

**THE WORD-CRUCIFIED IN THE THEOLOGY OF ALOYSIUS
PIERIS, S.J.**

**PIERIS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF
SRI LANKA**

By

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Abstract

This project is a study of Pieris' theological writings with a focus on his particular contribution to the post-Vatican II development of the theology of religions and its implication for a renewed understanding of divine revelation/salvation and Christ in the context of religious pluralism and poverty in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this project is to bring to attention Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified, a central notion of his theology of religions, as a catalyst and a compass to set the right direction with a reverential attitude towards other religions in the Sri Lankan context.

The reason for this undertaking is the reality of Christianity's place as "stranger" and "intruder" (*foreignness*) in the context of Sri Lanka. Hence, the Sri Lankan Church is in need of a *language* to communicate the credibility of revelation in the process of becoming a Church of Sri Lanka with a sound theology that views other religions as co-partners within God's one single but progressive and holistic economy of salvation for humanity. Here, we underscore that Buddhism, from the time of its introduction to Ceylon in the third century B.C. has been a dominant formative factor in the Sri Lankan historical and cultural transformation. Hence, we need to recognize the importance of perceiving the Word-Crucified through the soteriological perspectives of non-Christian religions, particularly, Buddhism.

A critical analysis of the development of Sri Lankan theology would show that the *renewal* of the Sri Lankan Church after Vatican II Council was basically worked out within the framework of *adaptation*. This model is associated with an infiltration of the faith into a culture. This approach deprives the culture of its own religious content. Hence, the Church failed to enter effectively into the religio-cultural fabric of Sri Lanka. This scenario shows that the Catholic Church did not possess a relevant theology that considered local contextual realities as its

resources to back its renewal programme. It had traces of the “triumphalistic” ecclesiology of the colonial era.

This search for a proper theological idiom is a challenge against the historical background of centuries of cultural estrangement during the colonial period and in the context of the present religio-cultural awakening. Here, we argue that the Sri Lankan Church should relentlessly engage in a Triple-Dialogue that would allow her to nurture the essence of faith in Jesus Christ while separating it from the trappings of the colonial experience. This is a call for inculturation understood in terms of the local Christian Church getting involved in the local people’s struggle for full humanity. This will eventually deepen the roots of the Sri Lankan Church in the life and culture of the people, most of whom are non-Christians. As for the most effective model of inculturation we propose the “monastic model” of *participation* in a non-Christian spirituality.

In Chapter One we examine the religious heritage of Sri Lanka as predominantly Buddhist, which reshaped its national and cultural identity. The overall purpose of this chapter is to set the background to think anew the credibility of Christian revelation from within the religious pluralism and abject poverty of Sri Lanka. In this chapter we discuss the religio-cultural alienation brought about by the aggressive evangelization of the missionaries during the colonial period which caused the rise of “Protestant Buddhism.” It also marked the height of positive Buddhist revivalism. This chapter briefly studies a few pioneering efforts to overcome the *foreignness* of Christianity.

Chapter Two investigates the theological and spiritual journey of Pieris in order to shed light on his theological originality. It takes into account an overview of Pieris’ childhood and family atmosphere, his vocation as a Jesuit and his academic formation. It highlights the unique

background of Pieris to show his moral authority and obligation for a fresh “Sri Lanka’s/Asia’s search for Christ” centered on Christ’s *mission of love* which he articulates in his paradigm of Covenant Christology. The main text examined is Pieris’ unpublished autobiography.

Chapter Three examines in detail Pieris’ notion of the Word-Crucified, the foundation of his paradigm of Covenant Christology. This main chapter of the dissertation intends to provide the direction and the basis for a relevant theology of revelation and Christology for Sri Lanka. This chapter brings to light Pieris’ unique theological contribution which fills a lacuna in the present theological thinking in Sri Lanka in the context of religious pluralism. It also endeavours to show how the notion of the Word-Crucified gives the Sri Lankan Church and its theology a credible and necessary basis for a much needed Triple-Dialogue.

Chapter Four presents Pieris’ Asian paradigm of theology of religious pluralism built on his Covenant Christology. The principal aim of this chapter is to highlight and appreciate the unique theological contribution of Pieris to the Sri Lankan Church as she finds her way in a context of religio-cultural pluralism that is predominantly Buddhist. This chapter also discusses his “integral approach” to religious pluralism, which can be applied to the wider Asian Context. On the basis of this study, we maintain in the General Conclusion that the Sri Lankan Church needs to participate in the local cultural ethos and soteriological nucleus of its religions in becoming a Church *of* Sri Lanka. It would provide the point of re-entry to Christ while the Church would regain its lost ‘authority’ and local recognition that comes with being a Church of the poor. The concluding remarks ends with an indication of the possible areas of further study and a guiding theological orientation to the Sri Lankan Church.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
ABM	Asian Bishop's Meeting
<i>AVCTh</i>	<i>Asian Voices in Christian Theology</i>
BCC	Basic Christian Communities
BHC	Basic Human Communities
<i>BIRA</i>	The Bishops' Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs of the FABC
<i>BIRA II</i>	Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs of the FABC
<i>CCA-CTC Bul.</i>	Bulletin of the Commission on Theological Concerns: Christian Conference of Asia
Cf.	Confer
CSR	Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, Sri Lanka
CUA	Catholic University of America Press
<i>Dialogue</i>	<i>Dialogue</i> : Journal of the Ecumenical Institute for Study & Dialogue, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Doct. Diss.	Doctoral Dissertation
<i>DTWT</i>	<i>Dictionary of Third World Theologies</i>
Eng. trans.	English translation
CSR	Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, Sri Lanka
<i>DP</i>	<i>Dialogue and Proclamation</i>
e.g.	for example
<i>EAPR</i>	<i>East Asian Pastoral Review</i>
EISD	Ecumenical Institute of Study and Dialogue
EATWOT	The Ecumenical Association of the Third World Theologians
ed.	editor(s)
esp.	especially
<i>Église et Théologie</i>	<i>Église Th.</i>
fn.	footnote
<i>FW</i>	<i>Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity</i>
FABC I	Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC
FABC	The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences
<i>FAPA</i>	<i>For All the People of Asia</i>
GC	General Council (of the Society of Jesus)
<i>G.VatII.C.,</i>	<i>Give Vatican II a Chance</i>
<i>Horizons</i>	<i>Horizons</i> : The Journal of the College Theology Society
i.e.	That is (from the Latin <i>id est</i>)
<i>Ind. Th. St.</i>	<i>Indian Theological Studies</i>
<i>InFra</i>	<i>Inter Fratres</i>
ICM/CPW	International Congress on Mission: Consensus Paper Workshop
<i>Japan Miss. Bul.</i>	<i>Japan Missionary Bulletin</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JKTh</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologie</i>
<i>LMW</i>	A. Pieris, <i>Love Meet Wisdom</i> (1988)

<i>Logos</i>	<i>Logos</i> : A publication of Center for Society and Religion, Colombo, Sri Lanka
<i>Lum vie</i>	<i>Lumière et vie</i> (Lyon)
<i>Miss. Oblate</i>	<i>The Missionary Oblate</i> (Sri Lanka)
<i>Month</i>	<i>The Month</i> : A Review of Christian Thought and World Affairs
ms	Manuscript
NS	New Series of Journal of Dialogue, Sri Lanka
OHD-FABC	Office of Human Development of the FABC
OS	Old Series of Journal of Dialogue, Sri Lanka
<i>Origins</i>	<i>Origins</i> : National Catholic Documentary Service, Washington D.C.
<i>Pacifica</i>	<i>Pacifica</i> : Australian Theological Studies
Ref.	Refer
<i>RM</i>	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>
SCRS	Study Centre for Religion and Society
<i>SEDOS Bul.</i>	<i>SEDOS Bulletin</i> : Servizio Documentazione e Studi (Rome)
Skt.	Sanskrit
<i>Spiritus</i>	<i>Spiritus</i> : A Journal of Christian Spirituality
<i>Th. St.</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TRC	Tulana Research Centre
<i>Vāgadevī</i>	<i>Vāgadevī</i> : Journal of Religious reflection, The Society of Jesus, Sri Lankan Province, Colombo.
<i>VJTR</i>	<i>Vidyajyoti</i> : Journal of Theological Reflection
vol.	volume(s) of periodical
Vol.	Volume of books
<i>VTW</i>	<i>Voices from the Third World</i> : Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
<i>Way</i>	<i>The Way</i> (London): Review of Contemporary Christian Spirituality

General Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Modern Christianity came to Sri Lanka, which was and still is predominantly Buddhist, with the invasion of the Portuguese in 1505. This was also the beginning of the colonial era in the Sri Lankan history. This era ended when Sri Lanka gained political independence from Britain in 1948. The missionary movement in Sri Lanka was contemporaneous with the spread of colonialism. However, though it is simplistic to say that Christian faith followed the trade routes and the sword, the colonial conquest certainly created the necessary atmosphere and context for the spread of Christianity. Hence, in the mind of the non-Christian majority of Sri Lankan Buddhists and Hindus, the Christian faith is linked to the colonial cultures and Western political powers. Therefore, it is generally viewed that Christianity arrived in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, in a foreign garb. The missionaries, in the colonial period, perceived local cultures and religions negatively, and felt a strong moral obligation to ‘civilize and Christianize the heathen.’¹ Other religions were seen as erroneous and their adherents needed the education and salvation that only Jesus could offer. Here, it should be noted that this *foreignness* is on account of the Sri Lankan Churches foreign method of operation. The person of Jesus Christ is well respected and honoured by the non-Christian majority for his noble teaching. Today, Sri Lanka is home to four major scriptural and meta-cosmic religions, namely, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

Given this multi-religious context, today the Church *in* Sri Lanka is called upon to articulate the “account of hope” in the context of a dialogue – with the Sri Lankan poor, with its

¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 31, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004, (Chapter II: My Journey from Jordan to Calvary, pp.8-21), here p.11. For a detailed historical study of this missionary attitude see R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, Cambridge University Press, U.K., 2001.

diverse cultures and its religions – in her attempts to become truly a Church of Sri Lanka.² In fact the classical biblical passage for Fundamental Theology remains 1Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.”³ The task is always the same, but its fulfilment is always new, because the questions are always being asked anew. For the Sri Lankan Church dialogue is not simply one activity among others, but it is rather the comprehensive *modus operandi* of its entire mission. In a multi religious-cultural setting such as Sri Lanka, interpreting Christ and his revelation (self-communication) is an interreligious task.

The Scope of this Study

My project is a study of Pieris’ theological writings with a focus on his particular contribution to the post-Vatican II development of the theology of religions and its implication for a renewed understanding of divine revelation/salvation⁴ and Christ in the context of religious pluralism and poverty in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this project is to bring to attention Pieris’ notion of the Word-Crucified, a central notion of his theology of religions, as a catalyst and a compass to set the right direction and attitude in the Sri Lankan Church’s search for a *language* to communicate the credibility of revelation in her effort to become a Church of Sri Lanka. Here, we seek to extract the revelation theology that is implicit in Pieris’ writings with the aim of evolving a renewed thinking of revelation as the foundation for a new theology of

² Ever since its first plenary assembly in Taipei, Taiwan – 1974, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences has repeatedly insisted on this principle for the Asian Churches. Cf. FABC’s First Plenary Assembly, no.12, in: Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arévalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Maryknoll, N.Y./Quezon City, Philippines, Orbis/Claretian Publications, 1992, p.14.

