-print” (C.T.Kurien, *Global Capitalism and Indian Economy* p.84) Alternatives should be based on forces present

in the existing situation. This is required by Realism as different from projecting Utopian blue-prints and imposing it on reality. Utopian vision is necessary but cannot be imposed without taking the contemporary social reality into account. In fact we have to grapple with the contemporary reality to realize a short-term alternative which will open a path to the long-term alternative.

The present international situation is marked by the domination of the “ideology” of the free-market economy. The ideologisation is seen in that the market with its sole criterion of economic growth is made to determine policies regarding other economic goals like liquidation of mass poverty, economic welfare and eco-justice, but also policies regarding directions in social educational and cultural life. Such ideologisation happened much later than the emergence of the market-mechanism in early capitalism for the limited purpose of maximizing production in the context of scarce resources. It is the ideology of the market that has been revived and enforced globally through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization by the economic Powers in the uni-polar world. After the disintegration of socialist regimes in 1989, this ideology dominates the world and the Third World

countries have fallen in line.

We have to reckon with the middle class who form the political community of the Third World countries increasingly supporting it, because it is in their class interests. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) drawn from the middle class and even the organized working class have imbibed the consumer culture and have fallen in line. They may also be believing the media's pressurized propaganda that any present impoverishment of the weaker sections will be corrected in due course through economic growth or that in the present it is the price we pay for economic progress of the nation for the future.

Therefore it is quite unrealistic to build our hope on the expectation that market economy is moving to any inevitable doom or that we can count on the permanence of the democratic polity in India continuing to permit agitation of peoples' movements against the present pattern of development. Capitalism has shown its resilience before; and if India's ruling class feels seriously threatened by peoples' movements or if the BJP comes to power, there is real possibility of democratic freedoms being restricted.

Rajan Gurukkal of the Social

Sciences department of the Mahatma Gandhi University in Kerala gives his reasons why the leaders of counter-culture who are anticipating “a total breakdown of the market-friendly dimension of development in the wake of micro-movements which they see as part of the process of global transformation” are too optimistic and are likely to be disappointed. For, “political systems incapable of counter-balancing unusually swollen middle class, myriads of white collar jobs, non-local means of subsistence, irresistible passion for consumer goods and a social life making sense only in the idiom of science and technology hardly grant an easy walk-over for anti-development movements. Uprooted subjects colonized to the core, thinking and acting according to the rules of modern science, the larger public fails to recognize the myth of development that has been tantalizing over the decades. The capitalist enclave operating through the agency of the state bureaucracy combine goes on increasing middle class incentives through privatization and commercialization. A large majority of the educated commons are depending on the subsistence niches of supra-local economy of commercial interests. More and more of the rural populace are being drawn to urban complexes for non-traditional labour, making rural subsistence systems irrelevant.

This is weakening the side of the marginal communities in the conflicts between commercial interests and survival needs” (“Ecological Perspective of Development” in *Development and Politics of Survival*, pp. 71 f).

The question is, will at least a good minority of the politically conscious community of India commit themselves to preserve democratic freedoms and identify, themselves with the cause of the victims of globalization and opt to oppose the policy in the name of the Nehru legacy of the welfare state? Not that Nehru's concept of the socialist pattern had done much good in practice to the poor sections, but it provided room for it. Will there be a demand in the year of the General Elections that the State be democratic enough to respond to the peoples' movements and discipline the market and the market-mechanism so that they may be de-ideologised so as to make room for objectives like social welfare and justice as well as national self-reliance and eco-justice. This is the short-term political objective.

Among the movements opposed to the policy of globalization, the strongest are those aimed at protecting the ecological-biological structure of nature. Where these movements of eco-justice stand in isolation from the struggle against “capitalist

infringements of communal rights to natural resources”, that is, from the struggle for social justice, they are likely to be of a purely middle class character and tend to get coopted by the ideology of market economy. But where they are so related they are a power for change. In fact the local struggles of the organized movements of dalits, tribals, fisherfolk and women, for living and for survival (some of which have been partly or temporarily successful), against specific expressions of market-directed pattern of development, have been a potent force to educate the middle class regarding the inhuman reality of the present development paradigm; such education is necessary to achieve even our short-term objective. However these movements are politically marginal until they get more power-political support from the organized working class and/or the political parties.

Ajit Roy the editor of the independent *Marxist Review* from Calcutta thinks that Marxist thought has still great potential for defining the long-term alternative based on the power of the organized working class. He estimates that the organized working class will soon feel the pinch of a hi-tech development under TNC auspices which increasingly excludes them from sharing in the scheme of

economic production and distribution. This potential needs to be explored.

On the whole however in the Third World in general and in India in particular, the leaders searching for alternative paradigms take a more neo-Gandhian approach emphasizing decentralization of political and economic power. This envisages microlevel sovereign communities of some sort, controlling their resources and shaping appropriate/indigenous technologies, and socially liberating themselves from traditional patriarchies and hierarchies, redefining without destroying their traditional community structures and values. This too is a form of modern development, only more humane than the present one under globalization.

S.L.Parmar an Indian economist who made a significant contribution to the thinking of the World Council of Churches on development issues, once spoke of the kind of technology that would help social development of people and protect nature. He said, "Since modern technology appears to be ecologically unsatisfactory, it needs to be replaced by a more appropriate technology that is in harmony with nature. Since it manifests inequalities and reduces

participation and control.. .the need is to evolve technologies that are labour-using, capital-and energy-saving, small-scale and amenable to decentralization. These conditions can be largely met if technology is built primarily on natural human and renewable local resources, if it can be linked to traditional skills, crafts and techniques, and if it is geared to production that will meet the basic needs of the poor” (*Faith Science and the Future. Geneva p.196*).

It is significant that even Fukuyama who put forward the thesis that democratic capitalism may be the End of History, has recently said in a Press interview that modern institutions need the support of “pre-modern social structures like the community, religion and the family” and that with these structures disintegrating, “modern institutions were facing a crisis in the West” (quoted by Ajit Roy in the *Marxist Review* July 1995).

So the new alternative should be conceived not as a return to the traditional society as some would have it, but as going forward affirming both discontinuity with the oppressive ethos and continuity with the liberating culture of mutuality in the traditional society. It is not an anti-development paradigm but an alternative development

paradigm.

We have in India the traditions of Gandhi-Vinoba-led Sarvodaya, Lohite Socialism, Jai Prakash's Total Revolution and Ambedkar's pattern of dalit struggle which can become resources for the new alternative. Many of our academics like Rajni Kothari, Ashish Nandy and Vandana Shiva have sought to formulate the new direction. They themselves recognize that the base of this alternative paradigm has to be the movements of peoples who are the victims of globalization. Elements of the new discourse have begun to "acquire forms of struggle and movements fast opening up avenues of integration for the teased and frustrated millions in the southern nations". "Rooted in local cultures and directed to local problems, these are microlevel resistances with signs of world-wide solidarity", says Gurukkal. In this context the large number of net-works of Social Action groups in India have a very important function in the discourse provided they have what Gramscie has called an "organic" relation to such peoples' movements.

In this light, the new National Alliance of Peoples' Movements in India has significance as having the potentiality to become the base of the long-term alternative in our country. It is too early to

say. But the Alliance seems to have had a good beginning in their Bombay meeting under the leadership of Medha Patkar, Tom Kocheri and Banvari Lal Sarma. Bastian Wielenga of the Centre for Social Analysis says, "In peoples' movements such as the National Fish-workers' Forum (NFF), the Narmada Bachan Andolan, the Socialist Front, Jan Vikas Andolan, Chilika Bachao Andolan and the National Federation of Construction Labour which are cooperating in the NAPM, the victims of the dominant development politics are raising their voice and begin to project alternatives. Huge dams are affecting water cycle and bio-regions, purseine trawlers are affecting marine food chains, both are destroying livelihood of people based on community control of resources. This type of development displaces people. Against that, the displaced people claim the right to life (Art 21 of the Constitution)...One of the aims of the struggle is to protect the material base for creative life-centred life-sustaining activities. The slogans, 'protect water-protect life' and 'protect bio-diversity' highlight what has to be done already now for the sake of a new society in the future. This is in the spirit of Shankar Guha Niyogi who emphasized that the agenda of peoples' movement has to include simultaneously struggle and creative efforts": *(Life-centred Production-Practical*

Steps Towards a Feminist Eco-Socialism. Resource Centre for Peoples' Education and Development).

In the midst of a largely gloomy Indian political scenario, there are many rays of hope.

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Chapter 14: The Christian Contribution to an Indian Philosophy of Being and Becoming Human

Based on a talk given at a Consultation on Christian Contribution to Indian Philosophy held at the Catholic Seminary in Madras in 1994 under the joint auspices of the Seminary and the Indian Philosophic Association. Published in Christian Contribution to Indian Philosophy, ed. Anand Amaladass SJ, Madras 1995.

The process of modernization of religious traditions is a contemporary social reality in India. The Christian contribution in this context should be in relation to the struggle of India to develop, through dialogue

among the many religions, cultures and philosophies, a body of common insights about being and becoming human, that is, a common framework of humanism which will humanize the spirit of modernity and the process of modernization.

Modernity is represented by three forces- first, the revolution in the relation of humanity to nature, signified by science and technology; second, the revolutionary changes in the concept of justice in the social relations between fellow human beings indicated by the self-awakening of all oppressed and suppressed humans to their fundamental human rights of personhood and peoplehood, especially to the values of liberty and equality of participation in power and society; thirdly, the break-up of the traditional integration of state and society with religion, in response to religious pluralism on the one hand and the affirmation of the autonomy of the secular realm from the control of religion on the other'.

These forces of modernity have enhanced human creativity in many directions. But since they have been interpreted onesidely in the context of a mechanical materialist world-view, they have also become sources of destructivity and dehumanization. Technology has produced technocracy and totalitarian planning destructive of personhood and ecology.

Revolutions devour their own children and produce new oppression. Secularization becomes closed secularism. And so on. Now that the destructive aspects of modernization have become pronounced in the world of the second half of the 20th century, questions regarding a more holistic philosophy and an alternative paradigm of modernization have been universally raised. It is with a view to humanize technology and social revolt as well as religious pluralism and secularism in the modern world. It is in relation to this contemporary historical challenge faced by all religions, all metaphysics and philosophies, and all secular ideologies, dialogue among them has relevance. And it is in relation to the ensuing dialogue about a genuine Indian Humanism that does justice to the mechanical, organic and spiritual dimensions of humanness and social history, that a Christian contribution to Indian philosophy acquires importance.

The basis of the Christian contribution is the faith that the crucified Jesus Christ by mediating divine forgiveness to all humans in the solidarity of their sinfulness, has made possible mutual forgiveness between persons and peoples and has brought into being in history a new human communion

(*Koinonia*), transcending all religious, cultural and natural diversities and divisions. "Have put on the new humanity...where there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, sythian, slave nor free (neither male nor female- Gal. 3.28)...Forgiving one another as the Lord forgave you(Col. 3.10-13.).

The communion/community is symbolized sacramentally by the fellowship of the Church of Christ at the Lord's Table. But it is not bound by the organized church. It is a ferment universally present for the renewal of all communities, opening them to each other before God, in a mutuality of forgiveness and justice. This will enable them to build the common framework of a genuine Secular Humanism and an open secular culture of mutual dialogue, about building a richer and fuller humanness in community life.

It is significant that Vatican II (and also the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches) defines the church as the sacramental sign of the unity of all humanity, and also speaks of the presence of the Paschal Mystery among all peoples (see Decree on the *Church*, and the document on the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*) This approach

assumes that in Christianity, acknowledgment of *Salvation* (understood as the transcendent ultimate destiny of human beings) finds expression and witness in the universal struggle for *Humanization* (understood as the penultimate human destiny) in world history which is shaped not only by the forces of goodness and life, but also by the forces of evil and death. In fact, the nature of the penultimate historical goal of humanization within the hope of ultimate salvation, is the theme of moral philosophy in the Christian religion. Christianity in its more pietist, fundamentalist and conventional expressions, has confined its attention largely to the ultimate spiritual salvation forgetting its temporal witness in charitable social service and more than that, in social action to bring about justice in social structures. On the other hand, traditional Christian moral philosophies have been reluctant to recognize the creative positive aspects of the forces of modern technology and social change under the auspices of Secular Humanism. Both these have resulted in Christianity leaving the field of ethics of modernization to secularistic ideologies which reject the very idea of the transcendent spiritual dimension of human existence and pursue a reductionist interpretation of reality.

It is this situation that is sought to

be remedied by Christian Ecumenism by its emphasis on Humanization as an essential aspect of Salvation (see M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization* 1971)

Neo-Hinduism has been involved in a similar endeavour of relating the Historical and the Ultimate in the context of the impact of modernity. In traditional Hinduism *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha* are recognized as *purusharthas*, goals of life. But traditional Hindu metaphysics, as P.T. Raju points out, has been preoccupied with *moksha*, the ultimate realization of oneness and equality of all in the Spirit, mostly forgetting that it is necessary to bring witness of oneness and equality within the social structures created for the human pursuit of wealth (*artha*), temporal happiness (*kama*) and duty (*dharma*). The equality at the *paramarthika* level of *moksha* was allowed to coexist with rigid inequality of the caste-structure in the *vyavaharika* levels of *artha*, *kama* and *dharma*, without even a tension between the two levels.