³ See the encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*, no 67.

⁴ The dense opening chapter of *Dei Verbum* (for instance, nos. 2, 3, and 4), used the terms “revelation” and “Salvation” almost interchangeably. As far as the Second Vatican Council is concerned, the history of salvation is the history of revelation and vice versa (Cf. G. O’Collins, S.J., *Fundamental Theology*, Paulist Press, N.Y., 1981, p. 58-59).

religions in the Sri Lankan context. It is to be noted that Pieris does not have to his credit a well formulated Sri Lankan/Asian theology of revelation to accompany his brand of theology of religions, which he calls, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism.”⁵ Nevertheless, it is quite evident that Pieris’ profound understanding of divine revelation which emerged from his lived Sri Lankan/Asian religio-cultural ethos has significant implications in his theological works.

Our attempt in this dissertation is not to develop a comparative study of religions. This work does not either attempt to identify so-called ‘Christian’ values or ‘Christian’ revelation in other religions or to assign roles to other religious traditions for the salvation of their adherents in God’s plan of salvation for humankind. This dissertation is also not an exhaustive presentation of a revelation theology for Sri Lanka. But rather, in view of evolving a relevant theology of revelation, it is an attempt to perceive the Word, as the *revelatory medium of salvation* which is the source of the enlightenment of Gautama-the-Buddha, and which became flesh in Jesus. It is an effort to evolve a credible theological language in a culture that has already grown around a soteriological nucleus fashioned by various other religions, particularly Buddhism. We hope our attempt will guide Christians and Buddhists to appreciate Jesus the Word-Crucified as a *Corporate Person* who continually engages in the process of saving, gathering, integrating everyone and everything in his becoming the *totality* of Christ or what Christians call the Christhood, the all encompassing plenitude of Christ. As this dissertation will demonstrate, it is a process that respects the legitimate plurality of religions which acknowledges their common *beatitudinal* or *alpecchatā* (Skt.) spirituality and their irreducibly distinctive identities.

The theological reason for this undertaking is that in the face of the reality of Christianity’s place as “stranger” and “intruder” (*foreignness*) in the context of Sri Lanka, the

⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism” (ms), TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 2009.

question remains whether Christian divine revelation has found its correct socio-cultural and religious idiom by letting its credibility evolve among the *many-religions* and *many-poor* of Sri Lanka. This is the basic issue of inculturation understood primarily in terms of the *Liturgy of life*, i.e. the Church in Sri Lanka living the *paschal journey of self-emptying* of Jesus, the Word incarnate, that culminated on the Cross. It is the best way to meet Christ in the poor of Sri Lanka, the victims of oppression and injustice. For Pieris the poor, particularly the poor by circumstance, are the vicars of Christ (Mt. 25:31-46).⁶ This is the most appropriate way for the Church in Sri Lanka to become a true local Church of Sri Lanka.

Here, let me explain briefly the basic problem the Church in Sri Lanka is currently facing as stated above. First of all we need to mention that today the Sri Lankan Church is in search of a *language* to communicate the credibility of revelation in the process of her becoming a Church of Sri Lanka with a sound theology and an attitude of respect towards other religions. A sound and relevant theology is indispensable to the life of the Church. Theology in the normal course of events assumes the existence and *givenness* of revelation. In fact the understanding of revelation encloses and affects the whole of theology. The present impression of *foreignness* of the Church in Sri Lanka in the eyes of the Buddhists and the Hindus would bear witness to the fact that Sri Lankan Christian theology has suffered from polarization between revelation and context.⁷ As a result for not having considered the context of Sri Lanka (mainly consisting of poverty and religiousness) as a resource of theology, the Sri Lankan Church and its theology continue to remain in its foreign garb since it was *planted* in Sri Lankan soil. Hence, it is evident that the

⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, p.21; Also see Idem, "Christ Beyond Dogma: Doing Christology in the Context of the Religions and the Poor," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol.25, 2000, (pp.187-231), here p.207.

⁷As Asian Christians, while we rely on the Sacred Traditions and Sacred Scriptures (*Dei Verbum* 10) we do theology together with Asian contextual realities as resources, insofar as we discern in them God's presence, action and the work of the Spirit (See Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences document *Methodology*, paper 96).

Cross which is the daily living reality of the victims, the poor of Sri Lanka and their hope, was for a long time either neglected by the theology of dialogue, or considered only in contrast with it. Therefore, the theology that sustains at present the Sri Lankan Church is in urgent need of finding the link between the Word-Crucified and the theology of interreligious dialogue.

Following the history of the great development and changes in the world, we could observe what an impact the new and renewed relationship between the Church and the world, and between the Church and the religions, has brought about, particularly with the convening of the Vatican II Council. Hence, it is time for the Sri Lankan Catholic Church and its faithful to renew their Christian vision, to redefine their historical self-consciousness in the world they live in if they truly desire to be faithful to the *spirit* of Vatican II and move towards making Christianity relevant in the religio-cultural context of Sri Lanka.

Hypothesis

In my thesis I would like to show that the notion of the Word-Crucified is a key concept for the understanding of the theology of the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris, while at the same time constituting, in the eyes of this theologian, a renewed thinking of revelation as the foundation for a new Christian theology of religions in the Sri Lankan context.

The Method

As my hypothesis suggests, my study is an attempt towards an understanding of and a search for a “language of credibility” of revelation/redemption in the context of religious pluralism and poverty in Sri Lanka. To do so I will investigate the contribution of Pieris to the post-Vatican development of the Christian theology of religions by focusing on the notion “Word-Crucified” which I see as a central notion to understand his theological contribution.

Apart from library research in Ottawa, for my fieldwork I returned to Sri Lanka in 2008 to use Pieris' research library and to conduct interviews with him discussing the subject matter of my thesis topic. He was generous enough to give me access to his unpublished autobiography.

In this dissertation Chapters One and Two will provide a socio-anthropological and theological background to appreciate Pieris' creative theological contribution and its gradual development. Then we will discuss Pieris' Asia paradigm of Covenant Christology which has the Word-Crucified as its foundation, and his brand of "Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism" which is sustained by his Covenant Christology, in the third and fourth chapters.

In order to properly situate the demonstration of the working hypothesis, the introductory chapter of my dissertation will present a brief study of the identity of Christianity in the religious heritage of Sri Lanka. Here, I will concentrate on the religio-cultural setting with specific reference to Buddhism and its liberative thrust which shapes the Sri Lankan identity. The overall purpose of this chapter is to set the background to think anew the credibility of Christian revelation from within the religious pluralism and abject poverty of Sri Lanka rather than finding a method to adapt the Gospel to the existing religio-cultural setting. Thus it requires a brief historical overview of the religio-cultural context of Sri Lanka and a study of the fact of the *foreignness* of Christianity especially in the eyes of the Buddhists and an overview of the efforts made to overcome this *foreignness*. These elements of study are pursued with a view to showing why the Church should become truly a Church *of* Sri Lanka, and live a discipleship of witness and service to fellow Sri Lankans.

In the Second Chapter of my dissertation, I will concentrate on the unique theological and spiritual journey of Aloysius Pieris. The overall purpose of this Chapter is to shed light on the originality of Pieris' contribution to the theology of religions and particularly on his profound

understanding of revelation that makes a significant impact on his theology of religions in the Sri Lankan context. Pieris has extensive scholarly training in theology both in the Eastern and the Western schools of thought. He too has the distinction of being the first Christian, let alone Sri Lankan Catholic priest, to obtain a doctorate in 1971 in Buddhist Philosophy from a Buddhist University in Sri Lanka. In this chapter, I will make an overview of Pieris' childhood and family atmosphere leading to his vocation as a member of the Jesuit religious Order. Then I will proceed to study Pieris' theological and Buddhist philosophical formation journey with a view to identifying the sources of the key elements of his theology of religions, particularly by analyzing his unpublished autobiography.

With this general treatment forming the background, the Third Chapter of my dissertation will take up a study of the development of Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified which takes the centre stage in understanding his Christology and theology of revelation in the Sri Lankan multi-religious context. My overall attempt in this chapter is to demonstrate Pieris' unique theological contribution which in fact fills a lacuna of the present theological thinking in Sri Lanka in the context of religious pluralism. Here, I will proceed to show how Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified gives the Sri Lankan Church and its theology a credible and necessary basis for a much needed Triple-Dialogue with Sri Lankan culture (inculturation), religions (interreligious dialogue), and the Sri Lankan People themselves, especially the poor (liberation). At the end I will proceed to draw some ecclesiological implications that would emerge from this study. This chapter thus requires a study of the major works and writings of Pieris, especially those that pertain to the specific area of our study.

Finally, in the Chapter Four of my dissertation I will discuss Pieris' perception of religious pluralism in the light of his paradigm of Covenant Christology. The principal aim of

this chapter is to highlight and appreciate the unique theological contribution of Pieris to the Sri Lankan Church as she finds her way in a context of religio-cultural pluralism that is predominantly Buddhist. It requires a brief evaluation of the ongoing conversation on religious pluralism and the theology of revelation in the context of Sri Lanka. Here, I would limit myself to a brief analysis of the theological contribution of three Sri Lankan theologians belonging to three different Christian denominations thus highlighting the importance of the ecumenical thrust in dealing with the religious pluralism in Sri Lanka. This will also highlight Pieris' revelation theology in the Asian context. I will also analyze some major studies done on Pieris taking into account the specific questions raised by the reality of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka in relation to the understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Then I will proceed to weigh Pieris' understanding of the relationship between Christianity and other religions against the current theological thinking on religious pluralism in Sri Lanka with a view to establishing a viable basis for a healthy discourse on the credibility of God's revelation/redemption.

In the General Conclusion I will evaluate Pieris' theological contribution and suggest the areas it can further develop and encourage the Sri Lankan Church to participate in the Sri Lankan realities of life. I will also propose a theological orientation towards a healthy dialogue in the context of religious pluralism of Sri Lanka based on my research.

CHAPTER ONE

Christianity and the Religious Heritage of Sri Lanka

1.1 Introduction

In the light of the general thesis topic and the hypothesis, in finding a way to let the credibility of Christian revelation evolve among the *so many-religions* and *so many-poor* of Sri Lanka we need to take into account the dominant religious heritage of the country. This heritage is shaped by Buddhism and Buddhist culture which has existed since the third century B.C. In this First Chapter I will appreciate the heritage of religious pluralism, permeated with a strong influence of Buddhism and Buddhist culture. The overall aim of this chapter is to set the background to think anew the credibility of Christian revelation from within the *many-religions* and *many-poor* of Sri Lanka rather than finding a method to adapt the Gospel to the existing religio-cultural setting. The historical and social elements that led the Buddhist Identity to equate with the Sri Lankan National identity amidst socio-political vicissitudes exists until present time. Thus it requires a brief historical overview of the religio-cultural context of Sri Lanka and a study of the fact of the *foreignness* of Christianity in the eyes of the Buddhist majority and the Hindus, and an overview of the efforts made to overcome this *foreignness*. These elements of study are pursued to show why the Church should become truly a Church *of* Sri Lanka, and live a discipleship of witness and service to fellow Sri Lankans.