It is this compartmentalization of the ultimate spiritual and the historical social which Swami Vivekananda condemned as Pharisaic. In fact the whole history of the Neo-Hindu movements from Raja Rammohan Roy to Gandhi, Tagore and

Radhakrishnan may be seen as an attempt to relate *paramarthika* level of salvation with the *vyvahariaka* level of social structures and goals (see M.M.T. *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance 1969*).

The secularist ideologies of history like Liberalism and Marxism in their attempt to deal with the destructiveness which appeared in the process of modernization under their auspices, have been forced to give up something of their closed character and to open themselves to recognize, not only the conditional character of rationality but also the tragic contradiction in the spirit of human self-transcendence itself. For instance, Neo-Marxism became aware, after Stalinism, of sources of self-alienation beyond class, in the State, bureaucracy and technology, and beyond them in some cases in the human spirit itself. This was clear in the thought of Ernest Bloch and others of Eastern Europe even before the disintegration of the socialist regimes of the region.

All these show that ours is a historical context conducive, not only to inter-religious but also to religion-ideology dialogues on building a common body of insights about being and becoming human - a dialogue in which Christianity can make a

contribution from its idea of reconciliation of humanity and the creation of a Secular *Koinonia* across religions, cultures and ideologies. Christian contribution to Indian Anthropology may be marginal, but it need not be insignificant. In the reverse, the ways in which other religions and secular ideologies grapple with the truth and meaning of the humanity of Jesus Christ can help in developing a truly indigenous Indian Christology and Christianity (M.M.T. *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ* 1976).

Actually, it was the leaders of the 19th century Indian Renaissance and the political thinkers in the ideological leadership of the 20th century Indian Nationalism who grappled with the person and teachings of Jesus Christ and assimilated the essence of Christian humanism into the religious and secular thought of modern India. Natarajan in *A Century of Social Reform* points out that the fear of Christianity has been the beginning of social wisdom in Hinduism. But certainly it was not merely the fear of Christian proselytism but also the intrinsic love and appeal of the person of Jesus Christ and Christian values, especially the Cross of Christ as the symbol of God's identification with suffering and oppressed humanity, that led to the redefinition of the

traditional Hindu spirituality, philosophy and social ethics. And it was in this setting that Indian Christians and Churches began to get concerned about a relevant Christian contribution to Indian philosophical and theological thought through inter-faith dialogue.

Of course, it is not merely professional thinkers. Hindu, Secular and Christian who have contributed to the Christianization/Humanization of Indian religion, ideology and philosophy in the light of the Crucified Christ, but also the local Christian congregations which in their worship and sacramental life, demonstrated a pattern of corporate life of fellowship, transcending traditional caste division impelled by their new sense of being made brethren through the death of Christ on the Cross. The Lord's Table open to people of different castes and tribes and sexes challenged the traditional spirituality that divided peoples into the ritually pure and impure and thereby supported social structures of caste, sex and other discriminations. It does not mean that the church congregations did not make compromises with such structures themselves. They did. But they also promoted a spiritual vision and practice and challenged them, thereby acting as a transforming ferment in the larger society. In

fact, the vision of Peter that God in Christ had destroyed purity-impurity divide between Jew and Gentile (Acts 10) was a turning point in the early church to build a new *koinonia* transcending religions. It is the extension of it in India in the idea and practice of the churches in the Indian village and city that challenged absolutising the traditional casteist, sexist and other structures of Indian society as divinely ordained. It had tremendous appeal not only to the outcaste, the tribal and the woman, but also to the nationally awakened Indian intellectual who saw in Christ the source of a new universal humanism.

I must hasten to add that Christianity has also introduced into Indian religious and secular philosophy the idea of Messianism that is, the idea of a Messiah who would bring history to fulfillment. Such Messianism, if interpreted outside the framework of the idea of the suffering crucified Servant, would naturally develop a historical dynamism with the idea of Messiah as Conquering King seeking power through aggression. In fact Christianity itself has often in its history succumbed to the Messianism of the Conquering King rather than of the crucified servant Christ. Christian communalism is an expression of it in India. The

dangerous consequence of the impact of the Messianism of conquest introduced into India by the Semitic religions is that Hinduism has absorbed it and produced *Hindutva*, with its idea of Hindu communalism and Hindu Rashtra threatening secularism which is the foundation of national unity in our context of religious pluralism. Unless the Crucified Jesus is emphasized as the central symbol of Christian messianism, the contribution of Christianity to Indian philosophy may be the intensification of a philosophy of history which posits totalitarian statism of a religious or secularist kind as its goal (MMT. *Man and the universe of Faiths*, 1975).

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 15: Inter-Religious Conversion

A paper presented at an inter-faith Consultation on Religion, State and Communalism" held at Madras from Sept. 21-24 under the auspices of the CCA and several religious and secular organizations in India, at a session chaired by Swami Agnivesh.

The topic of Inter-religious Conversion has many dimensions. But I suppose it has to be dealt with in this consultation from the point of view of its relevance and relation to the problems raised by the threat of Religious Communalism to the Secular Democratic character of Indian

polity and the democratic struggle of the people for an egalitarian community.

Clearly many aspects of religious activities must have been dealt with in their relation to India's secular democratic polity by the time this presentation comes before the consultation. So I expect some of the basic issues I shall be dealing with in respect of conversion will at many points be a repetition of those which have already been considered.

Nevertheless the agenda worked out by the organizers of the consultation seems to have its rationale and I am happy to introduce the topic for your discussion.

My presentation has three parts. The first part deals with why the individual's right of freedom to "profess practice and propagate religion", and to convert to another faith and religion inherent in it, is a condition and guardian of all other democratic freedoms and fundamental human rights in State, society and culture. In the second part, we shall point to the specific conditions in India which has made inter-religious conversion an issue of communal politics and shall also look at some aspects of the history of the controversy whether the solution lies in depoliticising religious conversion or in outlawing it. And in the third part, I shall discuss a

non-communal form of religious existence and some Christian theological reasons for promoting a non-communal expression of the Christian faith and fellowship.

The idea of the secular democratic nation-state emerged in Europe in the context of the secular humanist Renaissance and the rationalist Enlightenment which followed it on the one hand and of the Protestant Reformation and free-church movements following it on the other. The emphasis on the right of the individual to pursue and obey one's "reason and conscience" even against the dictate of church, community and/or the State whether in the realm of scientific or religious truth was a basic principle affirmed by them in common.

And the religious denominational plurality along with strong middle class and later working class groups committed to atheism destroyed any possibility of return to Christendom, and the only option for national unity was to secularize the state with equality under law for all religious and secular thought and groups. The religious denominational pluralism and the puritan desire to prevent the state from interfering with their religious freedom along with the forces of secular liberal thought brought into being the secular democratic polity with its clear separation between religion and state in the USA. However,

the doctrine that humans as rational and/or spiritual beings “have ends and loyalties beyond the state”, community and nation to which they belong, became part of the “civil religion” or civil culture, which gave moral reinforcement to this whole process of democratization and secularization.

In fact the characteristic of State totalitarianism whether under Hitler or under Stalin was the rejection of this doctrine about human being as having ends and loyalties beyond the state”, it turned the citizens from being spiritual persons into functions of the state and social planning machines. The one point at which totalitarianism made this evident was in cutting the freedom of religion. The Confessing Church in Germany in resisting it, both at the level of doctrine and practice in their relation to the Jews, became the source of renewal of democratic politics in Germany after the War. Of course, the freedom to practice religion was there in Russia and China, along with freedom of atheistic propaganda. It is significant that in all situations of democratization, freedom of religion including propagation of religion and atheism equally was restored. In this context it is worth mentioning that the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights clearly affirms religious

freedom and freedom from discrimination on the basis of religion as integral to it. But religious people would maintain that the inalienability of fundamental rights depend on the doctrine that they are not gifts of the state or even of the people who constitute the state, but the gift of the Creator as the US Constitution puts it or the Spirit as we would say in India, and that therefore these rights cannot be taken away by the state or the people.

I am not unaware of the difference in approach regarding propagation of religion and inter-religious conversion, between religions with a dominant “mystic” spirituality and “unitive” vision, and religions with a dominant “prophetic” spirituality and “messianic” approach. Religions which consider the mystic experience as the ultimate point of spiritual self-realization, consider history with its plurality as of no ultimate significance, and consider the many religions in history with their emphasis on *nama* and *rupa* as ultimately so relative and insignificant, that they are tolerated as equally true or untrue. On the other hand, religions which believe that God has revealed himself and his purpose in a concrete historical event or a tradition of such unique events with fixed name and form and as continually acting in

history, see spiritual self-fulfillment as consisting in propagation of the news of the unique event and in building up a fellowship of people who acknowledges the revelatory event, which will also be a sacramental sign and instrument for bringing God's Kingdom on earth. Of course, these are two types of spirituality and every religion has both types in it, because of interpenetration. But Hinduism, Taoism and religions of the mystic family are predominantly mystic oriented and Judaism, Christianity and Islam are predominantly prophetic-messianic in character. The former would naturally emphasize the sameness or equality of religions and the necessity to negate them all in the ultimate spiritual experience, while the latter would emphasize the essential difference between them and their historical mission in the pluralistic situation.

It is necessary to add that the modern secular ideologies like Liberalism and Marxism as well as Nationalism and Statism which have arisen in prophetically oriented western religious culture, have a secularized messianic spiritual approach to history and human self-fulfillment. Ram Manohar Lohia, a secular ideologist, has written on the essential difference between what he called the western and

traditional Indian spirits. The traditional spirit bases mutual toleration of historical differences on the idea that they are parts of the same truth, while the modern spirit of democratic toleration of differences is on the basis that though they are essentially different, reverence for each other as persons requires respect for each other's freedom to differ. It is this difference between the two types of religious spirituality that needs to be understood in the debates on the question of the freedom of propagation of religion and conversion, as a fundamental right of the human person. It also clarifies why secular ideologists among Hindus are generally more supportive of freedom of conversion than the religious. Because as they can see, on it depends the right of ideological propagation and conversion which is basic to the multi-party system of political democracy.

Of course as Lohia sees clearly in his *Fragments of a World Mind*, the messianic historical spirituality has produced more "strife" in society than the mystic, while the latter has produced "stagnation". Given the choice between the two, he would choose to die in strife than stagnate. The point is that Semitic religions have produced more missions of humanitarian service but also more crusades of conquest than

the mystically oriented religions in the past; and now that the traditionally mystic religions like Hinduism are also converting itself to Semitic messianic historical spirituality, it is also producing missions of service as well as power-crusades of conquest. Dostoevsky in his *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* has shown how the spirit of Jesus the Crucified Messiah has itself been turned into the spirit of the Inquisition to serve a Jesus turned Conquering King. Dostoevsky was of course thinking of the same mutation in modern secular ideological messianisms. The same spirit in modernization has, along with missions of service to universal humanity making human life richer and fuller, produced also a good deal of power-crusades for conquest which has found expression in technology being used in the service of colonialism and transnational and national economic exploitation, totalitarian statism and destruction of nature. The question is, whether in religion or in secular modernity, these perversions of the messianic spirit can be redeemed by the spirit of genuine humanism within it and/or controlled by the rule of law from outside it, without suppressing the basic spirit of democratic freedom. At the level of spirituality, the role of the cosmic primal as well as the mystic unitive spiritualities in checking the messianism of

conquest underlying modernization has also come up for universal consideration.

Sorry for the time taken for this digression into the spirit of modernity and its relation to messianic spirituality. It is necessary for a consultation like ours to see that religious ethos and political ethos are connected. Now back directly to our topic. It is necessary to ask what the conditions in India are which make for aggressive communalism more than in other countries.

S. Gopal in his recent talk at Bangalore on *A Historical Perspective of Secularism in India (1993)* has pointed out how communalism was introduced by colonialism. Whether we take the popular culture or the culture of the rulers, "what you had in India was not a sectarian Hindu culture or a Muslim culture but a composite Indian culture". The British who colonized India had accepted the European concept of nationhood as constituted by unity in blood and language, "ethnic purity and a single language"; therefore, they said, that "India is not and can never be a nation...India is a collection of religious communities...But the unfortunate tragic element was that this British interpretation of Indian history was also accepted by many of our national

leaders...So British interpretation plus the shortsightedness of our own leaders, not excluding the Mahatma, together resulted in this dreadful phenomenon of communalism". In such a setting, religious communalities came to be political units to be wooed by Imperialism and Nationalism. The numerical strength of the communities came to acquire political significance. It was in this context that majority and minority communalism became strong and Akhanda Hindustan and Pakistan became religious/political goals.

And even Gandhi had to develop a secular nationalism by conceiving cooperation between religious communities rather than transcending the religious divisions. The desire of the Hindu leadership including Gandhi to build up a "single Hindu community" was a natural outcome of the pressure of the political situation. But it came to be associated not only with religious but also with caste political overtones, and came into conflict with the anti-Brahmin movements of depressed castes who were organizing separately for separate political strength to bring about cultural and social change aimed at elevating their status in the body politic; it also made the conversion into other religious communities, of the depressed sections of Hinduism as

well as of the Tribals partially Hinduised and moving more fully in that direction, to be seen as a weakening of the Hindu community and a strengthening of other religious communities as political entities.

In this process the mystic spirituality of Hinduism was also changing in the direction of the messianic spirituality. So far as Gandhi was concerned, it was towards a syncretism of mystic Hindu spirituality with the self-giving and suffering love of Jesus the Crucified Messiah producing the politics of nonviolence aimed at a secular nation-state based more or less on inter-religious understanding and the decentralized socialism of Sarvodaya. But the Hindutva of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS *parivar*, as Ashish Nandy points out, was a semiticisation of Hinduism converting Hinduism as “faith” into Hinduism as “ideology” (Ashish Nandy, *Hindutva*; I. Secularism's Disowned Double, II. The Poor man's Statism in *the Indian Express Feb 1991*). It was a conversion of Hinduism into the messianism of power-crusade and conquest, which as Sebastian Kappen has said (in *Understanding Communalism 1993*) was not unlike that of the medieval theories of Christianity and Islam.

The British also solidified the separation between religious communities by making the personal law (civil code) of each community legal. And when Christian missions made converts and created Christian communities they imposed an English law as the personal law of the Indian Christian community and separated them from other religious communities legally. Therefore religious conversion also became a transference from one legal religious community to another. I am told that India is the only country where Christians have separate civil law like this. Of course as Mundaden has clarified in his *History of Christianity in India Vol. I.*, it was the Portuguese Catholic mission that emphasized the religious and communal exclusiveness of the Christian fellowship of faith in the Kerala situation where traditionally there was much syncretic interaction between Syrian Christians and Hindus at all cultural and social levels. They also openly identified conversion to Christianity as an extension, not only of western culture but also of western Christendom i.e. the pattern of integration of church, community and politics of medieval Europe. In the 19th century, the Protestant Christian missions identified Christianity almost totally with western culture and made religious conversion to Christianity a transference from Indian culture

to an alien culture. Thanks to the oppressiveness of the Hindu caste culture, the Christian converts from the depressed and low castes saw conversion as a liberation from caste oppression. Thanks to intolerance of caste structure, converts especially in the North had to be organized in Mission Compounds where the cultural ethos of community life was that of the western missionaries. Only when conversion became a group movement among the dalits and tribals that the social and cultural structures and values of the converts' traditional life came to be kept intact. But that made conversion more suspect as politically motivated and materially influenced.

I have repeatedly related the story of how the Constituent Assembly came to accept the inclusion of freedom of religious propagation in the clause on fundamental rights of religious freedom in response to the Indian Christian community voluntarily giving up the communal representation proposed by Britain as safeguard for the Christian minority. George Thomas in his book *Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism*, gives the story of how K.T.Paul and S.K.Datta of the Indian YMCA who represented Protestants at the Round Table Conference in London, took a determined stand against turning Indian Christians into a

communal political entity by Britain imposing on them communal representation, communal electorate and other communal safeguards. The All-India Christian Council in 1930 said that “the place of a minority in a nation is its value to the whole nation and not merely to itself” and it depended on the genuineness with which it sought the common weal.

Azariah who later became Bishop of Dornakal argued that the church in accepting the position of a communal political minority with special protection would become a static community and it would negate its self-understanding as standing for mission and service to the whole national community, that in any case the Indian church is not a single social or cultural community since it consists of people of diverse background, each of whom would have its own political struggle to wage in cooperation with the people of similar background in other religions; and therefore theologically and politically Christians should ask only for religious freedom for its mission and service to all people, not as a minority right, but as a human right (ref. John Webster, *Dalit Christians-A History*). H.C.Mukherji and Jerome D’Sousa were the spokesman for this secular nationalist cum

Christian approach in the Constituent Assembly. “The immediate outcome was an offer by Sardar Patel and accepted by the Assembly that religious freedom in its full sense including the right to propagate religion should be written into the Constitution, not as a minority right but as a fundamental right of human person”(MMT, *Social Reform amongst Indian Christians*. P.16). It was a sort of covenant between Christians and the nation- on the part of Christians that they will not use their numerical strength for the purpose of their communal interest in politics and on the part of the state that it would not restrict their evangelistic freedom and the growth of the Christian fellowship through inter-religious conversion undertaken through genuine conviction. That covenant has been sought to be violated on both sides. The Orissa and Arunachal Pradesh laws and the lapsed OP. Tyagi Bill supported by the Prime Minister Desai restricting religious conversion and also the discrimination of scheduled caste converts to Christianity in the special benefits to people of the scheduled caste background, may be mentioned as violations of the covenant on the part of the State; and the Christian people have been unhappy at giving up minority communal safeguards and many efforts to organize Christian political parties off and

on have been made in several states especially in the South by Christians.

This is an issue that continues to agitate both majority and minority religious communities. Religion has not yet become a matter of personal choice, and politics still remains a matter of bargaining among religious communities. Of course the right to the propagation is not the right to convert. The former is the right of persuasion only. The right to convert is that of the hearer. And it is necessary that no kind of inducement or coercion is present to violate the moral and spiritual integrity of the person or group propagating or deciding to convert. But any law in this matter is difficult to implement and is likely to be misused. Public opinion is the best moral safeguard. Of course Law provides that any fundamental right can be exercised only with due regard to morality and public order. But the issue is far from being closed.

In a paper on "Proselytisation -a Causal Factor for Communalism" at the Nehru Centenary Seminar at Trivandrum on "Minorities and Secularism", N.V.Krishna Warner opposes the above covenant and the freedom of conversion given as fundamental right (*Minorities and Secularism- A Symposium 1991*). His argument is that it is conversion from Hinduism to

other religions that has been a serious cause of Hindu Communalism. He says, "Hinduism as such does not favour the idea of proselytisation. . .Hinduism did not object to this so long as political power depended not on numbers but on other factors. Now that democracy has come to stay, Hindus have belatedly realized that numbers do count and only numbers do count ultimately". Further they see that there is "high concentration of non-Hindu communities in several states of India many of them on the borders", which places national security of India at risk. Therefore he asks whether it is not time that the law stops the movement of proselytisation which is "a form of aggression", and take a decision that "propagating one's own religion is different from proselytisation and that while the former is every Indian's birthright, the latter is a punishable offence"(pp. 223-9). Here there is a mixture of religious and political motivations and the assumption that the security of the Indian nation lies primarily on Hindus on the border, because others are supposed to have extra-territorial loyalties. This is of course the Hindutva approach.

A different moderate approach is given in "Communal Strife Linked to Conversions" the report

of an interview with AP Governor Krishna Kanth (*Indian Express* 20 Oct. 91). At a meeting of the National Council of Churches he asked, not for any legal restriction but a “a voluntary agreement among religious leaders of all faiths that from now on they would not resort to conversions because the social logic of conversions is not valid now”, that the promise of liberation from caste structure has not been fulfilled as proved by the fact that it persists in all religious communities; and any attempt to organize Hinduism as a religious community like others of the prophetic tradition has been a failure. So it is argued that “caste is not just a Hindu phenomenon, that Hinduism is not a religion, and that both Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar were victims of this false perception”. Hindus are trying to become a religious community in the image of religions each of which has a book and a prophet because such a community has more unity. But “what Hinduism is not it cannot become”.

From the Christian side, the thinking has gone on the line that the Christian church as fellowship of faith in Christ should cease to be a religious community in the common communal sense. A conference of the NCC of India, on renewal in mission, came to the finding that conversion to

Christ is “not moving from one culture to another or from one community to another community as it is understood in the communal sense in India today” (*Renewal in Mission p.220*). In the Christian Institute for the Study-of Religion and Society there was an open discussion about a proposal that since Christ transcended not only cultures but also religions and ideologies, the fellowship of confessors of faith in Jesus as the Messiah should not separate from their original religious or secular ideological community but should form fellowships of Christian faith in those communities themselves, and that so long as the Law sees baptism as transference from one community to another it should not be made the condition of entry into the fellowship of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper but made a sacramental privilege for a later time(Ref. *Religion and Society March 1972*).

T.M. Philip in his historical survey of Baptismal practices and theologies (*Debate on Mission, ed. Hofer 1979*) says that the “rite has become a legal condition for the entry into the church which functions as a religious communal group; in this context it fails to convey its full meaning and purpose as the expression of or solidarity with the new humanity in Christ which transcends all communal or caste

solidarities”; he also refers to the conclusion of Joseph Belcastro’s book *A New Testament Doctrine of Baptism for Today*, that “the N.T. does not teach that baptism was a condition of salvation or church membership, but baptism was to be available for the disciples of the coming church.... that faith in and acceptance of Jesus as the Christ was the basis of membership in the church”(pp. 321).

In the late eighties the Indian Theological Association explored the pattern of the church in a secular mode as herald of the Kingdom and servant of the world in a pluralist society like India. Kuncheria Pathil asks for “the Open Church with flexible structures boundaries rules and rituals” in dialectical and dialogical relationship with religions and ideologies and cultures and in solidarity with peoples’ movements for justice . George Lobo says that while the visibility of Christianity is needed for the sacramental role, the fellowship of faith, if true to itself “has to be essentially charismatic and not a power structure or rigid institution seeking to safeguard its own interests”. Also that “there is nothing in authentic Christianity that would demand that one who receives baptism should abandon his original socio-cultural group and join another” (*Communalism in India- A Challenge to*

Theologizing 1988).

The present Indian legal system of separate civil law for different religious communities imposes separateness between communities of faith. It is necessary to have a common civil code so that conversion at the level of faith may not have the effect of a communal transference. If that is not possible, Fr. H. Staffner has brought forward the proposal which the late E.D. Devadason mooted, namely that the Christian community should accept the recodified Hindu law as their own civil law in the place of the present quite outdated Indian Christian Law which, as already stated, was an imposition of an English law on Christian converts in India. Staffner says, "People may find it strange that Christians should be asked to agitate that a so called Hindu law be made applicable to them. E.D. Devadason points out that the law worked out by Pandit Nehru and Dr. Ambedkar in 1956 is not really a Hindu law. The mere fact that this law is applicable also to Jams, Buddhists and Sikhs clearly shows that from the beginning it should have been called Civil Code rather than Hindu Code" He adds, that it is not based on any Hindu Scriptures but on "modern concepts and progressive values and is applicable to all citizens irrespective of religion". Staffner

sees it as one way to give baptism its true sacramental sense rather than the communal” (“A Better Civil Law or a Communal Personal Law for Christians” in *Peoples' Reporter*, 1 - 15 Aug 1994).

Recently there was a Court judgment in Madras which granted the contention of a person who affirmed that he was a Christian by faith without change of community by conversion and therefore entitled to benefits of the scheduled castes of the Hindu community. I thought it was an interesting judgment which distinguishes faith and communal affiliation.

We have to move in the direction of decommunalising politics and fellowships of religious faith if politics and faith are to find their genuine democratic or human character.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 16: Issues In Evangelistic Mission In The Present Indian Context

A talk at the United Theological College, Bangalore on 19 August 1993.

There are several crucial issues related to evangelistic mission which are not related particularly to the Indian context, but to the general context of the modern world. They are also relevant for our consideration in the Indian context. I choose a few:

1. What is the Evangel, the gospel, which the Church is called upon to communicate to the people of the modern world?

The central issue in the early debates between Fundamentalists and Modernists was on the question whether the gospel should emphasize as the essence of the gospel, deliverance of the humans from sinfulness or affirmation of the human vocation to creativity and cooperation with God in recreating nature and society according to the purpose of God. The alternative contained in the question is no more valid. The modernists have become conscious of sin as the spirit of destructivity present in all human creativity so that even secular evolutionary and revolutionary ideologies of reshaping the world have now come to recognize that all human creativity and creations need deliverance from the spirit of perversity working within them; and Christian theology of modernity today emphasizes the social and cosmic dimensions of sin and atonement. On the other side, the fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals have begun to see that Christian atonement and redemption are not merely for individual appropriation in isolation but also take into account the whole person with his/her involvement in society and culture.

John I, Col. I and Heb. I emphasize that it is through Christ that all things have been created and that therefore all things come under the redemption of Christ.

Col. 2.14-15 speaks of the Cross of Christ as the source of the Forgiveness of sins as well as Victory over all principalities and powers. Rom. 8 sees the subhuman creation, humanity and the Holy Spirit of God as “groaning” together for the End, the final manifestation of the Family of God on earth.