Sri Lanka, formally Ceylon, is an island republic off the southern tip of India; with a population over 20 million according to 2007 Mid-year census and statistics. The principal languages are Sinhala and Tamil. Sinhalese, the majority ethnic group accounts for 82%, Sri

Lankan Tamils 4.3%, Indian Tamils 5.1%, Moors 7.9% and other 0.7% of the total population.

Buddhism is the major religion comprising 76.7 percent of the total religious population.

Hindu makes up 7.9%, Islam 8.5%, Roman Catholicism 6.1%, and other Christians 0.8%.¹

Buddhism is practiced mainly by the Sinhalese and Hinduism mainly by the Tamils while Christians are found among both the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Christianity in Sri Lanka has only a history of 500 years. It landed on our shores with the Portuguese invasion in 1505. Christianity was thus introduced to a culture which was predominantly Buddhist and had existed in the country since the third century B.C. Hence, it is evident that before the arrival of Christianity and Western culture, people of Sri Lanka had a life and culture mainly patterned on Buddhist tradition. Buddhism, as a religious tradition, took such a decisive role in the making of its national identity that Sri Lanka is known in the world as the Seat of *Theravada*-Buddhism, though India is its place of birth. The other faction of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, is nonexistent in Sri Lanka.

The socio-cultural history of Sri Lanka shows that the long and dominant tradition of Buddhism and Buddhist culture in the country has been the backbone of its national and religious heritage.² We can identify two dominant characteristics in the Island's Buddhist national heritage, namely, the religio-national solidarity and, the sense of destiny and mission. The religio-national solidarity in Sri Lanka is a parallel reflection of the close-knit interpenetration of "monk and monarch" as was in the West. From the time of the arrival of Buddhism in the Island, Buddhism had been accepted by the state as its official religion. In the missionary perspective

¹ Source: *Statistical Abstract of Sri Lanka*, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2008. Note: Due to the socio-political tensions prevailed in the country Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts in which the 2001 census enumeration was not completed are not included here. Traditionally the above mentioned districts are thickly populated by Sri Lanka Tamil ethnic group. Traditionally Sri Lanka Tamil forms the second highest ethnic group generally accounting for 12.6% of the total ethnic population.

² Cf. L. De Silva, "Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., pp. 37-52, esp. 37.

Buddhists believe that they are the “chosen people” and Sri Lanka is the land favored by the Buddha as was the case of the history of Israel and its people as the “chosen people” of God.³ Thus Sri Lanka came to be placed on the world map as the land in which the *Dhamma* (Buddhist Doctrine) will shine in all its glory with its light radiating throughout the world.

When looked at from another perspective, Buddhism in itself has been seen as a formative factor on the development of Sinhala Culture, culture of the majority Sinhala race in Sri Lanka, and thus recourse is frequently made to implicit ideas of a common Buddhist culture of which Sinhala culture is only one variant. It is a ‘little tradition’ within the broader and more inclusive ‘great tradition’ of the Theravada Buddhist culture of Southeast Asia.⁴

1.2 The Relationship between Sri Lankan National Identity and Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity

Here, in view of the present chapter, an initial clarification needs to be made in understanding the relationship between Sri Lankan National Identity and its Sinhalese-Buddhist identity. The distinction must be made between Buddhist *doctrinal* tradition (*Dhamma*) and Buddhist history. As Gananath Obeyesekere points out, “If Buddhist doctrine is fundamentally soteriological, Buddhist history (or *political religion*) is practical and world oriented.” The other important fundamental fact is that “if Buddhist doctrine and ethics are universal, Buddhist

³ Cf. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 22.

⁴ For the explicit version of the “great” and “little” distinction: Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism,” in: *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 21, 1963, pp. 139-153. See also R. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971.

history is particularistic and concerned exclusively with the political events in the various Theravada nations.”⁵

When one reads the histories of Theravada Buddhist societies such as that of Sri Lanka one invariably comes to realize that they are inextricably related to the unfolding of Buddhist history. However, unlike the great monotheisms which understand history as the unfolding of the Divine Will, the Buddhist doctrinal tradition teaches that the Buddha, who is no longer active, has no active intercessory role in history. But the Buddha as a totally benevolent being is powerfully internalized in the Buddhist conscience. Hence the unfolding of Buddhist history, or a Buddhist sense of history, is the work of Buddhist monks, the guardians of the Buddhist tradition, in alliance with the kings (“monk and monarch”). To be precise, Buddhist history is a *construction*, generally after the death of Buddha (*parinirvana*), by learned monks based on a coalition with kings of a given Theravada Buddhist nation.⁶ This history is generally constructed with a detailed record of kings, political events, and the problems of political order and disorder. This Buddhist history exists almost entirely outside the Pāli canon. Certainly, some of these historical facts, such as secular rulers’ greed for power, their violence and intolerance, murder, parricide and sexual misconduct fall outside of the fundamental tenets of the Buddhist doctrine. Hence, strictly speaking, it is the Buddhist history and not the Buddhist doctrine that is generally associated with cultural identity, violence and intolerance of others. This distinction partially answers the popular question of how Buddhism, a religion of radical nonviolence, has fanned the flames of political violence and, ethno-religious passion and rivalries in Sri Lanka. This

⁵ Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995, (pp.231-256), here p. 234.

⁶ Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, pp. 232-234. Also see Gombrich, R., and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhist Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*, Princeton University Press, N.J., 1988, pp. 440-441.

distinction and the resulting tension between history and soteriology are not so clear-cut in the great monotheisms and in most types of Hinduism.

However, this distinction between Buddhist history and Buddhist doctrine which is made for academic purposes to safe guard the universality and pristine purity of Buddhist doctrine is never to be understood as a separation of one from the other. In Sri Lanka, for instance, there is a close identity between what might be called ‘Sinhala-Buddhism’⁷ and ‘Sinhala culture’ where a particular Buddhist sense of history is unfolded. Pieris, illustrating the mutuality between the ‘cosmic’ (all socio-political activities, technological and scientific progress) and ‘meta-cosmic’ (all that is ordained towards interior human liberation) dimensions of Buddhist religious experience, attests to the inseparable integrity of Buddhist history and Buddhist doctrine.⁸ In fact Buddhism, from the time of its introduction to Ceylon in the third century B.C. has been a dominant formative factor in the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural transformation. And in turn Buddhism and Buddhist culture have been the fundamental bases of Ceylon’s national and religious heritage. It has shaped and reshaped Sri Lankan national identity to the extent of equalizing at times Sinhala-Buddhist religious identity with the Sri Lankan national identity.

⁷ Buddhism, which is traditionally referred to as *Buddha sāsana*, a Pāli term, meaning “the universal Buddhist church” takes almost entirely a particularistic significance in Sri Lanka. The *sāsana* is inextricably linked with the country’s dominant ethnic group, the Sinhalese. Thus we have the term ‘Sinhala-Buddhism’.

⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-cultural Guidelines,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. 6, nos. 1 and 2, p. 29-52, esp. pp. 32-38. As a further note, this article was one of the major papers presented at the third international theological conference of *The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (EATWOT) held for the first time in Asia, in Sri Lanka in 1979. It marked a major breakthrough in spelling out the Asian Identity in liberation theology. It brought to the attention of the theologians the liberative potential of non-Christian religions integrated both in theory and praxis into a biblically sound prophetic vision of Christianity. As Michael Amaladoss, a prominent Indian theologian, and many other acknowledge, until this paper it was the Latin American perspective of the poor and their struggle for liberation that was dominant in the Association (Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1997, p. 93).

1.2.1 Brief Overview of Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity before the 16th Century

Gananath Obeyesekere, a distinguished Sri Lankan social anthropologist, in an article titled “Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity in Ceylon,” elaborates on the relationship between Buddhism and ethnic identity in Sri Lanka.⁹ Analyzing the historical and social background, and the immediate socio-political and economic factors of Sri Lanka, he goes on to show how up to the sixteenth century being a Sinhalese implied being a Buddhist.¹⁰ In other words, according to Obeyesekere, before the advent of the first Portuguese colonizer in 1505 the term ‘Sinhalese’ meant also ‘Buddhist’ and there was no self reference term for the latter. To be a full blooded Sinhalese one has to share in the ancestral faith, namely, Buddhism: they are twin facets of the same identity. This created a general attitude that Sinhala Catholics were not ‘really’ Sinhalese. Hence, Sinhala Catholics and Sri Lankan Catholics in general were considered as a ‘denationalized’ group of people following alien customs with strong allegiance to a foreign Pope.¹¹ Sinhala society was one in which nationalism was recognized in terms of loyalty to race and religion.¹² In another historical development, namely, consistent invasions and conflicts with South Indian invaders who were generally Tamil speakers and mostly Hindus, the concept of Sinhala-Buddhist identity was further consolidated. In fact as Obeyesekere argues these historical conflicts between Sinhalese and South Indian invaders brought about a new pattern of

⁹ Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity in Ceylon,” in: George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*, Mayfield Publishing Company, California, 1975, pp. 231- 258.

¹⁰ Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity in Ceylon,” in: George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity*, pp. 231 and 235. G. Obeyesekere is also quick to observe that Buddhist did not always imply Sinhalese since there were other nationalities who were adherents of Buddhism though the numbers are very insignificant. However, he notes that it is likely that as far as the masses were concerned, the label “Buddhist” also implied “Sinhalese”.

¹¹ Cf. R. L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, 1992, p. 21. Furthermore, at the footnote 21 of the chapter 2 of the same book the author notes that similar criticisms were leveled by Hindu Tamil activists against Tamil Catholics.

¹² Cf. M. Roberts, “Problem of collective identity in a multi-ethnic society: Sectional nationalism Vs. Ceylonese nationalism 1900-1940,” in: M. Robert (ed.) *Collective identities, nationalism and protest in modern Sri Lanka*, Marga Institute, Colombo, 1979, pp. 340-341.

myth and “mythicized” history¹³ that gave rise to the conviction “Sinhalese as defenders of the *sāsana* versus Tamils as opposers of the *sāsana*.” Above all it is a strong traditional belief that the Sinhalese role of protector and guardianship of the *sāsana* was decreed by Buddha himself. Furthermore, starting with the Sinhala King Dutthagamani Abhaya, popularly known as Dutugamunu (161-137 B.C.), who was deemed to be the savior of the Sinhala race and of Buddhism, developed one of the most important myths of the Sinhalese that “The Sinhalese kings are the defenders of the secular realm and the *sāsana* of which the order of monks (*sangha*) were its visible representative. Their opponents are the Tamils.”¹⁴ Both early and modern histories prove how powerful these myths have been of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. These myths and many more which are constantly emphasized both in great chronicles of the Sinhalese (*Mahavamsa* and *Chulavamsa*) and in the Sinhala literature and arts in the course of history, are critical for understanding the equivalence of the term “Sinhalese” with the “Buddhism” and in defining the nation as Sinhala-Buddhist. Every single Buddhist history since the time the *Mahavamsa* was written (fifth century) takes it for granted that the country is Buddhist. However, strictly speaking, according to the historical facts the South Indian invasions by Tamils cannot be purely interpreted as ethnical motivated.