A theology of redemption combines affirmation of human creativity in the purpose of God and deliverance from human sinfulness to release humans for their vocation of cooperation with God in continuous new creativity. P.Chenchiah used to say that a return to the original creation and to the innocence of Adam before the fall cannot be the goal of the Christian gospel. In fact the new Adam Jesus Christ according to I Cor. 15 is of a higher order than the original Adam. I have found H.Berkhof's theology combining Karl Barth and Teilhard de Chardin quite helpful in this connection. In his paper on “God in Nature and History”, Berkhof says that the dynamic of the gospel is “a great movement from lower to higher, going through estrangement and crises, but also through atonement and salvation, and so directed towards its ultimate goal, a glorified humanity, in full communion with God, of which goal the Risen Christ is the guarantee and first fruits”

When one thus takes seriously creativity and atonement in history in its movement towards the eschatological goal of the Kingdom and recognizes what Devanandan has called “the personal, social and cosmic” dimensions of the Gospel of the Kingdom, evangelism becomes witness to the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ as the bearer of the coming Kingdom in all areas of life of the world in the immediate present. Here the covenant of the preservation of the fallen world through justice and judgment (indicated by the covenant of God with Noah in which God calls all humanity to create and maintain an order of society based on reverence for life, and the Divine ordinance through which the political order that uses power and legal justice for the liberation and protection of the weak from self-aggrandizement of the strong in a sinful world- Moses, David and Rom. 13) as well as the covenant of Grace through Israel and the Church are both signs and foretastes of the End, the Kingdom of Love and Righteousness.

2. Secondly, modern missionary movement which became dominant in the 18th and 19th centuries have been emphasizing proclamation of the gospel to people of other religions and cultures making clear that they were called to decide for or

against Christ and that their decision for Christ involved joining the fellowship of Christians in one of the denominational churches as representing the Church, the Body of Christ. The book *Colonialism and Christian Missions. Post-colonial Reflections* by Jacob Dharmaraj (1993) raises the question whether a good part of the missionary idea and practice in India was not controlled by the colonial climate of thought which did not belong to the essence of the gospel. For instance, that climate was shaped by the expansion of western power and knowledge in the world accompanied by the certainty that all the world would soon become Christendom displacing all other religions and cultures. There was a devaluation of these other religions and cultures and a total identification of the gospel with western Christianity and western culture. The point is that there was not an adequate idea of the transcendence of the gospel over religions and cultures, and therefore the idea of the Church of Christ as a ferment transforming all religions and cultures and taking new incarnations within them did not find expression in missionary practice. This critique is fairly old now. But the crucial question for evangelistic mission today is how in a changed post-colonial situation the forms of the church and its evangelistic proclamation

and the call to conversion and the invitation to join the fellowship of the church may take place within the context of the recognition of religious and cultural plurality and common participation in building a new just society and state. With every religion, culture and ethnos seeking self-identity, parity and justice in mutual relations in society, inter-religious and inter-personal dialogues are a necessary setting for redefining the form of any evangelistic mission. As D.T.Niles used to say, the essential scandal of the gospel should not be mixed too much with other scandals extraneous to the gospel.

Wesley Ariarajah who was Director of the Dialogue Unit of the WCC for many years, in his Thomas Athanasius lecture given in Kerala (*Current Trends in Ecumenical Thinking* 1992) deals with the topic "Interpreting the Missionary Mandate" in the present context of religious and cultural pluralism. He quotes the findings of an ecumenical consultation in Switzerland to say that Christians "should consider religious plurality to be within God's purpose" and discusses Buddhist and Judaic models. The Buddhist message and teachings were 'released' into the mainstream of the national religious and cultural life without any demand that any person becoming Buddhist had to 'leave'

his or her cultural and religious heritage behind. The people of Israel did not seek to make Jews of all nations, though they discharged their vocation of proclaiming Yahve as the God of all nations. The nations had the right to exist as nations and were not expected in one way or another to be incorporated into Israel. Ariarajah in this light defines the Christian missionary mandate: The Christian mission then could become the joyful responsibility of bearing witness to what we have come to know about God in and through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, to the values of the Kingdom that would lead peoples to truer life. It would be a witness that does not call upon our neighbours to leave their religious culture and people to become part of the church, but point to "Christ as One who has underwritten the promise of God to renew all life". He adds that it would however leave the possibility open for a person who had been witnessed to, to want to name the Name and become part of the historic community, the church which is called to be faithful to the Gospel message among the nations. "The Christian is called not to convert but to witness. The burden of responding to the message is that of the hearers and not of those who proclaim".

I have discussed Ariarajah's

approach to the missionary mandate at such length because it is one which takes the pluralistic situation seriously. His main point that the Christian task is to witness and not to convert is important. But there is nothing wrong in inviting those who respond positively to the Person of Christ without leaving their religious and cultural community to form fellowships around the Lord's Table and the Word of God as "part of the Church" within their religious and cultural community-settings themselves and those who respond to the Christian values to consider acknowledging their source in Christ.

3. Thirdly, evangelistic witness cannot be isolated from the total life of the church. The proclamation of the *kerygma* is integrally related to the *didache*, the church's interpretation of the gospel in terms of the self—understanding of the hearers, to the church's *diakonia*, its service and social action and above all to the church's *koinonia*, the quality of its fellowship. Hromadka of Czechoslovakia used to speak of the credibility of the evangelistic mission of the church as dependent upon the total life of the church, that is to say, it depends upon the way in which the church makes its prophetic mission of defence of human

personhood and peoplehood in society and state and the ability of the church to reconcile diversity within its fellowship of divine forgiveness and become a source of reconciled diversity in the larger society. Here specifically the Christian contribution to overcoming Communalism and strengthening Secularism is of the greatest importance in the Indian context. This involves countering Closed Secularism which creates spiritual vacuum and Religious Fundamentalism which creates intolerance of the other. Open Secularism and Renascent Religion should reinforce each other.

Historically it was the decision of the Indian Christian community to give up communal representation and other safeguards that made possible the inclusion of the right to propagate religion as a fundamental right of every citizen in the Indian Constitution. This decision was taken by the leaders of the Indian Christian community because they did not want to remain a static communality but wanted to be a missionary community. They got the support of the secular politicians because freedom to propagate religion was considered by them as part of the freedom to propagate cultural and political ideas. The assurance that increase of numbers through evangelism and conversion would not be used

to augment communal self-interest continues to be necessary to preserve that right. It is also necessary to show that religious freedom is the guardian and condition of all other fundamental freedoms of the human person. One could say therefore that the witnessing and serving vocation of the Christian community as well as the fundamental rights of all the citizens are best served by Christians giving up any self-centred communal approach in India.

We must remember that not only the Hindutva of the RSS-VHP-BJP *parivar* but also the more liberal Neo-Hinduism of the Gandhian line consider the missionary propagation and the conversion resulting from it as religious imperialism and destructive of inter-religious harmony.

Though other religions may not have developed a theological justification of caste as in traditional Hinduism, conversion to other religions has not proved as effective as was promised. Here the indictment of the Christian churches of India with respect to the church's failure to overcome the spirit of caste within its fellowship is to be specially noted. So there is a good deal of truth in the argument that conversion to other religions has lost its social logic. It is clear that

the Indian situation calls for deeper mutual understanding among religions and for the development of a consensus about parameters of religious practices in a democracy, where there is co-existence of non-missionary and missionary types of religions.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 17: Emerging Concepts Of Mission in Asia

A talk opening the discussion on the subject at the Theological College of Sri Lanka, Pitimatalawa, Sri Lanka on 9 July 1993 in connection with the 30th anniversary of the college.

I must at the outset say that I am not intimately in contact for the last so many years with all-Asian thinking on Mission. So what I say and the issues I raise in this talk, should be considered as having a more restricted horizon than all Asia.

I consider the following issues as

crucial for a rethinking on them from the context of Mission in Asia at present.

1. First, the Evangelistic Mission of proclamation and conversion in the new Asian context.

The evangelistic mission of the church has traditionally emphasized proclamation of the gospel of Christ to people of other religions. The message has been that Jesus the Son of God was crucified for the sins of the humanity and that Jesus raised from the dead by God brings Divine Forgiveness and Salvation understood as access to God; as free gifts to all who repent and accept Him as Saviour and join the fellowship of the Church of Christ.

This idea of mission for conversion had been criticized from various points of view. First, that it has been related to the 18th and 19th century expansion of western power in the world accompanied by the hope that all the world would soon come under Christendom. Second, it was based on ignorance of other religions and religious cultures and an unthinking devaluation of them as satanic or idolatrous only and would soon disappear as superstitious and inhuman. Third, the appeal to conversion was confined largely to the marginalised and oppressed

sections of other religions and others who saw in it a means of social uplift unconnected with spiritual goals. Fourth, that its understanding of the gospel was too individualistic and partial as it isolated the souls to be saved from the whole persons related to society and culture. These criticisms are true and many of the traditional forms of evangelistic mission will have to change if they are to be accepted. The crucial issue for the mission is whether the cutting edge of proclamation of Christ as Saviour and invitation to those who accept Him to join the Church remain valid or not in the new setting. Do we require a new form of the fellowship of the church, which is different from the religious communities as understood in Asia. For instance, just as the church takes form in different cultures, can Christ-centred fellowships around the Lord's Table and the Word of God get formed within different religious communities, as in the case of Keshub Chunder Sen of Bengal in the 19th cent and Subba Rao of Andhra Pradesh in the 20th century.

Wesley Ariarajah takes a different line of approach. The recognition of plurality of religions, religious spiritualities and religious cultures is the context. Prof. Chung the young woman theologian from the background of Buddhist

spirituality of Korea in her talk at the Canberra Assembly of the W.C.C. on "Come Holy Spirit, Renew Your Creation", pointed to the need of Christ to be presented, interpreted and lived out in relation to indigenous spirituality. An ecumenical consultation in Switzerland (1982) suggested that perhaps we should consider religious plurality to be within God's purpose. Wesley Ariarajah in his Mar Athanasius lecture asks what model Christian mission should adopt. The model of the people of Israel was to proclaim God's law for all nations without converting the other people into Judaism. The model of Buddhist missions was to release the Buddhist message and teachings into the mainstream of the national and cultural life of the peoples and let them remould that life. Says Ariarajah, "We relate to the Hindu not because he or she is not in relationship with God but because we assume such a relationship. The Christian mission then could become the joyful responsibility of bearing witness to what we have come to know about God in and through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It would be a witness to the values of the Kingdom that would lead peoples to truer life. It would still have to point to that one source of all Christian witness- Jesus Christ. But it is a witness that does not call upon our neighbours to leave their religious culture and people to become part

of the church. Rather it would point to Christ as One who has underwritten the promise of God to renew all life...Such a view certainly leaves the possibility open for a person who had been witnessed to, to want to name the Name and become part of the historic community, the church, which is called to be faithful to the Gospel message among the nations. On the other hand, a person who has heard the message may not feel the vocation to become part of the church but to remain a witness within his or her own religious tradition. In still other situations there may be no response whatsoever to the message. The Christian is called not to convert but to witness. The burden of responding to the message is that of the hearers and not of those who proclaim.

(Current Trends in Ecumenical Thinking, Kottayam, pp.12-13.)

2. Secondly, the Church's prophetic mission of humanization of the mechanisms of our corporate life. It is the mission of the church to our religiously pluralistic society and the world of technological development and modernization in the name of justice to the whole human person, of social justice to the poor and the marginalised and justice to the organic natural basis of production and reproduction of life on earth. Here the mission is primarily that of the theologically

informed laity supported by the fellowship of the whole church. Here I indicate three specific aspects of it.

A. The need of a New Humanism.

Today secular humanism underlying the ideologies of technological development has become a kind of secularist fundamentalism which reduces human society to the mechanical-materialist dimensions, and consequently aggressively denying the organic dimension of humanity's relation to the natural environment as well as the transcendent spiritual dimension of human selfhood. So technology has become destructive of ecology and exploitive of human persons thus mechanizing life. In one sense, today's revival of religious fundamentalism and aggressive religious communalism as well as the call to a return to the worship of nature are inevitable reactions to such self-sufficient secularism. But in many ways, religious fundamentalism and communalism are also very inhuman and destroy the faith-dimension which humanizes. So a new holistic humanism integrating the mechanical-materialistic, the organic ecological and the spiritual personal dimensions of human being has to emerge through dialogue between religions and secular ideologies and between

religions. That is the only path open for religion to assimilate secular values of material development, rational freedom and equality, and for secularism to get integrated with the organic and spiritual dimensions of the humanum. Today scientific secularism is a bit more humble than before, but religion has given up renewal, opting for aggressive revivalism. But a new wholesome anthropology is needed as the basis of a more healthy process of development and modernization. This must be the goal of inter-religious and secular-religious dialogues in our time.

B. The traditional societies of Asia have marginalised the dalits, the tribals, the fisherfolk and women and have denied them any part in the decision-making processes of society and they have reinforced it by getting religions to declare them ritually impure because they live close to organic nature and deal with its wastes. Actually these marginalised people lived by nature's bounties- the dalits through agricultural labour on land, the tribals by the resources of the forests, the fisherfolk of the sea and other water sources and the women by the organic functions of family life. Modernity has awakened them to their rights of participation in the structures of power, but the modern technological developments and

commercialism have increased the power of their traditional oppressors by alienating land, forests, water sources and femininity from them for exploiting them for purposes of profit and have destroyed their livelihood and pattern of life. Now, the new concern for ecology needs to be expressed, not in isolation but in relation to the traditional rights of these people for their livelihood and rights. Eco-justice and social justice to the people engaged in unorganized labour should go together. It will also correct the mechanical individualism of modernity by the community values of traditional societies. The social activists involved in the welfare of these people need to explore further the relation between modernity and tradition in the development of peoples.