¹³ In any society Myths have a self-perceived historical role and are not mere fictions in so far as they reflect the ground experience of a given society. Hence, they are not lacking in objective validity. Here the concept of “Myths” is understood as that which summarizes actual living patterns in a given historical setting of and at the same time that which has been used to interpret and re-patterned (*mythicized*) the actual historical events. Myths sum up for the people of a country the “meaning” of their country’s history. Hence, Myths, in a sense, are more powerful than the verifiable historical facts. In Sri Lanka the sentiments underlying some of the Myths have been rallying points for Sinhalese nationalism. However, myths are subordinate to history in that they are placed chronologically in the historical framework. According to scholars, unlike modern historical writing, Buddhist history is not hostile to myth and miracle (Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity in Ceylon,” in: George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity*, p. 236).

¹⁴ Here, however, according to verifiable historical sources the contrary has been proved. Tamil Kings of Ceylon often have taken the traditional role of Sinhalese kings in safeguarding Buddhism, the official religion of the state while there have been certain instances where some Sinhalese kings have not been loyal and truthful the traditional duties of a king of Ceylon (Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity in Ceylon,” in: George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity*, pp. 235 and 237).

1.2.2 Sinhalese-Buddhist Ethnic Identity in the Colonial period

Though there were certain threats of decline in Sinhalese hegemony in Ceylon with the systematic South Indian invasions before the 16th century, the really radical change in Sinhalese ethnic identity came with the advent of the European powers, beginning with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505.¹⁵

As a result of the arrival of the colonizers in the country the historic equation of Sinhalese=Buddhist cease to have the kind of universal validity it once had. The three colonial powers: Portuguese, Dutch and British caused a split in the old Sinhalese ethnic identity into three separate Sinhalese identities, each distinguished by religion. The sets of identities can be called as Sinhalese Buddhist versus Sinhalese Catholic; Sinhalese Buddhist versus Sinhalese Protestant; Sinhalese Catholic versus Sinhalese Protestant. A similar split was experienced within the Tamil and Muslim ethnic identities. As the result of this wave of identity-split we are left with the major groupings: Sinhalese-Buddhists who are the majority, Sinhalese –Catholic, Sinhalese-Protestant, Tamil-Hindu, Tamil-Christian, and Moslem.¹⁶

Thus, according to the verifiable historical facts various subjugating and administrative measures adopted by the colonizer, and an onslaught of Western culture, a slow decline was brought about in many of Sri Lanka's cultural and religious traditions. Particularly, Buddhism, the majority religion began to decline, and Buddhists lost many of the privileges they had enjoyed under the native rulers for centuries. At that time a major transition of political power over the country, namely, from kings to governments which were hostile to Buddhism, needs special mention. This transition which began in the sixteenth century with the coming of the

¹⁵ Before the 16th century the decline in Sinhalese civilization may have resulted in the demoralization of the Sinhalese, but did not affect their identity in any other way.

¹⁶ Cf. G. Obeyesekere, "Sinhalese-Buddhist Identity in Ceylon," in: George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity*, p.243.

Portuguese was completed with the conquest of the whole country by the British in 1815. An important consequence of this transfer of political power, as far as Buddhism in Ceylon was concerned, was the loss of state patronage which in fact was a necessary condition for the proper functioning of its central institutions.¹⁷

The most vivid and consequential formulation of Sinhala Buddhist revivalism with nationalist overtones was the anti-Christian movement began by monks like Mohottivatte Gunananda¹⁸ and Hikkaduwe Sumangala in the mid-nineteenth century. Then it was given an institutional and propagandist basis by the Theosophists, notably Colonel Henry Steel Olcott as their leader in 1880, and taken to its ideological limits by the charismatic religious reformer Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933).¹⁹

1.2.3 Buddhist Revivalism in Post-independence from 1948

This Buddhist revivalism was stimulated again with Ceylon's gaining of political independence in 1948, when Buddhist leaders started a movement to restore Buddhism to its

¹⁷ Cf. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900*, p. 28.

¹⁸ In 1862 the monk Gunananda in resistance to the missionaries founded the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism in imitation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which had been active in Ceylon since 1840 and on a press originally imported by the Church Missionary Society began to print replies to Christian propaganda (Cf. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900*, p. 220).

¹⁹ Cf. R. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhist Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*, pp. 203-207. Colonel Henry Steel Olcott was an American and a son of a Protestant minister. He was also one time the secretary of the Theosophical Society of New York. Its head quarters moved to Adyar, near Madras, in 1879 and have been there ever since. He came to Sri Lanka on 17 February, 1880 on a mission for the Buddhists in the country. Soon after he arrived in the country he founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society. However, soon he became aware of the larger role that Sri Lankan Buddhist expected of him. He then enthusiastically accepted his role as a Western champion of Buddhist against the Christian Mission. Consequently, he formally declared himself a Buddhist by taking the five precepts of Buddhism administered by monks (The five precepts are: Do not kill, do not steal, do not indulge in sexual misconduct, do not make false speech, and do not take intoxicant). On the other hand Anagārika Dharmapāla was born in 1864 to Buddhist family in Colombo but was educated at Christian mission schools, for there was hardly any other. Initially he was with the Theosophists but later dissociated from them to revive Buddhism with his own outlook and style.

former pre-colonial status and to rectify imbalances in education and civil services.²⁰ Shunning government sponsorship, the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress appointed its own Buddhist Committee of Inquiry on April 2, 1954 in accordance with a resolution adopted at the 33rd annual conference of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) held at Kegalle on December 27, 1953.²¹ This Committee, popularly known as “Buddhist Commission”, having looked into the plight of the Buddhists in the country, produced a report called *The Betrayal of Buddhism* (February, 1956), which could be said to act as the ideological charter of Buddhist activists.²² The report attempted to look to the *Dhamma* of traditional Theravada to restore Buddhism to its pristine purity and Sinhalese nationalism that was eclipsed by the long history of colonial domination. The year 1956 was very significant in the post-independence period in Sri Lankan history for two reasons. First, it marked the major socio-political revolution in the country by voting into power the political party, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), backed by the United Front of Monks. The MEP, headed by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike promised the Buddhist monks and the rural masses which form the majority of Sri Lankan population, the implementation of the proposals in *The Betrayal of Buddhism*. Mr. Bandaranaike’s sweeping election victory in

²⁰ Cf. K. M. de Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*, Penguin Books, India, 1998, Chapter 3, esp. pp. 75-76. The Buddhist revivalism of post-independence had its roots in the agitation of the Buddhist activists against British missionaries and some of the political decisions of the British government in mid and the late 19th century.

²¹ Cf. Stanley J. Tambiah, “Buddhism, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1993, (pp. 589-619), here pp. 593-595. The ACBC, as early as 1951, had requested the then United National Party (UNP) government which ruled since independence, to appoint a Buddhist commission to inquire into the state of Buddhism. However, ACBC went on its own to set up a committee when the government refused to do so on grounds of separation of politics and religion. Also see George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, U.S.A. 1988, pp. 79-90.

²² The report, *The Betrayal of Buddhism* in its survey made a major comparison between the status of the Christian missions and of the Buddhist sangha in Sri Lanka, especially during the British period (1796-1948) and the first years of independence. It blamed colonialism and Christianity for subverting both Buddhism and Sinhalese nationalism, and introducing ephemeral materialism. The English title of the report *The Betrayal of Buddhism* denotes its charge that the British government had failed to protect the Buddhist religion as it had promised in the Kandyan Convention of 1815.

1956 was in fact the turning point in the modern history of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. Second, it was also the year of the celebration of ‘Buddha Jayanthi’, that is the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha’s death and the landing of the first Sinhalese, Vijaya, and his group in Sri Lanka.²³

In essence the major proposals of the report were: first, that the government should create an incorporated Buddha *Sāsana* Council²⁴ to remedy the structural fragmentation of the Buddhist *Sangha* (the monk order) in imitation of the “corporate” organizational structure well established in the Christian Missions; second, the government should cease aiding Christian mission schools and subsequently take over all privately managed but state-assisted schools, and begin to compensate and rehabilitate Buddhism after centuries of neglect.²⁵ The report underlined the rebuilding of Buddhist civilization by education as the only long-term solution to the lost Buddhist identity. In fact the second major proposal of the Report did focus on the successful educational activities and Christian, especially Catholic, proselytization in schools. It is recorded that by the 1930s Catholics with their extensive network of Catholic schools, largely at the state’s expense, were generally known to have the best school system in the country.²⁶ Consequently, the Catholic education system laid a solid foundation for Catholics to enjoy considerable advantage in obtaining powerful and prestigious jobs both in government and private sector. Hence, as briefly noted above, the report *The Betrayal of Buddhism* clearly

²³ Cf. Stanley J. Tambiah, “Buddhism, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms and the State*, pp.595-596.

²⁴ The *Sāsana* Council was to be a semiautonomous body, financed by the state but leaving the administration and support of Buddhism in the hands of the council of *bikkus* and laymen.

²⁵ Cf. George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*, University of South Carolina Press, 1988, pp. 84-86, 109.

²⁶ From 1869, especially with the introduction of the denominational system of education by the British as a result of the campaign pioneered by Catholic priest, Father (later Bishop) Christopher Bonjean, OMI a rapid growth of Catholic-run schools was noticed in Sri Lanka. At the same time in the year 1869 the mission schools which are run by the Protestant Christians under British rule lost their monopoly of modern education with the establishment of the government Department of Public Instruction (see R. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhist Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*, p. 208).

articulates what the revival and restoration of Buddhism meant to the Sinhalese activists in substantive terms. Lynn A. De Silva of the Methodist church in Sri Lanka, who pioneered an intellectual dialogue with Buddhism in his reading of the Buddhist resurgence, notes two of the dominant factors, (a) the religio-national desire to reintegrate nationalism and Buddhism, and (b) the positive missionary determination to carry the light of the *Dhamma* to the ends of the world.²⁷

It is noteworthy that every government in power in Sri Lanka since the *Jayanti* (1956) made a serious effort to carry out the mandate given in *the Report* and *Jayanti Programs* to revive and restore Buddhism to its “rightful place”. Even the very recent socio-political developments in Sri Lanka bear witness to the fact that the rise of Sinhala nationalism has been closely linked to the resurgence of Buddhism and the various attempts to define the nature of particular Buddhist conceptions of the state, authority and legitimacy.²⁸

However, despite the strong demands to the contrary on the part of a significant section of the Buddhist leadership, the new republican constitutions of Sri Lanka in 1972 and 1978, respecting the pluralistic religious and ethnic composition of the country, did not declare Buddhism as the state religion.²⁹ What these constitutions have given to Buddhism is “the foremost place” and the assurance of state protection, while granting to every citizen the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion: to quote the 1978 Constitution, “The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha *Sāsana*, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1) (e).”

²⁷ Cf. L. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1976, (pp. 37-52), here p. 38.

²⁸ Cf. R. L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting*, 1992, p. 9.

²⁹ Cf. George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and response*, p.112.

As a final comment a brief note may be made of the foundational myth that ultimately led the majority Sinhalese race to believe that Ceylon is a Buddhist nation and that they are the “chosen people” on almost equal terms with the Old Testament projection of the land of Israel and its people. Based on the historical works, especially on *Mahavamsa* the great historical chronicle of Ceylon, the Buddhists believe that Ceylon was favored by Buddha to be the repository of the true *Dhamma* where it would be firmly established and shine in all its glory.³⁰ As virtually all historical texts recognize, the Buddha hallowed the land by visiting it three times at three different locations. He consecrated the whole country as a place where Buddhism would flourish. The myth of the Buddha’s visits is uncontested. By this consecration, the land was cleansed of evil spirits and thus made ready for the coming of the founding ancestor of the Sinhalese race, Vijaya from northern India. According to tradition, the Buddha before he passed away, instructed Sakka (Indra), the chief god, to protect Vijaya. He landed in Sri Lanka which was already favored by the Buddha, on the very day the Buddha passed into final nirvana. This implies that Vijaya the victor is the secular counterpart of *the* victor, the Buddha himself.³¹ Thus it was the Buddha’s intention that the *Dhamma* would be established and preserved in its pristine purity in Sri Lanka for the good of the world. It is for this reason that Sri Lanka is known today as the seat of Theravada Buddhism. Hence, this foundational element of Sri Lankan history is the key to understand the historical consciousness of the Sinhalese and Ceylon as its country.

³⁰ Cf. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900*, p. 22.

³¹ Cf. G. Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals,” in: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalism Comprehended*, The university of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995, p. 236. Also see L. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context”, in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, p. 37.

1.3 Perception of Christianity as a “Foreign” Religion

The Sri Lankan Catholic/Christian Church is criticized for her colonial co-operation and inheritance of spirituality, theology, architecture, hymnody and ceremony from the imperial countries. As a result the Church is fearful and confused. The Sri Lankan theologians, particularly Aloysius Pieris, Tissa Balasuriya (1924-) and Anglican Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe, (1926-1983) see this reality of *foreignness* as the result of the Church being triumphalistic, being rich, elitist and middle-class oriented. They also criticize the Church for collaborating with the oppressors in power and for being allied with capitalism. This negative historical legacy which even today haunts the Christian Church lends support to Buddhists and Hindus to undermine the Church’s credibility and mission in Sri Lanka. This colonial inheritance is in fact contradictory to the mission and *kenotic* spirituality embodied in Jesus and brought to its perfect exposition on the Cross. Hence, it is not Christianity and its soteriological value that is seen as foreign but its close identification with the dominant cultures of colonialism, westernization and capitalism. It was the missionary movements’ perception of the mission of God coloured by their own cultural identities that came into direct conflict with the local culture shaped by Buddhism. In other words, the missionaries who came along with the colonial powers did not so much introduce the historical Jesus in the cultural idiom of Sri Lanka, but rather the Christ of the denominations that came from their home countries. In Pieris’ contention this leads to the primary and fundamental cause of *foreignness* of Christianity in Sri Lanka/Asia, namely, the Christianity’s failure to strike roots in the local “cosmic religiosity”.³² This is a fundamental issue of the inadequate perception of Christology and theology of revelation in the context of *so many religions* and *so many poor* in Sri Lanka that is reflected in the prevalent ecclesiological principles on which the local church functions.

³² Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1996, (Chapter 7), pp. 65-67.

1.3.1 Existence of Christianity before Colonial Times in Sri Lanka

The recorded Modern Catholic history of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) begins with the First Mass offered in Colombo by Fr. Frey Vicente, a Franciscan, after the arrival of the Portuguese on November 15, 1505.³³ This was never considered the beginning of the regular mission of evangelization which was taken up by missionaries around 1543.³⁴ This work of evangelization was further carried on by the Oratorians led by the great Apostle of Sri Lanka, Blessed Joseph Vaz, during the Dutch persecutions in the seventeenth century. The work was then consolidated by more recent European missionaries, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Sylvestro Benedictines, and the Jesuits. There were also women religious congregations that came along with them. Catholicism took deep root, especially in the western Maritime Provinces.

However, it needs to be noted here that stone inscriptions and coins found in the archeological excavations are evidence of the presence of foreign Christian officers in the service of the Sinhala kings during the period from 473 to 508. Furthermore, the much accredited historical work of the Greek writer Cosmas Indicopleustes entitled *Christianike Topographia*, testifies to the existence of Persian Nestorian-Christians in Ceylon as early as 535 A.D.³⁵ The decline of Persian merchants in Mannar and Nestorian-Christian adherents, and the sharing of Oriental commerce with the Arabs resulted in the gradual disappearance of the first Christian body in Ceylon. According to available accepted historical records there is no Christian presence

³³ Cf. Claude Lawrence, *Work and Working of the Archdiocese of Colombo in Ceylon*, Curia Secretariate Catholic Press, Colombo, 1970, p.30. Also see G. Prakasar, *A History of The Catholic Church in Ceylon - Vol. 1*, Messenger Press, Colombo, 1924, pp.18, 22.

³⁴ Cf. Robrecht Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon under Dutch Rule*, Officium Libri Catholici, Rome, 1957, p. 31. Before the evangelization proper began around 1543 Fr. F. Vicente and others who may have appeared in the scene were chaplains who ministered mainly to Portuguese military and their settlement rather than missionaries.

³⁵ Cf. S. G. Prakasar, *A History of The Catholic Church in Ceylon – Vol. 1*, pp. 9-10. Here, G. Prakasar makes reference to a Greek work entitled *Christianike Topographia* by Cosmas Indicopleustes. Cosmas Indicopleustes is a merchant from Alexandria who later became a monk.

in Ceylon from the sixth century to the sixteenth.³⁶ It is to the early decades of the sixteenth century that we have to look for large-scale evangelization and the true beginnings of the Catholic Church in Ceylon with the arrival of the Portuguese to the Island.

1.3.2 The Buddhist Experience of a Religio-cultural Invasion

The first form of Christianity in Ceylon was of course Roman Catholicism followed by Protestantism and Anglicanism under the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796) and the British (1796-1948) rules respectively. Today the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian body in the country accounting for 6.1% out of the 6.9% total Christian population.

With the introduction of the colonial powers early in the 16th century, and with the coming of the Portuguese in 1505, and the establishment of the Western hegemony over Ceylon, conditions began to change. The history of colonization, marked by Western cultural arrogance, cannot easily be separated from the history of the expansion of Christianity in Sri Lanka. To this day Sri Lankan Christianity bears the stamp of its colonial origin and Western imperialism. In reality Buddhists feel that Christianity is always the representative of the Western culture and imperialism. They tend to think of Christianity as an obstacle to their objectives. Hence there is a psychological aversion to, and suspicion of, Christianity.

As in any other Asian nation, except the indigenous churches in the Near East and Kerala, the Church in Sri Lanka is the result of colonial expansion and missionary outreach

³⁶ Cf. G. Prakasar, *A History of The Catholic Church in Ceylon*, p. 10-12. G. Prakasar citing Sir James Emerson Tennent: *Christianity in Ceylon* states that the account of Suleiman (visited Ceylon c. 851) does not evidently speak of the presence of Christians in Ceylon since it states simply the presence of multitude of Jews and many other religions. Prakasar further goes to show that not even Marco Polo the Venetian Christian traveler who has visited Ceylon about the year 1290 A.D. mentions any presence of Christians in the Island. Especially the silence of the Franciscan monk, Blessed Odoric of Portenan in Friuli, Italy, about Christian presence in Ceylon who set out on his missionary travels in 1315-1316 which included Ceylon is very significant. Bishop Giovanni de Marignolli, an Italian Minorite, who was a Legate of Pope Clement VI (1347-1352) is known to have passed through Ceylon c. 1349 also keeps no record of Christians presence in the Island.

working hand –in-hand. However, before we proceed further we need to qualify the above popular impression for a balanced understanding of the issue at hand. While it is true that the logistics provided by the colonial set-up certainly facilitated the spread of the missions it is too simplistic to say that faith followed the trade routes and the colonial sword. As Kitsiri Malalgoda, a prominent Sri Lankan sociologist, points out, in terms of effective colonial policy colonial governmental powers (Portuguese and Dutch) did not have a clear idea of mission nor did they feel a strong moral obligation to ‘civilize and Christianize the heathen’. He further asserts that apart from some individual administrators the governing body in general lacked a positive moral obligation towards the people they governed. Their primary concern had been political expediency and economic gain.³⁷ Robrecht Boudens notes that the Pope saw the danger of Catholic missions being identified with the Portuguese conquest and, in principle, did not like the Portugal King’s policy of monopoly preventing the missionaries of different religious Orders working for more effective missions. These initial background reasons led Rome to found the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith as the principal authority under the Pope in respect to the missions.³⁸

In any case, whatever the nuances, however great the social contribution of the mission Churches in the past, however heroic the sacrifices of cross-cultural missionaries over the centuries, the fact remains: the Latin Church *in* Sri Lanka in the mind of the “natives” is a foreign presence. In other words, in the mind of the “non-Christian” majority of Sri Lankans, Buddhists and Hindus, the Christian faith is linked to the culture and political powers of the colonizers and that of the West. Unfortunately, this major reality of the foreign presence of the Latin Church in Asia has not been given due attention by the Roman authorities at the Asian

³⁷ Cf. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900*, p. 36.

³⁸ Cf. R. Boundens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule*, p. 44.

synod of 1998.³⁹ This is true despite of what the Asian bishops have said in their interventions and recommendations.

In the perception of Rienzie Perera, an Anglican priest of Sri Lanka, the local Christian Church still struggles with the historical legacy of being a “replica of the Western Church” with the inability to enter into a process of serious inculturation.⁴⁰ While he admits that the Christian Church has made attempts from time to time to indigenize the church he holds that they are “cosmetic approaches”. He is also critical about the *social power* that the Christian Church, though a minority community, which derived from its schools and institutions. He shows how it is contradictory to the mission of Jesus and the spirituality he embodied. However the irony is that many in both the Catholic and Protestant Church in Sri Lanka see this social power not as a contradiction but as a great opportunity to serve the nation. This triumphalistic or power ecclesiology which is still operative to a great extent stands in the way of the Church evolving to be the Church of Sri Lanka as will be discussed later in this chapter. Pieris pointing to a much needed ecclesiological revolution calls for the Christian Church to undergo a double baptism, namely to be baptized in the “Jordan of Asian religion” and on the “Calvary of Asian poverty.”⁴¹ He asserts that unless the institutional church undergoes this double baptism, it can hardly hope to be a credible witness to the Word of revelation (that Jesus himself) or a readable sign of salvation for Sri Lankans/Asians. It is certainly a call to renounce the Church’s dominant image and identify with Sri Lanka /Asian culture and the suffering of its people.