C. In fact the modern pattern of development has left over 50 percent of the Third World peoples to live under the poverty line. By 2000 A.D. it is estimated that a billion people will suffer absolute poverty. Now that the protest of Socialism has had its set-back, the new economic liberalization accepted as norm all over the world will cut most welfare measures and-create more poverty and unemployment because it subserves everything to the goal of economic growth by which ten percent will become

very rich. In this situation, the church has to exercise a “divine option for the poor” based on Luke 4 Nazareth Manifesto and Matt. 25 Parable of the Last Judgement and other liberation motives in the Bible, and engage in a prophetic mission of speaking truth to collective power of economy and State. In 1968 WCC/CCPD reversed the normal order of economic priorities from economic growth, self-reliance and social justice to the order social justice, self-reliance and economic growth. Today eco-justice must also be brought into the goals of the economy. And the church must be prepared to stand by the people when they struggle for an economy that gives priority to eco-justice and social justice rather than economic growth through trans-national high technology.

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Chapter 18: Mission Of The Church In The Pluralistic Context of India

A talk at the Conference of Biblical scholars at Kottayam on 28th Dec. 1993.

I am grateful to the organizers of this conference for their kind invitation to me to give the opening talk at this conference of Biblical scholars on the mission of the church in India's pluralistic context. I have been thinking, speaking and writing on this theme for many years, but I find myself a bit intimidated by the fact that I face an audience of Biblical scholars from the different theological seminaries of

the country. I have ventured into writing commentaries on the biblical books in Malayalam, approaching the Bible in two senses of the word, layman: namely, inadequate scientific understanding of the text but primarily concerned with response to life-situations. In dealing with the biblically grounded missionary response to pluralism I shall take the same approach this evening.

My first point is that while plurality has existed in India for centuries, pluralism is a modern reality. Traditional India had been a land in which peoples and communal groups who followed different religions, lived according to different cultural values and social patterns and spoke different languages, coexisted. But the coexistence never demanded anything other than tangential interaction between them because there was no demand on them for unity and unification under a common scheme of technology or of values or of religion. Of course, there were rulers who provided a sort of umbrella of state protection, but their function was very minimal. Whether Rama or Ravana ruled, whatever political authority structures came into being or disappeared, they had but minimum impact on the life of the various village communities; they continued to live in some kind of

internal self-sufficiency according to their different traditions, with Custom as the real King. Of course through such coexistence for long periods, there developed symbiotic interpretations of religions and cultural and social values, creating not one but several composite cultures and syncretic religious trends in different regions of the country in different periods of its history, with one or other religious value or cultural system having dominant influence. But there was no imperative demand to interact or unifi~' which is characteristic of the modern situation. Therefore in contrast with the traditional we speak of the modern as a situation of pluralism. It is a situation of dialogic existence arising from the pressures on all from a secular democratic nation-state which has been formed as the result of a common national struggle for independence and has been given the task and powers to work for national integration, national development and build a new welfare society based on liberty, equality and justice. The movement from coexistence to dialogic existence is the movement from plurality to pluralism. This movement from plurality to pluralism is not only national but also local as well as world-wide.

My second point. It is the common historical responsibility

of building a genuinely human community that brings peoples of all religions and cultures within the dialogical framework of pluralism. It involves a common movement into a technological culture but it also entails correcting the inhumanities like State totalitarianism, increasing impoverishment and marginalisation of the majority of the people, destruction of the ecological basis of life and above all the general mechanization of human life already brought about by the misdirected technological advance. It also calls for a common search for an alternative paradigm of technological and social development based on a genuine ideology of humanism in the context of a proper relation between nature, human personhood and structures and values of community.

I have emphasized this historical responsibility as the framework of pluralism because it posits humanization and the questions related to the meaning of being human as the central theme of common concern in dialogue and action, for all those who are encountering the common historical responsibility. All religions including Christianity, all cultures and all secular ideologies are in informal and formal dialogues about what is the meaning of our common humanity and about the path of

common action-responses to the situation from their respective understanding of the nature and destiny of the human selfhood.

It is interesting to observe that while preparing for the centenary celebrations of the 1893 World Congress of Religions of Chicago, Metropolitan Paulose Mar Gregorios said that Chicago 1993 Global Concourse of Religions must “be committed not just to dialogue with each other but to the future of humanity as a whole”. He explained it thus, “If religions cannot go into the question of the welfare of humanity, those great values to which they bear witness will not make much sense to vast millions of people of this world. On the one hand, all religions have to develop a deep spiritual commitment to the recreation of the deepest levels of meaning for human existence in a personal and communal spirituality. But equally important is the other pole, the commitment to the welfare of humanity, the commitment to justice, the commitment to peace, the commitment to an environment that promotes life rather than threaten to extinguish it, the commitment to eliminate toxic drugs and nuclear weapons” (*A Source Book for the Community of Religions* ed. Joel Bevers Luis, Chicago, 1993, p.16).

I submit that the Mission of the Church in the pluralistic context must be considered primarily in relation to the common human challenge which pluralism in a technically unified world brings to us all. Of course in its train the consideration of the theme of being human and common human values and goals will bring trans-historical questions of God, salvation and immortality, in a challengingly relevant way, as the transcendent dimension of being human is raised. But these transcendent issues are not the most relevant starting points for communication of any truth in modern pluralistic existence. I presume that it is this awareness that led Pannenburg and other theologians to affirm that anthropology is the primary language of modern theology. It is different from saying that theology is only anthropology as Feuerbach and following him Marxism did.

I hope you will excuse a personal recollection. I expanded this approach in my Carey lectures of 1969, *Salvation and Humanization*. Later when I was in Selly Oaks, I had a conversation with Prof. John Hicks of the University of Birmingham whose approach was that inter-religious relation should have God as the point of entry, as indicated in his book, *God and the Universe of Faiths*. I differed

from him because I thought that an undefined Umbrella God was not a relevant framework for a situation where the search of all religions as well as secular ideologies was for defining and realizing true humanness in the context of a modern technological society. So I wrote a little-known book, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, to develop the idea. I argued that the humanity of the Crucified Jesus as the foretaste and criterion of being truly human, would be a much better and more understandable and acceptable Christian contribution to common inter-religious-ideological search for world community because the movements of renaissance in most religions and rethinking in most secular ideologies were the results of the impact of what we know of the life and death of the historical person of Jesus or of human values from it. I still hold that no dialogue or reconsideration of the humanism in any pluralistic situation can escape Jesus Christ Crucified, though it may sidetrack religious dogmas about him.

Thirdly, what is the gospel for such a pluralistic situation as ours, where the common search is for the path of humanization? One could take several ways of expressing the core of the gospel. It is quite intriguing to note that in the Hindu thinking on the Cross in the Indian setting, it is God's

identification with human suffering rather than Paul's emphasis on the atonement for human sin that has been crucial. For instance, for Poet Tagore, Cross is "the image of the heavenly Mercy Which makes all human suffering its own" (*Universal Man* 1961 p.167). I find that many commentators of Psalms of Lamentations follow Westermann in affirming that an overly Pauline-oriented theology in terms only of sin does not take seriously the implication of relating the story of the Passion of Jesus in terms of the lament of Ps. 22 and God's concern for human suffering has a strong biblical tradition behind it (Patrick Miller Jr. *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 110). This is reinforced by Jesus' understanding of his ministry in Luke 4 and also in the identification of the Son of Man with the least ones in the Parable of the Last Judgment. It has been taken up as the foundation of the Liberation theologies in recent times. One could very well affirm that justice for the oppressed is inherent in the concept of the church as *koinonia*. I shall not expand on this.

What I have found most relevant is Colossians ch.3 in the light of which it is legitimate to speak of the gospel as the news of the New Man Jesus Christ ("Put on the new self, the new humanity"); and more especially it is valid to

present the new fellowship of mutual forgiveness created by the Divine Forgiveness in Christ and expressed in the Eucharist and the social *koinonia* of the church as the foretaste of true human community as the essential gospel (“Forgiving one another as the Lord forgave you”). The nature of this *Koinonia in Christ* is that it transcends all communities defined by nature, culture and even ideology and religion and opens people for inter-personal communication with each other. It transcends them and takes incarnate form in them as well as between them transforming them from within. In this process, closed communal life based on idolatry of communal self-identity and pursuit of communal self-interest gets broken, opening it to a vision of their common humanity and their relatedness to each other in mutual forgiveness, justice and love. (“There is neither Greek nor Jew ...but Christ is all and in all”). Therefore it can become one potent source of inter-communal community in society outside the church also, a sort of *secular koinonia* and of the development of the ideology of a genuine secular human community at local, national and world levels in the modern pluralist context of many religions and cultures. The Christian message of Salvation in Christ in its total eschatological framework (with which Col. 3 begins) should be kept in intimate relation to the

historical mission of promoting *koinonia* in both the churchly sacramental and pluralistically secular dimensions of community life in the modern world.

Today most will recognize that the church as the *koinonia in Christ* transcends different cultures and takes roots in each, redeeming and reinterpreting indigenous cultural thought-forms and life-forms and values to make them the language of communication of Christian faith and ethics. In fact one of the most serious studies undertaken by all schools of theology in the churches whether evangelical or catholic is the relation between the one gospel and many cultures. But the real question to explore today is whether we can equally speak of Christ and *koinonia in Christ* as transcending all religions and able to take root and form within each religion and to undertake the mission of redeeming it of its idolatries and saving its spiritual treasures and values as vehicles of the gospel and the worship of God through Jesus Christ. If this approach is valid, then we shall have to give greater emphasis in the church's mission, to conversion of religions to Christ and to urge individuals from other religions converted to Christ to stay within their religious communities and build up Christ-centred fellowships around the Bible and

the Lord's Table within their religious ethos. It is very clear that the conversion of an individual isolated and abstracted from his/her culture or religion, can never be that of the whole person. Such a mission to whole persons, of course, requires some sort of separation of religion from faith and relativisation of Christianity as well other religions in the light of Christ. Karl Barth and Karl Rahner have done it, each in his unique way, one by emphasizing the solidarity of religions in sin with Christ abolishing all religions and the other emphasizing the solidarity of all religions in Grace, with Christ perfecting all prevenient Grace in them. C.F.Andrews' incarnational theology of religions and P.D.Devanandan's post-Kraemer theology of religion and Swami Abhishiktananda's Trinitarian theology of advaitic mysticism (to mention only the names of those who are no more with us) need further exploration in the light of our need to find an Indian ecclesiology for a pluralistic society. Jurgen Moltmann has said, "There were Jewish reasons for believing in Jesus to be the Christ. There were Greek reasons for believing in Jesus as the Logos. There were German reasons for believing in Jesus as the leader of souls. In their own period those reasons were not merely cultural; they were more religious in kind. Culture and religion cannot be

separated. Consequently today we shall also have to inquire into Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic reasons for faith in Jesus” (*Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p.162).

Along this approach may lie the solution of our finding in India, a non-communal form of the church in a situation where religious communalism has become a serious national problem; and the church organized as a minority community separate from the majority and other minority communities, each safeguarding its numerical strength and its own traditional personal law and seeking communal prestige and communal political power in the body-politic, makes conversion of groups and even individuals a problem of inter-communal relations. To me more important is the fact that so long as the church remains a religious community in competition with other religious communities, the church can never say that in Christ it sacramentally represents the destiny of all peoples in the country.

It is interesting to remember that the Constituent Assembly of India included propagation of religion as a fundamental right of the citizen in response to the Indian Christian leadership declaring that they were giving up communal representation as a minority

community. They realized that the church as a self-regarding community and the church as the dynamic bearer of universal salvation would not go together. Personally I believe that in forgetting it we have not only reasserted our communal rigidities in our concept and practice of the church and have contributed to the communalisation of Indian politics and to the erosion of the true nature of the church's mission in the pluralistic society.

I shall conclude my talk by referring to an important essay by Kuncheria Pathil on "A New Vision of the Church in a Religiously Pluralistic Society" (in *Communalism in India* the report of a Consultation organized by the Indian Christian Theological Association). It starts by referring to the Vatican II definition of the church as the "sign and sacrament of the unity of all humankind" emphasizing the universalism of the church in Christ. But Pathil thinks that the wording may still appear triumphalist as affirming that the church has the full human unity which she can make effective for the rest of humanity. Pathil says, that the vision of the church as "the herald and servant of the Kingdom of God" would be a much more appealing model, since it contains a two-fold relativisation of church, one in the

suffering servant relation to the world and the other in its relation to the Kingdom to come. He adds that the sign character and servant role of the church demand that in the face of the oppressive situation of the people, the church must “organize itself into peoples’ movement for liberation” cutting across the boundaries of religion, caste and culture; and here transparency of the church requires that we have to conceive of an open church with flexible structures, boundaries, rules and rituals making Christian identity vulnerable.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 19: Re-Articulation Of Christian Identity in Higher Education

Paper presented to the Consultation on Higher Education at UCCollege, Aluva on 14 March 1996.