³⁹ Cf. John M. Prior., “Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of Ecclesia in Asia,” in: *EAPR*, vol. 37, no.3, 2000, p.261. John Mansford states that the exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* mentions the reality of the foreignness of the church in Asia in passing in a single sentence as though it is no more an issue (*EA*. no. 9).

⁴⁰ Cf. Rienzie Perera, “Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious Context,” *CTC Bulletin*, Christian Conference of Asia, vol. XIV, no. 1-2 (April-August), 2008, (pp.50-55), here p. 53.

⁴¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, pp. 45-50.

As noted in the report *The Betrayal of Buddhism*, Sinhalese lost two things which they most value as a result of colonial dominance, namely, their culture (or distinct nationality) and their religion since the Sinhalese society had absorbed into their system the false values and social practices of the West. In short, the Buddhist majority interpret the advent of Christianity with the colonial powers as a religio-cultural invasion. One of the negative values that damaged the Sinhalese Buddhist culture is “the acquisition of wealth by fair means or foul.” It is directly against strong Buddhist values such as nonattachment and right livelihood. This value will be discussed later in the Third and Fourth Chapters highlighting Pieris’ proposed spirituality of “freedom from want” and “freedom from need” in our attempt to develop a *language* of credibility of divine revelation in the multi religious context of Sri Lanka.

Hence, the Church in Sri Lanka has not only the uphill task of removing the haunting negative impact of colonialism and westernization, but also the task of liberating Jesus the Christ from the misguided interpretations of dogmas and the teachings of the Church. This attitude will allow Jesus to take his true identity in the local context and become the crucified and saving presence among the crucified and broken “religious poor” of Sri Lanka. This is exactly what Jesus did at the Jordan when he stood among the baptized and identified himself with the “religious poor” of the countryside.⁴² This revelation of God’s identification with the poor in Jesus made its highest realization on the Cross in the form of, in Pieris’ terms, an *irrevocable defense pact between God and the poor*.

However, it should be clearly stated that generally speaking, Jesus Christ is widely respected and loved by the majority non-Christian Sri Lankans: Buddhists see him as a social reformer and a great teacher. The Buddhists identify Jesus who sides with the poor to bring total human liberation. Hindus treat him as an avatar, *an* incarnation of God. Muslims recognize and

⁴² Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 46.

respect Jesus as a great prophet as he is mentioned in the Koran. And for many others he is a great liberator.⁴³ Furthermore, many people reading the Bible may recognize Jesus as a great man whose teaching and example have universal relevance even though only a Christian in his faith confesses him as the incarnate Word.

Hence the crux of the matter is neither Christ nor his acceptance in faith or rejection by Asians/Sri Lankans but rather the Latin Church's alien tone and idiom inherited from the colonial past. At the same time, on the functional level, why Christianity was/is considered foreign, is also the result of an inadequate theology of mission and theology of Church by which the missionaries were guided. At the foundational level, Christianity is basically a revealed religion. Hence, it is the unhealthy Christological assumption and inadequate theology of revelation that painted Christianity to look foreign when it re-entered Asia through missionaries. That is why there is a strong need in the Sri Lankan Church today for an adequate theology of revelation, the basis and the centre of theology, which shapes and reshapes the whole of theology. However, we must remember that it was only at the Council of Vatican II (1962-65) that the official Catholic Church leadership for the first time studied the theology of revelation in itself by analyzing the nature, the object and the content of revelation. It substantially effected a change in pre-suppositions in theology.⁴⁴ The Council of Vatican I, instead, in its prevailed

⁴³ Cf. The response of The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka to the *Lineamenta* of the Asian Synod 1998 found in Peter Phan (ed.), *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries*, Orbis, N.Y., 2002, p. 40-44.

⁴⁴ In the history of Christianity, *Dei Verbum* became the first Conciliar document on God's Self-revelation. But this does not mean to deny the fact that Vatican I was the first council to deal formally and explicitly with the theme of revelation in its constitution *Dei Filius* (1870), which was as such a consideration on faith. *Dei Filius* has confronted the issue of revelation not from out of Revelation itself but from the external provocation of rationalism from the Enlightenment (Cf. G. O'Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, Great Britain, Geoffrey Chapman, 1993, p.57. Also see R. Fisichella, *Introduction to Fundamental Theology*, Piemme, Rome, 1996, pp. 83-84).

historical context was preoccupied with countering the challenges posed by Rationalism and Hegelianism than developing a fully formulated theology of revelation as such.⁴⁵

1.3.3 Overview of Ecclesiology in Pre-independent Sri Lanka

During the colonial period the missionary reintroduction of Jesus and Christianity into Asia, the birth continent of Jesus, marks also the beginning of the period of introducing the Euro-ecclesiastical expansionism in Asia. On one hand, this can be viewed as an unfortunate historical event since it marked the rejection of Christianity from its home continent at its re-entry. On the other hand, it is a fortunate happening since Christianity met, for the first time, with the challenge of the soteriological core of other meta-cosmic religions of Asia. This encounter of religions showed Christianity the only way it has to re-enter the Sri Lankan/Asian religio-cultural ethos.

Pieris argues that ecclesiology in the first half of the 20th century *in* Sri Lanka was built on a *Christological justification of the Church's social power*.⁴⁶ In other words, the official Catholic Church in Sri Lanka understood its *superior social position* and particularly *the right to educate* their flock in Catholic schools as a God-given authority.⁴⁷ It was this ecclesiological basis which guided the Sri Lankan Church in its mission orientation and accounts for its severe

⁴⁵ Cf. Joseph Pottmeyer, "La Costituzione *Dei Filius*," in: Rino Fisichella (ed.), *Teologia Fondamentale: Convergenze per il Terzo Millennio*, Piemme, 1997, pp.19-39.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Catholic Church *in* Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country's Independence (1948-1998)," in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. XXV-XXVI (1998-1999), p. 255. In substantiating his position Pieris analyses the motivation and the ecclesiology behind the official Catholic Church's pro-Sinhala Buddhist solidarity in the 1870s and that of its protest against the Schools take over by the state in 1960's. He then suggests a much needed a paradigm shift from "Domination Christology" to "Servant Christology" as the new basis for a Sri Lankan ecclesiology.

⁴⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Catholic Church *in* Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country's Independence (1948-1998)," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 256. Here, Pieris making reference to the pamphlet published by Fr. J. B. Martin in 1913, prefaced by the Archbishop A. Courdert of Colombo, in protest of the proposal of a State-run University College drives the point home. The establishment of the University College was considered as only a preliminary step in the ultimate creation of a fully-fledged University. The Ceylon University College Colombo was founded in 1921 with recognition granted by University of London to prepare students for some of its Arts and Science external degrees.

opposition to the take-over of the schools in 1960s by the state power. It is evident that the *social power* gained by the Church in Sri Lanka by the beginning of the 20th century was a result of a strong network of Catholic schools.⁴⁸ The school system was so important that the Catholic Church was identified with the Catholic schools. Hence, in showing the gravity of the take-over of Catholic schools, scholars rightly observe, that in the mind of the official Catholic Church it was not just a loss of privileges in general, but above all a threat to the “Catholic Identity” in the country.⁴⁹ These Catholic schools which produced an English-educated elite and the power base of the society, were viewed, particularly by the aspiring rural elite, as a symbol of foreign domination. Thus the Catholic Church was viewed as the supporter of the colonial elite system. In fact, contrary to the general belief, Protestant missionary schools and later Catholic schools served more the purpose of creating and sustaining the colonial elite system than being interested in proselytising the school children even beyond the period of independence. At the same time, as history proves, despite the best effort of missionaries, it was only a minority of the pupils at mission schools who became Christians due to strong Buddhist family background which prevailed in the country.⁵⁰ This historical truth is commonly visible in the rest of Asia too which after four long centuries of colonialism has surrendered only about two percent of its population to Christianity. It is within these living realities that the Sri Lankan/Asian theologians grapple to find meaning in religious pluralism within one single universal plan of salvation of God for humanity. Pieris, who reminds us that Sri Lanka/Asia will always remain non-Christian, strongly advocates the need to use the soteriological idiom of non-Christian religions if we want to make

⁴⁸ Cf. François Houtart, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, T.P.I., Bangalore, 1974, pp. 282-283.

⁴⁹ Cf. R. L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting*, p. 42. Also see Ulrich Dornberg, *Searching Through the Crisis: Christian, Contextual Theology and Social Change in Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 1980s*, published as *Logos* vol. 31, nos. 3&4, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1992, (pp. 1-232), here pp. 38-39.

⁵⁰ Cf. R. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhist Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*, p. 209. Also see Ulrich Dornberg, *Searching Through the Crisis*, published as *Logos*, vol. 31, 1992, p. 38.

sense of Christ in our cultures which developed invariably around a soteriological nucleus.⁵¹ As we saw earlier, *Sangha*, the monastic nucleus of Buddhism, plays a unique formative role in Sri Lankan national identity, and is the institutional liberative core of Buddhist society in Sri Lanka for it is the repository of the *Dhamma*.⁵²

However, as Pieris substantively points out, this ecclesiological foundation which made a dent especially in the relationship between the Catholics and the Buddhist was not a mere coincidence. The ecclesiology of the time that molded the Church in Sri Lanka has its roots in the theory of “the Social Kingship of Christ.” It was developed between 1860 and 1880 as a consequence of the French Revolution by a conservative French Jesuit professor of Philosophy of Law, Henri Ramiere. This theory was later appropriated in the Official Church by Pope Pius XI.⁵³ It is undisputed that the Church in Sri Lanka who at that time was reputed as the country’s leading educationist and the unrivalled school-manager did in fact strongly contribute to the growth of literacy in our country. However, this aggressive basis of the ecclesiology of the time met with Buddhist opposition in its strongest terms in the document *The Betrayal of Buddhism* issued by the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry in 1956.

Before the Second Vatican Council, the main focus of the Western church’s mission or to be precise the Western theology of mission, was the “saving of souls.”⁵⁴ This unfortunately transformed the Christianity of the missionaries in Sri Lanka/Asia into a religion that was

⁵¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 59, 70, and 74.

⁵² Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 75.

⁵³ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country’s Independence (1948-1998),” in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 257-259. Also see Daniele Menozzi, “Regalità Sociale di Cristo e Secolarizzazione. alle Origini della *Quas Primas*,” in: *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna, vol. 16/2, Febbraio 1995, (79-113), esp. p. 79 where the author cites a strong passage from the text of Cardinal C. Laurenti reflecting the Pope Pius XI’s mind at a Congress for the laity held in Italy in September 1924. The theory “the Social Kingship of Christ,” accounts perhaps for the *modus operandi* of the so-called *Catholic Action* which the Pope Pius XI himself promoted.

⁵⁴ Cf. M. Amaladoss, “The Challenges of Mission Today,” in: William Jenkinson and Helene O’Sullivan (eds.), *Trends in Mission*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991, (pp. 359-397), esp. 360.

exclusive. Hence, the *foreignness* was directly founded on the prime objective and vision of the Christian missionary thrust. This sidelined an important component of spirituality, namely, the living situations of the human beings (*sitz im leben*) and the role of other religions. The importance of one's living context for God's mediation of salvation for humanity will be discussed later in the thesis. This need for "salvation of souls" emerged from an erroneous theological thinking that other religions are false and are destructive to the souls of persons, and that they are not true paths of salvation.⁵⁵ Salvation is only through Christianity. Though the concept of the "saving of souls" was not the official doctrine of the Church, it was a popular belief, that people who were not baptized would not be saved. As a result of this deficient thinking at a particular time in the history of Western Christianity the general drive was to expand the Catholic Church by way of baptizing as many as possible. This attitude certainly projects Christianity as a foreign religion in the multi-religions context of Sri Lanka and in a context where viable theologizing is possible only through dialogue.⁵⁶

1.3.4 Overview of the Ecclesiology in Post-independent Sri Lanka

The independence in 1948 marked a smooth transition from a State Council to a Parliament under British tutelage, with the colonizer-trained local leadership at the helm of the government. Though the mission schools lost their monopoly of modern education in 1969 with

⁵⁵ Cf. L. De Silva, "Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, p. 39.

⁵⁶ For the Sri Lankan Church (or Asian Church) 'dialogue' is not simply one activity among others but is the comprehensive *modus operandi* of its entire mission. The basic methodology of inculturation, according to the documents of Asian Federation Bishop Conference (FABC) is a dialogical encounter of all the elements of the inculturation process. Dialogue is not primarily an intellectual exchange among experts and religious leaders, as the term 'dialogue' often suggests. Rather, it involves a four-fold *presence* (forms), namely, dialogue of life (where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, and their human problems and preoccupations), dialogue of collaborative action (in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people), dialogue of religious experience (where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of search for God or The Absolute) and, dialogue of reflection-theological exchange (where specialist seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and appreciate each others' spiritual values.)

the opening of the government Department of Public Instruction and the first non-monastic Buddhist school in the country, the education at the English-medium schools run by the Catholic Church and Christian Churches in general remained the sole point of entry to the ruling elite of the society well after independence.⁵⁷ Hence, given this general socio-political atmosphere at the time of independence the official church was not aware of the gradual revival of the Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness. It started in 1750s with the arrival of Siamese Monks from Burma when *Sāsana* was at low ebb due to the decline in knowledge of the *Dhamma* (doctrine) and *Vinaya* (morals).⁵⁸ This Buddhist revivalism grew with the advent of Anagārika Dharmapāla as we noted earlier. The Buddhist resurgence which gradually identified among its true enemies the Protestant Christians shifted its anti-Christian fervor from Protestant to the Roman Catholic Church after independence. The Buddhists saw the Catholic Church after independence as an *oppressively dominant minority* and an extension of Western imperialism.⁵⁹

One of the most active movements of cultural and language revival during the post-independence, especially mid-fifties, was the *Hela Havula* which was begun by Munidasa Kumaratunga in 1941. The official Catholic Church (the clerical sector of the church) which was not perceptive enough to monitor the gradual Sri Lankan cultural transformation was taken by surprise in the mid-fifties. Motivated by the *Hela Havula* movement the Sinhala Catholic teachers of the church-run Sinhala schools too faced the crisis of cultural identity. The Church in Sri Lanka also ran English medium schools in that period. The Sinhala Catholic teachers faced a crisis of being loyal to the church while being in search of cultural identity in the Sinhala culture shaped by Buddhism. This cultural dichotomy was also seen at the same time in Catholic liturgy

⁵⁷ Cf. R. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhist Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*, p. 208.

⁵⁸ Cf. K. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhala Society, 1750-1900*, esp. pp. 61-69.

⁵⁹ Cf. R. Gombrich and G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhist Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*, p. 219. Also see A. Pieris, "The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country's Independence (1948-1998)," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 259 - 260.

where the priest used Latin, while the people participated in their native tongue of Sinhala or Tamil. There were no major changes even with the new liturgical reforms in the sixties.

Furthermore, in the contention of Pieris, contrary to those who think otherwise, there has not been any *serious* “inculturation” among the Sinhalese Catholics at any time.⁶⁰ There had been sporadic attempts by certain individuals and groups without support from the official church.⁶¹

This again proves the lack of adequate theology, devoid of valid propositions with which theologizing is done in the Sri Lankan context today. As FABC rightly recognizes in the general Asian context, the aforesaid dichotomies are a result of not taking the context and the contextual realities as resources of theology, *loci theologici*. They are seen as the mere background against which one did theology.⁶² Such theology would never engage in serious “inculturation” but would end up with adopting, translating and applying the message to people who try to experience full humanity through their cultures and religions.

⁶⁰ Here, the “inculturation” is understood in terms of “Liturgy of Life,” i.e. our living out the Paschal Mystery in our daily struggle to transform a given culture into an anticipation of the Reign of God already now. In practice it is basically a natural process of mutual ‘dialogue’ between the Gospel lived individually or in a community of believers as a local church on one hand, and of the local context or contextual realities on the other. Inculturation is a natural process, which cannot or should neither be externally imposed nor be the conscious target of any action. It happens spontaneously in the course of our struggle to bring in God’s reign in our local context. For further detail on the subject refer A. Pieris, “Inculturation: Some Critical Reflection,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, no. 11, 1993, pp. 641-651. Also see Jacob Kavunkal, “Mission as Inculturation,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 63, no. 11, 1999, pp. 860-869.

⁶¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country’s Independence (1948-1998),” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 261.

⁶² See FABC, *Methodology*, paper 96, Chapter Three: Theological Method in an Asian context: I quote,

1. “Traditionally, the use of contextual realities meant that the context was the background against which one did theology. This background was the people, their culture, religion, history and struggles. The faith or the Gospel and tradition must address the questions and challenges thrown up by the context and respond to them. This kind of theology was concerned with the ways of adapting and applying the message to people in their concrete socio-religio-cultural situations”
2. “Today “context” has a new meaning and perspective. Contexts, or contextual realities, are considered resources of theology (*loci theologici*) together with the Christian sources of Scripture and Tradition. Contextual realities become resources of theology insofar as they embody and manifest the presence and action of God and his Spirit. This is recognized through discernment and interpretation. It calls for theological criteria to recognize and assess the *loci*.”

As Asian Christians, while we rely on the Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scriptures (*Dei Verbum* 10) we need to do theology together with Asian contextual realities as resources, insofar as we discern in them God’s presence, action and the work of the Spirit. In other words, as the Vatican II document on Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) clearly asserts, “history” is not just a setting for God’s word to be expressed (as in the Scholastic theology); rather history is itself revelatory. God’s Word is heard even today in history. He still speaks.

1.4 Overview of Efforts to Overcome Foreignness

From the time of political independence of Sri Lanka in 1948, despite certain improvements in collaboration and dialogue with people of other faiths, the local Catholic Church faces an uphill task in overcoming the agonizing image of its *foreignness*. This is particularly true in the minds of the Buddhist majority who had a bitter experience of Christian domination and aggression in the past. Moreover, the official church which operated within the mentality of the *power-ecclesiology*, fundamentally lacked a self-critical disposition and much needed adequate theological basis to respond creatively to anti-Catholic reactions. These reactions of the fifties marked the height of Buddhist resurgence after the time of the charismatic reformer Anagārika Dharmapāla. In fact, as a result of such deficiency the Catholic Church, despite of the privilege position of its Sinhala and Tamil membership, missed out on a golden opportunity of to give the Church a much needed credibility as a local prophet. The Church should have prevailed upon the policy makers who passed the “Sinhala-Only-Bill” which did massive damage to the national harmony in the following years. Hence, at present the Catholic Church is in urgent need of a paradigm shift in ecclesiology with the backing of an adequate theology of revelation and Christology.

However, it needs to be mentioned that, with the ecumenical spirit infused by the Second Vatican Council, the local church felt a strong need to re-assess its old perspectives on the social reality of Sri Lanka in its attempt to restate the Christian message in the local cultural idiom and thus identify its new role in the country. Unfortunately, as it was in the late sixties, the local church’s attempts to engage in inter-religious dialogue with the Buddhist, is treated by some as a tactical move to get around the non-Christian masses. This prevailing tense situation in Sri Lanka is not a surprise since the local church as an institution has been very slow to read the signs of

the time and to absorb the *spirit* of the Second Vatican Council. The Catholic Church's present position causes confusion and polarization on the issue of dialogue and proclamation. It was reflected in the differences of opinions between the interventions of Episcopal Conferences of Asia in the preparatory stages of the Asian Synod 1998 and the final Document *Ecclesia in Asia* (esp. Nos. 19 & 20).⁶³ This confusion prevents the Church from not being able to address the Sri Lanka living reality of religious pluralism, poverty, injustice, and discrimination. However, we can observe an official church's change of theological perspectives on social realities, though slow, particularly after the Marxist-inspired Sinhala Rural Youth-Revolt in 1971 demanded a radical socio-political structural change.⁶⁴ The revolt of 1971 was so significant that it shifted the rivalry in the fifties/sixties between Sinhala-Buddhist verses Christians and the Tamils to under-privileged majority verses the privileged few.⁶⁵ However, given the present socio-political context of the country, the Sri Lankan Catholic Church needs to ask itself whether it has done enough to change its church-centred *power-ecclesiology* to a "Reign of God"-oriented *kenosis-ecclesiology*, even after the emergence of the frustrated Tamil-Youth Revolt from the mid-seventies.

Here we need to take note of three new major contributing factors that perpetuated the image of *foreignness* and an unhealthy climate of tension between Christian and other religions,

⁶³ Responding to John Paul II, as he promulgated *Ecclesia in Asia* in Delhi, Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, Archbishop of Jakarta, Indonesia, said, "Yes, it is true that there is no authentic evangelization without announcing Jesus Christ, Saviour of the whole human race. But for Asia, there will be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures." (Cf. J. Cardinal Darmaatmadja, "A New Way of Being Church in Asia," in: *VJTR*, vol. 63, 1999, (pp. 887-891), here p. 891.

⁶⁴ For a socio-political analysis of the relationship between the political field and the religious field and its impact on the religious groups in Sri Lanka, and for our purpose here, the Youth Insurrection of 1971: Cf. F. Houtart, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, esp. pp. 344-358.

⁶⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country's Independence (1948-1998)," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 262. This socio-political and cultural setting gives us a glimpse of the local background for Pieris' theological journey which we will discuss in the second chapter of this thesis.

particularly between Catholics and Buddhists.⁶⁶ First, the Open Market Economic policy that began in 1977. It not only paved the way for the worst of Western liberalism which had facilitated a radical erosion of socio-cultural values in the country but also for the easy intrusion of fundamentalist Christian groups with a strong Western financial backing. They preached a new version of the “colonial-Christ.” This negative socio-cultural impact together with the official Catholic Church’s lack of collective responsibility and indifferentism towards the effect of the negative influence on the religion and culture of the country accounts for the Buddhists’ suspicion of the Catholic Church’s neo-colonial mentality. Second, the long standing ethnic conflict perpetuates the tensions in the relationship between Buddhists and the Catholic Church, due to its large ethnic Sinhala and Tamil membership. Given the sensitivity of the country’s ethnic conflict, the involvement of Tamil Christians, especially priests, in the struggle of the Tamils has been highlighted as evidence of the anti-Buddhist stance of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, this complicated and tensed situation sowed the seeds of suspicion even on the Catholic/Christian centres of dialogue and encounter for national harmony as supportive of the division of the country. These centres are seen as consolidating Christianity by de-stabilizing Buddhism.⁶⁷ The third negative impact on the Sri Lankan Church’s image and credibility was Rome’s insistence on “New Evangelization” geared towards church-expansionism to celebrate

⁶⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “Dialogue and Distrust between Buddhist and Christians: A Report on the Catholic Church’s Experience in Sri Lanka,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. 22, 1995(pp. 104-121), pp.115-120.