In the history of educational enterprise of the Christian Church in India, there were several articulations and re-articulations of the Christian identity in Higher Education as spiritual responses of the Christian Mission/ Church to changes in the cultural scenario of India. All these were done in the context of the political and cultural impact of the West on India and contained theological

interpretations of that impact.

One thinks of three specific historical occasions when it was done. The first was the time of the pioneer educational missionaries Alexander Duff of Calcutta, John Wilson of Bombay and William Miller of Madras. Following on the British government's decision in favour of promoting English rather than Oriental or Vernacular education in India, and to seek the help of private agencies in the task, the Missions started Christian colleges for imparting education in Western culture and modern science with the teaching of English literature at the centre of secular courses and spiritually interpreted by the teaching of Christian Scripture. Duff spoke of an intellectual and social revolutionary ferment at work among the educated sections of India through the impact of western power and culture and wanted the Missions to enter that revolution to make it serve as an instrument of the civilizing and evangelizing mission of Britain in India. Both Maculay the civil servant and Duff the Christian missionary believed that the religion of Hinduism and indigenous Indian culture would soon be displaced by the Christian religion and western civilization which were more or less identified in their minds. Miller of Madras Christian College said, "Very largely, especially when

contrasted with the tendencies which prevail in Hinduism, European thought is Christian thought” and if the Christian institutions of education is able to make that explicit, “there was hope that the whole new movement might be prepared by it to recognize the supply of all its spiritual wants in Him (Christ)”. So, “the Scriptures were to be the spearhead, all other knowledge the well-fitted handle. The Scriptures were to be the healing essence, all other knowledge the congenial medium through which it is conveyed”. Much conversion to the Christian church was not expected though there were a few in Bengal. The hope was that “even when no direct conversion ensues, much of the spirit and influences of Christianity will cleave to the rightly educated youth, whatever may be their future situation in life”. In other words education in Christian colleges would be a force for transformation of society in the light of Christian values and act as a cultural preparation for claims of the gospel.

The Christian colleges therefore sought on the one hand to impart a liberal education relating knowledge of science and technology to knowledge of the humanities as a relation of knowledge as power and means and knowledge as values and ends and reinforcing it with the

teaching of Scripture as a way of presenting *Jesus as the source of a structure of meaning and values* for life, and on the other hand emphasized the residential *college community* (with a non-denominational worship at its centre) as a forum where scholars could further their process of learning in community and build the nucleus of a society of persons transcending caste and creed. So the knowledge imparted was at different levels, - technical rationality, critical rationality to evaluate ends, universal human values, and the humanism of the person of Jesus - but with search for the unity of their inter-relationship realized in the renewal of personal and community life as the ultimate goal.

The second occasion of rearticulation of the Christian purpose of Missionary institutions of higher learning took place in the first few decades of this century in relation to the movements of religious renaissance and the emergence of political nationalism. By this time Hindu religion and culture instead of disintegrating as many westerners thought it would, survived the shock of western impact, and acquired new strength through the many Neo-Hindu movements of religious renaissance resulting from the impact of the values of western

Christianity and secular humanism. The Indian National Congress has also been formed as the political expression of the awakening of the people under the leadership of the class with western-oriented education; and linked to the politics of nationalism was also movements of social reform of family relations and caste structures on the basis of personal liberty and social equality. Of course a revival of traditional religion and culture resisting those values and producing a militant politics of Hindu Nationalism against reform was also alive. Ranade, Tilak and Gandhi represented different trends of Nationalism. But the national awakening was a fact. C.F.Andrews and S.K.Rudra of St.Stephens College Delhi took the lead in re-articulating the Christian identify in higher education in relation to the spiritual and political awakening of the Indian people under the auspices of Hindu religious renaissance and the political ideology of Indian nationalism.

C.F.Andrews said, that the earlier approach of Duff and other educational missionaries needed radical modification. For, Duff “looked forward to the supplanting of one civilization by another, the uprooting of Indian civilization and the substitution of the English. We have learned since his day that the problem is

one of assimilation, rather than of substitution....it remains for our age to apply the further truth of Christian assimilation.” He added, that the Christian purpose of education in the new situation was that “the wealth of English literature, science and culture” should be “grafted on to the original stock; it is no longer taught in a kind of vacuum without reference to the background of Indian thought and experience”. Here the basic purpose of college education remains as before, namely humanization of social culture and preparation of Indian cultural soil for the reception of Jesus as the divine source of human renewal. But it is not the Western culture as such but the cultural renaissance and ideology of nationalism, produced by the penetration of the spirit and values of western civilization that humanizes society and prepares the soil for the gospel. Ranade agreed that “the Christian civilization which came to India from the West was the main instrument of renewal” of India which finds expression in the new love of municipal freedom and civil virtues, aptitude for mechanical skill and love of science and research, chivalrous respect of womanhood etc.; and it is interesting that his lecture on his new concept of “Indian Theism” (a redefinition of Visishtadvaita in the light of Protestant Christian thought) as

the basis of national renewal of India was delivered in the chapel of the Wilson College Bombay. With Gandhi formulating the political ethic of satyagraha as an application of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Tagore interpreting the Cross as the symbol of God's identification with suffering humanity, there was also the growing awareness that not only western humanism but also the religion of Christianity would get creativity and stability only by planting them in the Indian cultural soil and allowing it to put down roots in it. This produced a crop of literature from the Christian colleges on indigenisation of Christianity in India like Farquhar's *Crown of Hinduism* and Hogg's *Karma and Redemption*.

The third occasion for re-articulation of Christian identity in higher education followed the Lindsay Commission report on Christian Higher Education in India in the thirties. The Commission realized that western culture and science could not destroy the traditional idols but has also introduced into India new gods like Rationalism, Scientism, Individualism and Materialism which had no sense of the sacredness of human persons and was converting technology into a force for exploitation of the industrial workers and

dehumanization of peoples' lives in the cities of India. And Indian nationalism was producing fanatic religious communalism and fear among the outcastes of re-establishment of Brahminic domination. Communalism was stopping the movement towards social reforms aimed at justice for women and the depressed groups. Inter-communal riots were very much in the picture and threatening the unity of India based on common humanity which was fundamental to secular nationalism. In this context, humanization required critical discriminative approach to both technological culture and nationalist ideologies.

Lindsay Commission was very clear that "Western learning in itself" (Miller) or its indigenisation in nationalism in itself (Andrews), could not be the needed emphasis in Christian educational institutions. What are the Christian purposes in higher education which can be the mid-20th century equivalent of those which were effective earlier in contributing to humanization of culture and cultural preparation for the gospel of the Christ's new humanity?

The Report refers to the book *Education of India* by Arthur Mayhew, the Director of Public Instruction in Bengal with approval of his personal view that

the “moral progress in India depends on the general transformation of education by explicit recognition of the Spirit of Christ”. It also seems to underline Mayhew’s diagnosis that the traditional Hindu religious culture had been revived in a militant and fanatic way as religious communalism in the wake of nationalism because the Anglicized policy of higher education, while concentrating on communicating western culture and its science and humanism to the Indian students, neglected to help them exercise a scientific critical rational evaluation of their deeply rooted indigenous traditions associated with the vernacular languages. Since they were ignored, they existed as an unexamined emotional part of their domestic life and took revenge for being ignored in their being revived in the same unexamined emotional form when the people were awakened by nationalism to their self-identity which meant looking at their past history.

In the same manner, the Report diagnosed that by concentrating on training in technical rationality and skills (which is in the realm of improvement of tools) and neglecting training in critical rationality which alone could expose social purposes and spiritual presuppositions of technological culture, evaluate

them and make moral choices among them, the educational system has paved the way for a dehumanizing technocratic culture and for an idolatry of Rationalism which denied the transcendent spiritual dignity of the human person.

If I remember correctly the Lindsay Commission noted the teaching of history as the point at which rational and moral evaluations of traditional and modern cultures could be made most effectively. Religious communities and their traditions have their history. Science and technology as well as the philosophy behind them have their history. Evaluations of these themselves have history.

Thus the Commission called for a Christian concern for Higher Education which helps critical rational and humanist evaluation of both the western and Indian cultures to build a new cultural concept which subordinated religious traditions, technology and politics to personal values according to the principle "Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath", enunciated by Jesus and illustrated in the idea of Incarnation of God in Christ. Incidentally this task was conceived as more than an intellectual one confined to the class room. Class room is important. But the concept of the

personal and personal values can be taught only where they can also be caught in community life where one can “speak the truth in love” and learn and assimilate it in that process. So they gave central place to residential houses as part of the life of the college. They also wanted colleges to help students to relate to the life of people in the villages of India through extensions of research and service. By the way, they also recommended cutting some denominational colleges to set up one or two first rate educational institutions of their conception managed by the Christian missions and churches in unity and the Tambaram version of the Madras Christian College was one result of it.

I have given this rather long history to show that re-articulation of Christian identity in higher education has been done before in situations which have produced our situation in due course, and though it needs doing again in the context of the present, some crucial issues which we now face have been faced and responses formulated which may be relevant to our new re-articulation also.

Our situation today is marked by several new features some of which may be mentioned as follows:

1. The fact of religious pluralism with parity and the threat to secularism which was seen earlier as an instrument for mitigating and transcending religious communalism in that situation. The idea of Secular Nationalism and Secular State were the creation of cooperation between Gandhi's reformed religion and Nehru's liberal humanist secularism and they succeeded to establish itself in India against the idea of Hindu and Muslim communalism. The new threats to it is from the revival of religious fundamentalism and communalism and its political expressions, especially in the Hindutva demand for a Hindu Rashtra. Closed Secularism which denies religion any place in public life has produced a religious vacuum which is being filled by the revival of communal religion. The situation calls for the search for a new more holistic humanism and a common public ethic for state and social reform developed through dialogue of religions and secular ideologies. But educational institutions especially in Kerala have taken the opposite direction and become more and more communal in their character. Christian colleges are even denominational in character. How does Christian concern for the larger pluralist national community and for a common anthropology and ethic for it, which has to be evolved through dialogue among religions and

ideologies find expression in such a situation?

2. The shift in State commitment from welfare society with socialism as goal to the “ideology” of the global market means that the state withdraws from intervention in the processes of economic and social life in the name of liquidation of mass poverty and unemployment or in the name of social justice or protection of ecology. Hi-tech development under globalisation is further marginalising the poorer sections of traditional society especially the dalits, the tribals, the fisherfolk and the women by destroying their traditional living and community life by alienating them from the land, the forest and the water sources by which they made their living. It also destroys these natural bases of their traditional community of life. Along with health and social welfare, education too has become a commodity in the market with self-financed technical institutions imparting training in technical and managerial skills for employment in Trans-national economic enterprises to those who can afford it. This leads to the negation of the earlier concepts of education as laid down in the Constitution of India which put priority to “promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker

sections of the people” and to the development of “scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform” in every citizen. How does the Christian concern for a higher education that prevents the mechanization of life and marginalisation of the weaker people and the destruction of the ecological basis of life by technocracy find expression? How do Christian colleges join the search for an alternate paradigm of human development and technology with a human face in the context of the technocratic momentum of globalisation?

3. The development of a new philosophy of science which radically questions the earlier mechanical-materialistic world-view within which classical modern science worked and also the search for a new philosophy of technological development and struggle for social justice which takes seriously the concern for ecological justice, are very much part of the contemporary situation. Capra's books like the *Tao of Physics*, *The Turning Point* etc. are expressions of the working out of the implications of change in the philosophy of science to social thought. It is significant that they have also become part of the ecumenical Christian social thought as expressed in the World Council of Churches declaring their goals to be “a just participatory and

sustainable society” or “justice peace and integrity of creation”. Any new re-articulation of Christian identity in education must assimilate these new insights.

In the period when I went to the World Student Christian Federation as a secretary, in 1947 religious scientists worked within the thesis in Martin Buber's *I and Thou* that separated the scientific I-It approach to things and the knowledge of persons through dialogue and mutual love. Later the idea gained ground that we cannot “speak of nature apart from human perception in the historical development of knowledge”, that all knowledge is “a creative interaction between the known and the knower” and that therefore there is no System of scientific knowledge or of technology which does not have the subjective purposes and faith-presuppositions of humans built into it. So a fundamental part of education is to expose such hidden or explicit purposes and presuppositions and critically examine them and transform them to a conscious commitment to a world-view which sees nature, humanity and cosmos within an organic life system working within an ultimate framework of a spiritual movement of self-determining selves towards a community of justice and love. It is the self-determining part in it

which also brings the dimension of the spiritual tragedy of self-centredness and raises questions of spiritual salvation in that movement.

David Gosling's *A New Earth-Covenanting for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* (London 1992) speaks about the general consensus among the scientists who worked with the Church and Society studies to move away from the "mechanical view of life-systems" which is responsible for much that is wrong with science and technology and the way they operate. About the view which is replacing it, the alternatives were between "the organic view" which emphasizes the world as a web of inter-relationships among relational entities with different levels of self-consciousness in dynamic movement advocated by biologist Charles Birch and theologian John Cobb on the basis of Whitehead's process philosophy and theoretical physicist John Pollkinghome's idea of seeing the world as "something in between" mechanism and organism which gives the world a "totally non-mechanical openness" in all its natural processes, "a freedom for the whole world to be itself, a freedom for us to act within that universe of which we are part".

I shall end this collection of fragments of my thought by

speaking of what expression
Christian identity must
necessarily have in Higher
Education in the immediate future
in India in a summary form. First,
a move to negate the communal-
denominational approach to
educational enterprise and to
make intellectual dialogue among
concerned teachers and post-
graduate students of different
religious and secular ideological
faiths for exploring a new relevant
common anthropology and social
ethic in a pluralist India, central to
the Christian college. Second, a
decision that Christian
educational institutions will not
surrender themselves to a pure
imparting of technical skills or
promotion of technical rationality
which concentrates on
technological tools only but will
in all situations be concerned also
with developing critical
rationality enabling the students
to examine the exploitive ends
and purposes hidden in all
technical situations. Thirdly,
Christian education must in some
way express their solidarity with
the victims of modern
globalisation like the dalits, the
tribals, the fisherfolk and women
and find ways of supporting their
struggle for justice and their
search for a new paradigm of
development which does justice
to their peoplehood and to the
natural sources to which they are
related. Fourthly, the idea of
residential houses which brings
together teachers and at least post-

graduate students as a community of intellectual seekers of truth or some equivalent of it should find a place in the life of a college. Education within some such framework alone can lead to a new culture of moral regeneration of our pluralistic society and provide the cultural preparation for the awareness of the challenging relevance of the gospel of New Humanity in Christ in our modern technological age. Of course the Christian college should have some place in its structure where Jesus and his human-ness can be presented in the Scriptural context with its cultural implications, to those who wish to learn about him.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 20: The Quest for a Human Community in a Religiously Pluralist World

A talk inaugurating the World Council of Churches - United Theological College Consultation on The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism, held at Bangalore on 17 October. 1995.

I am thankful for the invitation to inaugurate the Consultation on the Quest for Human Community in the context of India's religious pluralism and its implication for Indian ecclesiology. That is, in view of

the common quest of human community with peoples of other religions, how do we understand the being of the Church of Christ and the forms of the life of the congregation in the larger community? Concretely how do Christians structure the priestly and sacramental life and evangelistic mission of their separate religious congregation, within the framework of their participation in the whole nation's search for a common basis for promoting the politics of democracy and of development with justice for the poor and liberation of the oppressed and for building a common moral social culture to undergird the sense of the larger community based on dignity for all persons and peoples?

I have two sections to this presentation. First what are the common moral and cultural bases to be built through dialogue among religions and ideologies which will make possible an effective joint struggle for human community? Second, what kind of structure of the church will facilitate such dialogue and struggle which will at the same time strengthen the central elements of the church's being as the sacramental sign and interpreter of God's universal gift of salvation in Christ?

First, I shall speak on the need of taking into account the religious insights about human being and society in the pluralistic religious and ideological situation today in the struggle for the search for a new paradigm of modernization correcting the lopsidedness of the present one. And then, the implication of it for our understanding of the form of the church most relevant for Christian participation in that search will be discussed.

I

All traditional societies have been religious societies where society and state were integrated with one or other of the religions and controlled by it. Medieval Christendom was an integration of church, community and state. So was medieval Islamic societies. The primal societies, of course, were undifferentiated spiritual unities where religion or state had not emerged as different from society. Modernization has shattered them all because they with their hierarchies and patriarchies sanctified by religion could not comprehend within them the creativities of human individuality and rationality which were emerging. So the modern period is the age of the European Enlightenment, globalised through the political and economic expansion of the

West. In one sense, this age is still continuing. But the fact that technological and social revolutions which did have the potential and promise of producing a world community with richer and fuller human life for all humanity, resulted in the intensification of mass poverty, social oppression, war and ecological destruction, have led many to consider self-sufficient Secular Humanism as inadequate to understand or deal with the tragic dimensions of the human selfhood and social existence. Therefore there is widespread tendency to return to religion and its sense of spiritual depth, in one form or another. Some of course are for a straight return to the traditional integration of state and society with one or other religion, to Christendom, Hindutva or any other religious fundamentalism or communalism. But religious pluralism with its constant interaction between peoples with religion as a factor in their self-identities, has become too vital a reality in contemporary societies everywhere so that this return is impossible without religious strife; and in any case the fear of such a return bringing back the old hierarchies and patriarchies and destroying the egalitarian human values of modern democratic humanism is rather strong. So one has to find a new pattern of ideologically pluralistic secular humanism and

religiously pluralistic spiritual humanism entering into dialogue with each other on anthropology, the nature and meaning of being and becoming human. The goal is to create a Public Philosophy or Civil Culture, in which insights of religions, secular ideologies and social sciences are constantly brought into interaction and are tested for their relevance to humanize the contemporary forces of modernity which have run amok. It is the search for a kind of Open Secularism.

A consultation on Human Rights in the Middle East said, "The challenge and quest therefore in the Middle East is to envisage and establish models of society which are neither radically secular like in the West, nor ethno-centric like in Israel, or religions as in some Islamic countries; in other words, a society that recognizes the values of community, respects religious or ethnic differences, and does not ignore or seeks to eliminate them as was attempted by the French Revolution secularism and Marxism. And here lies the challenge- for such a society also will have to guarantee equality between communities and individuals. All this also requires encounter and dialogue with other religions in the region that aim at discovering through their

respective heritages, a common ethical ground for the basis of a new society” (*Human Rights: a Global Ecumenical Agenda*, WCC 1993 p.44). This approach is relevant for other religiously pluralistic regions like Asia. The only country which consciously put “belief in the Transcendent” as one of the five foundations of the Constitution of the nation-state and recognized religious pluralism and brought the various religions and secular ideologies together for dialogue on the basis of legal equality was Soekarno’s Indonesia.

There are two special contributions to social thought arising from combining religious and secular ideological insights about reality.

First, a more holistic anthropological basis for society. The Newtonian scientific rational insight brought to the forefront the importance of the mechanical materialistic dimension of reality, which could be objectivised and studied, which religion often overlooked in emphasizing the purely spiritual realities. But the danger of science was to interpret the whole world including the humans as parts of a machine, thus denying the spiritual selfhood which gives dignity to human beings. The mechanical attitude to human

reality was no doubt corrected by Freud, Marx and Nietzsche who emphasized the inter-connection between parts of nature thus bringing out the organic character of reality. The organic interpretation was an advance on the mechanical but still lacked the awareness of the human self. Though conditioned by mechanical and organic necessities of nature, the human self transcends them to determine its purposes and control natural necessities to realize them. This constitutes the essence of human personhood. The religious insight into the spiritual self which is at once both involved in the world and transcends it, is important to provide a spiritual basis for the inalienable rights of personhood.

Secondly, it is from this recognition of transcendent human selfhood that the spiritual source of evil and the tragic dimension of existence are derived. The modern Liberal and Marxist ideologies consider self-alienation of humans as mechanical error or organic maladjustment which could be corrected by the historical process. Such secular hopes have turned to secular despair, because the hope was based on a superficially optimistic understanding of human nature. But where the spiritual self is involved evil is seen as more

radical, as based on alienation from God or the ultimate ground of being. Of course, the mystic religions see it as arising from the illusion of the separate self created by the imprisonment of the soul in the material body, and the prophetic religions see the attempt of finite self to attain infinitude as its source; and their concepts of salvation correspond to these different metaphysical versus moral understandings of the problem of the self. There is need of dialogue between these religions to clarify the issue. But the point is that in either case the source of corruption of self is at depth spiritual and cannot be considered accidental and solvable by the self-redemptive forces of history.

These two, a holistic concept of the humanum and the spiritual source of human self-centredness have their implications for the search of the moral basis of the common life. Since human society is essentially persons-in-community, love is the ultimate moral basis of society. But because of the spiritual self-alienation of humans, one has to reckon with a tough human self-centredness which appears as self-righteous moralism on the one hand and crude selfishness on the other. The perfect love-ethic, while it remains the ultimate criterion of ethical

judgment, is impossible to fulfill in the natural state. So a second level of morality comes into being which includes checks to self-centredness. The morality of law and the coercive institution of the State to enforce legal justice are expressions of this imperfect morality at the level of self-alienated social existence of human beings.

It may be worth noting that all religions and secular ideologies reckon with the two levels of morality- the perfectionist ethic of love and the imperfect ethic of moral and enforced civil laws. Sometimes, they are quite separated as unrelated to each other, and often the morality of law is absolutised though it is supposed to be a pointer to and shaped to an extent by the ultimate love-ethic. Of course love realized as mutual forgiveness in small spiritually reconciled groups can mitigate the legalism of the ethic of law. Nevertheless the Christian doctrine of the relation between the ethics of Law and Grace, the Hindu concept of *paramarthika* and *vyavaharika* realms, the Islamic concept of *shariat* law versus the transcendent law, and the equivalent ones in secular ideologies like the Marxist idea of the present morality of class-war leading to the necessary love of the class-less society of the future need to be brought into

the inter-faith dialogue to build up a common democratic political ethic for maintaining order and freedom with the continued struggle for social justice, and also a common civil morality within which diverse peoples may renew their different traditions of civil codes.

II

What are the implications of such participation by the Church in the search of a holistic humanism and a realistic social ethics for a post-modern society for the form of the life and work of the Church itself?

In a country bedeviled by communalism, can we discover a non-communal form for the life and mission of the Church? Should the church, understood as a separate religious congregation or faith-communion, also set itself as a separate social and political community, or should it consider itself as a ferment in all social communities and the larger pluralistic secular society without itself becoming a communal body? Christians in India unlike the Muslims have learned not to be a separate political community, but be participating in different political parties. A good deal of economic life of Christians are also, thanks to secular technological

organizations of production and exchange, outside the specifically Christian communal circle. How far can a similar development take place with respect to their organized social and cultural life? Such non-communal areas of life can still be influenced along Christian moral values by the ministry of the lay Christians involved in these areas of life in their everyday work in cooperation with people of other faiths. In fact the churches which keep the political, economic and social activities of their members under their control have not produced any grater moral or human quality in the social life of their membership.

On the other side, the advantages of an extension of the non-communal secular areas of common life for the self-understanding of the church and its evangelistic witness are many. Bishop Newbigin when he was in India, said some words which are quite relevant to us even today. He said that a right understanding of the Christian doctrine of Creation has a deep concern to “uphold the proper integrity of the secular order”. He continues, “The secular field of politics, economics, science and so forth belong to this created world. They are not ultimately autonomous...but they have a relative autonomy, an

autonomy always threatened by demonic forces precisely because God wills to preserve here a sphere for the free decision of faith which is the only kind of victory he wills to have.... the Christian has responsibility to safeguard the real though provisional autonomy of a secular order wherein men of all religions can cooperate in freedom". Further he points out that this autonomy of the secular is a help to build a proper understanding of the church. He says, that it is "the true antidote to the temptation of the church to absolutise itself... There you have the true God-given reminder to the church that it is still in via and cannot treat itself as the vice-regent of God on earth I do not believe that we shall go back on that insight" (*A Faith for this One World*, pp. 67-68.83).

Bishop Azariah of Dornakal, in theologially justifying the rejection of the reserved minority communal electorate offered by Britain to the Christian community in India, spoke of how the acceptance of it would be "a direct blow to the nature of the church of Christ" at two points -- one, it would force the church to function "like a religious sect, a community which seeks self-protection for the sake of its own loaves and fishes" which would prevent the

fruitful exercise of the calling of the church to permeate the entire society across boundaries of caste, class, language and race, a calling which can be fulfilled only through its members living alongside fellow-Indians sharing in public life with a concern for Christian principles in it; and two, it would put the church's evangelistic programme in a bad light as "a direct move to transfer so many thousands of voters from the Hindu group to the Indian Christian group" (recorded by John Webster, *Dalit Christians- A History*).

If we pursue these eccesiological motives, the church will not be an organized closed community marked by rigid boundaries as at present, and competing with religious communities but a congregation of believers meeting for spiritual fellowship around the Word and the Sacraments, meant to equip them for Christian living, struggles of justice for the people and evangelistic mission in religiously pluralistic or secular social economic and political institutions. Religious conversion to Christ in this setting essentially means a change of faith which involves participation in the local worshipping congregation of Christian believers without transference of community and cultural affiliations, but with a

commitment to the ethical transformation of the whole society and culture in which they participate with others of different faiths.

The inter-faith dialogues referred above as a need, should not be considered as purely formal ones among intellectuals. In fact with the Panchayat Raj coming into being all over India, these dialogues have become part of working together with people of other faiths in pluralistic local situations. It may be considered integral to dialogic existence in society. But to make the day to day dialogue meaningful, the church as congregation even in the villages will have to equip the lay members involved with relevant lay theological-anthropological insights. This should be an important part of the teaching ministry in the congregations. In fact, if Christian witness in public life is the goal, this teaching ministry is to be preferred to the clerical leaders of the church controlling the decisions and activities of their lay members by communal dictate which is usually based on communal minority self-interests and rights and not on concern for the total neighbourhood.

It is clear from what has been said above, that the anthropological and moral issues aimed at renewing society and

state has to be followed as an end in themselves. But if they are dealt with at depth, the contribution of Christian insights to the discussions will be a more natural preparation for the communication of the gospel of salvation in Christ than the charitable services have been in the past, because it raises issues regarding the nature of self-alienation in human beings and the ultimate ways of reconciliation overcoming it. Therefore the evangelistic mission should not appear a kind of extra black market in the dialogic situation and it should not be forced. And one should expect different levels of positive response to the relevance of an Ethical Christology inherent in the Christian anthropology. How shall we evaluate them in the light of an evolving Indian ecclesiology? Are they less important than responses to a philosophical Christology?

And in an Indian situation where baptism is the legal mark of change of one religious community to another, each with its own civil codes recognized by the Courts, communalisation of church life is imposed by Law and perverts the meaning of baptism as sacrament of faith. We have to change that situation by working for a common civil code in India or opting for the re-

codified Hindu Civil Code as Fr. Staffner and others have suggested. But while the legal situation lasts, can we develop an ecclesiology which can invite to the Lord's Table of the church as congregation of faith, those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as decisive for their lives and are prepared to enter the worshipping congregation and not the communally organized body of Christians? The question of providing spiritual fellowship to those committed to Christ in different religious communities is a peculiarly Indian ecclesiological problem which has been with us for many decades and needs to be faced squarely, for the number involved is large and the stand of many of them based on the distinction between the spiritual fellowship of faith and the Christian communality, have theological justification.

Justice P. Chenchia in his "Religious Toleration- An Essay at Understanding", said, that the toleration by religions of religious pluralism within the family is the key to the practice of religious freedom for conversion in India. He said, "If on the side of the missionary faiths, the pull against remaining at home ceases and if on the side of the family, a wider toleration of worship is granted, the tragedy of separation need not

take place. I do not see why a convert be not allowed to go to church and yet remain in the family. This happens in China, Japan and all other countries except India. We need a little more honest solicitude for the spiritual welfare of the convert on both sides" (*Religious Freedom 1956*). In the multi-religious secular setting, conversions from one religious faith to another religious faith or to a secularist faith and vice versa should be expected. If the church expects the Hindu family's toleration of any member converted to Christian faith, the church and Christian families also have to justify theologically and sociologically inter-religious marriages within their circle and deal pastorally with the persons involved.

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The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism by M. M. Thomas

Dr. M.M. Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerela). This book was jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerela, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPOK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, in 1996. Price Rs. 60. Used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Chapter 21: The Church - The Fellowship of the Baptised and the Unbaptised

A paper written for the Festschrift of Dr. K.Rajaratnam "Liberating Witness" published in August 1995.

In the *Light of Life* Feb. 1995 (Face to Face, pp. 31-34) "An Interview with Mr.R.K.Karanjia, editor, *Blitz* Bombay" has been published. In it Karanjia speaks of his experiences which helped move him to the living reality of Jesus and the fellowship with the disciples of Jesus as mediating God to his life. He goes on to point out how he has been able to assimilate the new spirituality in

which he continues to live.

In 1989, Karanjia went to Russia to receive the Vorvosky Award. He saw Stalin's man who had demolished the Christian cathedral of the Czars "down own his knees worshipping the Cross of Jesus Christ". Later he had a long talk with him which was "the first blow which moved me from Karl Marx and the rest of the commies to Jesus Christ and his disciples" and which finally led his own evolution into "a *Jesus-bhakt*". Jesus was experienced as a "helping *avatar*" of the Breach Candy Hospital. It was an elderly nursing sister who had come to know Jesus through a deep personal tragedy who helped him experience the spiritual power of physical strength and healing in God through Jesus. After that, Karanjia says, he went ahead experimenting with little or big miracles on behalf of himself and others. He relates one experience where faced with the tragedy of a baby with meningitis, he talked to the grandmother about "Jesus and his healing power, and got her family's consent for prayers. I spoke to a Christian group about him and they too began to pray for his quick and complete recovery". The baby was cured. The interviewer asked him whether he was "converted to Christianity" and he answered, "No. I am not converted to Christianity. I am not a Christian.

I continue to be a Zoroastrian. All I have done is to accept Jesus Christ in my heart. Nobody has tried to persuade me into anything like a conversion. Nobody has hinted at such an attempt.” He added, “When I first received Jesus in my heart, as I was asked to, I felt my inside transforming itself into the hall of the Cathedral of His Holy Name with angels singing Hallelujah”. And his heart was filled with joy and a “stupendous faith” took hold of him. “It was a moment when I felt as if I were overlooking and piloting the universe.”

How do we evaluate the case of Karanjia's conversion to faith in Christ and his fellowship with believers in Christ without conversion from Zoroastrian to the Christian community from the point of the theology of evangelism and ecclesiology?

It reminds me of the statement from an NCC Consultation in the sixties on “Renewal in Mission” held in Nagpur. “In the perspective of the Bible, conversion is turning from idols to serve a living and true God and not moving from one culture to another and from one community to another as it is understood in the communal sense in India today”, and further that so long as baptism remains a transference of cultural or communal allegiance, “we cannot judge those who while

confessing faith in Jesus, are unwilling to be baptised” (*Renewal in. Mission* p.220). In fact, the nature of the church as fellowship-in-Christ envisaged in this statement transcends all religious communities including the Christian as understood in the communal sense in India and is compatible with the membership of the Christ-bhakt in any religious or secular communal formation.

“As understood in the communal sense in India” is crucial here. In the setting of the Indian legal system in which each religious community is recognized as having its own personal law of civil relations, change from one community to another is a legal act, and baptism is a transfer from one legal community to another rather than a sacramental act expressing personal faith. Further, since religious minorities have legal entity in the political framework through reservations and other safeguards, change of a person from one religious community to another is seen as enhancing the political strength of one community and weakening of another. Therefore the meaning of conversion gets perverted. Still further, each religion in India is generally associated with one cultural stream. Therefore conversion to Christianity has been seen as change from one

cultural tradition to another. Conversion to Christianity is largely seen as weakening the indigenous national culture of the person converted.

There have been many instances in modern Indian history of people distinguishing between Christian faith from Christian religion and religious community and of accepting the former without the latter. Christ not Christianity or Western culture, has been the slogan of many leaders of the Neo-Hindu movements in the 19th century, even as Christian Missions insisted on the three as one package. Of course the approach of the western Christian mission and national churches have changed their attitude in this respect, though they would make a distinction between the centrality of the person of Christ and a general devotion to the ethical teaching of Christ in saving faith. The question is, what is the nature of the fellowship of those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as in some sense central to and decisive in mediating God to human persons? And what should the evangelist aim in this respect?

In a survey the Gurukul research Centre made, it came to light that there were many persons in the city of Madras who had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour but had chosen to

continue in their own religious cultural and caste communities without conversion to the Christian community. Some of them maintain close spiritual fellowship with disciples of Christ minus the sacramental aspects but others pursue their devotion to Christ without such support.

This is not a new phenomenon in India. In the history of the modern neo-Hindu movements the person of Jesus was a strong component as my study of *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* had shown. In the case of Kesub Chandra Sen and P.C.Majumdar, Jesus Christ as the revelation of the Divine Humanity of Sonship was decisive for their faith and ethics and sought to redefine traditional Hinduism both religion and community in the light of Jesus. They even formed a Neo-Hindu Church of Christ with its own sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. In this century, O. Kandasamy Chetty of the Madras Christian College was a disciple of Christ and kept himself in spiritual fellowship with the fellow-disciples without joining the church by baptism. In his personal statement to the Missionary Conference on "Why I am not a Christian?" he said, he believed in Christ as the One Saviour of humankind. He added, "nothing would give me deeper satisfaction than to feel that I belong to his Body. I am not sure

that I remain outside the Christian Church. It is true that I have never felt any inward call that I could recognize as divine in its inspiration to join the Christian Church in the narrow sense in which some evidently use the term. Nor do I believe that while every believer is called upon to let his light shine before all the world, he is also called upon to join the church in the narrower sense of the term. There is nothing essentially sinful in Hindu society any more than there is anything essentially pure in the Christian society-for that is what the church amounts to- so that one should hasten from the one to the other...So long as the believer's testimony for Christ is open and as long as his attitude towards Hindu society in general is critical, and towards social and religious practices inconsistent with the spirit of Christ is protestant and practically protestant, I would allow him to struggle his way to the light with failure here and failure there, but with progress and success on the whole. The spirit of Christ is a peace-destroying spirit, I may assure you. If you cooperate with that spirit, your Christian believer in Hindu society will come out all right in the end. He may not join your church but he will prepare the way for the movement from within Hindu society towards Christ who shall fulfill India's highest aspirations and impart that life of freedom for which she has

been panting for ages... “(Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* pp. 207-214). There have been Hindu groups like that of Subba Rao of Andhra Pradesh, committed to spirituality and religious rites centred in the Crucified Christ as Saviour and Healer but deciding to stay outside the main stream of the church communities of the baptized believers.

There were others like Manilal C. Parekh who took baptism which he considered “ a purely spiritual sacrament signifying the dedication of the new disciple to Christ” conferring the privilege to make known the name of Christ. But he strongly felt that “the new disciple should remain within his own community witnessing from there”(ed. Boyd. *Manual C Parekh p.13f*). Parekh's complaint was that “the Christian church had become a civic community instead of a spiritual fellowship” (Carl Binslev, *L.P.Larsen* p.69).

The poet Narayana Vamana Tilak was baptised and worked from within the organized Mission for a time, but in the end “visualized an Indian pattern of discipleship of Christ and a church of Christ transcending the community of the baptised. In 1917 he resigned from the Missionary society to launch the movement of God's Durbar...a brotherhood of the baptised and the

unbaptised”(Acknowledged
Christ. . 1991 edition. p. 281).

In view of the ambiguity of the meaning of baptism in the Indian inter-religious and political context referred above, the question of giving to the unbaptised Christ-bhakts in other religious communities a sense of full belonging to the spiritual fellowship of the church including participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper needs exploration. Principal Larsen of the United Theological College, Bangalore is reported to have invited O Kandasamy Chetty to the Lord's Table at a conference violating the existing rule that only baptised Christians should be so invited. The question is whether that existing rule which the organized churches observe has any particular theological validity. If baptism is the mark of leaving one's religious community to join the Christian religious community, cannot those persons who refuse to take that step for reasons of conscience be permitted to join the fellowship of the Lord's Table.

The *Religion and Society* of March 1972 has a discussion on the subject, based on a correspondence between Bishop Newbigin and myself in which many theologians in India and abroad participated. The *Debate on Mission Issues From the*

Indian Context (edited by Herbert E. Hofer, Gurukul, Madras 1979) has a whole collection of essays discussing “issues of Baptism in the Indian Mission Context” which carries the debate forward (pp.403f.). T.M.Philip’s essay in it on “A History of Baptismal Practices and Theologies” points to a wide variety of practice and understanding that existed in the churches from NT times and says that the historical perspective would help us “to maintain a certain flexibility and openness in the light of the new questions and challenges presented by our present historical situation”. He asks for a new understanding of the baptismal rite in India today which meets the problem raised here. That problem is that “the rite has become a legal condition of entry into the church which functions as a religious communal group” and therefore fails to convey its full meaning and purpose as “the expression of our solidarity to the new humanity in Christ which transcends all communal or caste solidarities”(p.321). “A report of the Seminar on the Relationship of the Church to Non-baptised believers in Christ” is particularly illuminating because it took up issues raised by the unbaptised Christ-*bhaktas* some of whom were present along with evangelists who were alive to these issues in their evangelistic work.

The Seminar started with three questions which T.A.Khareem, an unbaptised Muslim believer in Christ, asked: “1. Is baptism necessary for one’s salvation? 2. How am I to witness and minister to my family and community if I am cut off through taking baptism? 3. Is there a fellowship to receive me if I leave my Muslim community?”(p.398). The Seminar also faced the challenge of the Subba Rao movement from Andhra Pradesh. Subba Rao in his conversation with Principal Devasahayam of the Rajahmundry Institute had claimed that “Christ has been imprisoned in the church” and his aim was to “*lift* Christ, above religion and make him available to all”. For him the traditional rites and practices of the church are “optional”. He claims that “hundreds of caste Hindus and government officials have found Subba Rao’s decultured approach to Christ a releasing experience; now they can ally themselves with Christ without identifying themselves with a different social community and way of life”(p.400). The report has many insights. Its critique of the church of the baptised is the most crucial. It says, “In many subtle ways Christians have communalised the gospel and Christ himself. Christians have become, according to their practical self-understanding, a self-centred caste among castes (or better a religious

sub-caste among the castes).

Many evangelists seriously hesitate to expose their new converts to the disappointing life of the organized church...Baptism has always been into the fellowship of the church. Yet the church must self-critically ask itself if it has a nurturing fellowship for converts from different castes or from Islam”.

The report ends by suggesting that keeping up intimate contacts with each other would help lead the baptised and unbaptised “into the true repentance of Baptism” and adds, “The Spirit of God blows where it wills. We are called to try to keep up with Him”(pp. 402-3).