⁶⁷ However, amidst these trying conditions these dialogue centres continue with their relentless efforts to help both groups of the ethnic divide to come together to discern their common enemy taking into account the indispensable social realities of the Tamil frustrations and Sinhala fears. According to Pieris the general thesis of these dialogue groups is that this conflict is the result of worshiping the *false God*, namely, the national idol of race and language, and that the *evangelization* is a risky option that must be carried out against such idolatry.

the 2000th birthday of Christ.⁶⁸ The zealous advocates of this “New Evangelization” certainly have overlooked the Proselytism which Jesus condemned (Mt. 23: 15)⁶⁹ and the Euro-ecclesiastical expansionism of the colonial period.

However, we need to note that in Sri Lanka there had been certain groups and individuals both Protestant and Catholic, who had in various ways anticipated Vatican II’s new perspectives with regard to other religions and local contextual realities. It is these pioneering seminal efforts that initially created the atmosphere for the local Catholic Church to receive particularly the teachings of Vatican II on Liturgy, the Church in the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*) and on other religions (*Nostra Aetate*), with some measure of success.

Here we can observe three other major factors that directly or indirectly encouraged the Sri Lankan Catholic Church in its struggle of rediscovery of its true identity, namely, non-Catholic precedents of dialogue and inculturation, the Government takeover of Catholic schools in 1960s, the rural Sinhala Youth Revolt in 1971 demanding a radical structural change in the political system.⁷⁰ These challenging realities made the Catholic Church redefine its credible identity taking into account the deep rooted socio-religious realities and the living condition of the majority-poor in the country. Sri Lanka is a country of religious pluralism and experiences abject poverty. The Catholic Church felt the urgent need to redefine its mission in an atmosphere of dialogue with the religions, culture and people (Triple-Dialogue). However, this Triple-

⁶⁸ Church-expansion by numerical increase was insisted by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Propagation of Faith at a conference held in Indonesia in 1990. It was attended by the delegates of FABC and the Nuncios in the Asian regions. This conference was followed by another in Kandy, Sri Lanka on a later date insisting on the same message (Cf. A. Pieris, “Dialogue and Distrust between Buddhist and Christians: A Report on the Catholic Church’s Experience in Sri Lanka,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 118-120).

⁶⁹ The conversion Jesus advocated was “a change of ways” (Hebrew *shub*, Greek *metanoia*) oriented towards the Reign of God. Jesus condemned proselytism, i.e. conversion from one religion to another. It can happen through Christians’ life of witness to Jesus and his mission but never as an organized program of activity which is unethical.

⁷⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “Dialogue and Distrust between Buddhist and Christians: A Report on the Catholic Church’s Experience in Sri Lanka,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 109-112. The 1971 insurrection was a movement of rural, non-Westernized Sinhala youth. They represented the most disadvantaged groups in the South of the country and expressed new aspiration aroused in part by the generalized spread of education.

Dialogue was taken seriously only after the inception of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC) in 1974. But the Catholic Church's shift in theological orientation after 1971 was not as radical and forward looking as lay movements like the Christian Workers' Fellowship (1958) and some other dialogue and encounter centres which emerged in 70s. We will briefly study them below.

1.4.1 Pioneering Efforts made by Groups and Individuals both Protestant and Catholic

With the immediate context of independence in 1948, and the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in 1956, the Christian Church was placed in a situation of new challenges and opportunities. It had to evolve its theology and mission in the face of the rising tide of religious renewal in the country as well as the ever deteriorating conditions of the poor. However, the general theological thinking among the educated elite in the Catholic and Protestant Church up to the Seventies has been liberal⁷¹ rather than *liberational*. The orientation and the atmosphere created by the Youth Insurrection of 1971 made certain sections of Catholic and Protestant Church realize that liberalism of the elite was not adequate. This socio-political setting made a significant impact on some clerics and lay persons. They were in search of the true Church of Sri Lanka with a Reign of God-oriented *kenosis-ecclesiology*, to move from the *liberal* phase to the *liberational*. For Catholic theologians this transition was a space created to discern the true historical role of the Church of the time in keeping with the *spirit* of the Vatican II's Conciliar teachings.

⁷¹ The liberal theological trend of the time did in fact influence in a limited way in at least four areas as identified by Pieris: namely, a. the liturgical renewal in terms of using the local Languages at worship and de-ritualization of church services; b. establishment of parish councils which involved lay participation, recognition of priests' senates and councils; c. dialogue and collaboration with other religions even secular ideologies; d. promoting a more radical involvement in social issues on the part of Priests and Religious (Cf. A. Pieris, "The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country's Independence (1948-1998)," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 269).

a) The Christian Workers' Fellowship (1958)

As a positive Protestant Christian response to the anti-Western and anti-Christian current of the time there emerged a movement: *The Christian Workers' Fellowship* in 1958. This lay movement began during the time of the Sinhala Buddhist resurgence and the churches' insensitivity to their social responsibilities. It benefited over the years from the social vision of Anglican bishops Lakshman Wickremesinghe, Kenneth Fernando, Catholic Bishop Leo Nanayakkara and, priest-theologians Aloysius Pieris and Lynn de Silva. Upholding its non-denominational character, but recognized by the churches, CWF works among industrial workers, farmers, tea plantation workers and Free-Trade-Zone workers. It advocates the cause of some of the poorest in the nation, and they operate across religious and ethnic lines under a broad international economic philosophy. It is also an ecumenical lay group which has worked at evolving contextual theology and liturgy relevant to the context. It developed a liturgy called "The Workers' Mass" which began with the involvement of its authors with the workers' problems for many years. They interpreted their daily struggle with the workers' in the light of the Word of God by reading the Scriptures and seeing the history of the country as a history of revelation and salvation.⁷² In Sri Lanka, CWF has been a pathfinder and trailblazer in its chief characteristics such as: lay leadership, contextual theology, meaningful and proclamational liturgies, Christian art and liturgical music, commitment to inter-religious dialogue, action and worship, openness to inter-faith communion and the churches' social

⁷² Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, no. 11, 1993, (pp. 641-651), here, p. 646. This is very much in line with the Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, particularly Nos. 11 and 8. According to Pieris "The Workers' Mass" approved by the official local church has not diluted a single dogma and has found language of the Workers irrespective of their creed. Furthermore, this is exactly what Pieris means when he says that inculturation begins not with the sacramental liturgy of the church but with the "Liturgy of Life"; that the intended liturgical renewal by Vatican II is a "change of *life*" and not a "change of *rite*."

involvement.⁷³ Interpreting the theology of the ‘Logos’ as a saving presence of God in all creation and religions and cultures, CWF articulates its basic theological position in its pamphlet *For a Real Sri Lankan Church* (1984, no 15):

Christ is the Word or Expression of God, the Logos. The Dharma and the Dynamic of history, who provides all human beings coming into existence with the means of salvation, the path of liberation on their own religio-cultural context (. . .). It is only when, through the working of Christ, the spiritual treasures found in these ancient religious streams and Christianity merge in a single river, that we will discover the face of a truly Asian Christ.⁷⁴

This movement was a creative response to the Buddhist and socialist aspirations of “the five-fold wave of power” consisting of the Monks, Indigenous Physicians, vernacular Teachers, Farmers and Workers which in fact brought a political structural change in the country in 1956.

b) Study Centre for Religion and Society (1962, Colombo)

It was partly in response to Sinhala Buddhist resurgence in the 50s that the Methodist church in collaboration with the National Christian Council (NCC) took the initiative to set up the “Study Centre for Religion and Society” in 1962 with as main concern the study of and dialogue with Buddhism. Lynn A. de Silva was its first director. This Centre

⁷³ Bishop Wickremesinghe was a founding member of CWF in 1958 while Bishop Leo associated himself with the movement from 1960s. Identifying the churches’ lacuna in the socio-cultural commitment Bishop Wickremesinghe began a discussion group with some white-collar Christian workers in Colombo city giving birth to “The Christian Workers Conference” in 1958 which later assumes the name “The Christian Workers’ Fellowship.” As T. Balasuriya notes CWF has had its beginnings even before Pope John XXIII’s reforms (1958-1963), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the changes initiated by the World Council of Churches reached Sri Lanka. For further discussion on CWF confer Tissa Balasuriya, “The Christian Workers’ Fellowship of Sri Lanka,” in: *Concilium*, 1993/2, pp. 121-130. Also see Robert Bobilin, “Buddhist and Christian Movements for Social Justice in Southeast Asia,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 8, University of Hawaii Press, 1988, pp. 5-12; John C. England and Jose Kuthianimattathil (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources* -Vol.1, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2002.

⁷⁴ Cf. T. Balasuriya, “The Christian Workers’ Fellowship of Sri Lanka,” in: *Concilium*, p. 126.

later assumed the name of “Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue” in 1977 due to its expansion of the area of work and administrative shift to an ecumenical committee.⁷⁵

Lynn A. de Silva identifying the inadequacy of the framework of traditional Christian theology in the Sri Lankan context, pioneered to facilitate a comprehensive study of Buddhism with a view to present the Gospel in an indigenous Buddhist cultural idiom through a dialogue with Buddhist. In other words, he attempted, in his own terminology, to ‘re-conceptualize’⁷⁶ Biblical revelation within the context of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in order to interpret and communicate the Gospel oriented to the conceptual framework of Buddhism. He followed an academic methodology. This Centre which still functions and publishes its journal, *Dialogue* since 1963. It has Aloysius Pieris, S.J., as its present editor.

Among the early Catholic initiatives to address the crying demands of the post independence era, particularly in the aftermath of the 1971 Youth Revolt, the following “centres” in the “periphery” of the Church can be cited:

c) The Center for Society and Religion (1971, Colombo)

This Center was co-founded by Bishop Leo Nanayakkara and Tissa Balasuriya, OMI.

The objective of the centre “is to help in the integral human liberation and fulfillment of the people of our country by their realization of human values in economic development with social justice, and the deepening of our culture and spiritual values.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Cf. L. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, p. 40. Also see John C. England, Jose Kuthianimattathil (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*-Vol.1, pp. 482 and 528.

⁷⁶ Cf. L. De Silva, “The understanding and Goal of Dialogue,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. 4, nos. 1 & 2 (1977), p. 7.

⁷⁷ John C. England, Jose Kuthianimattathil (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources* -Vol.1, p. 528-529.

d) The *Satyodaya* (1972, Kandy)

The *Satyodaya*, meaning the Dawn of truth, is a centre for Research and Encounter founded by Paul Caspersz, S.J. It concentrated on the estate sector. One of its major objectives is to integrate the Tamil estate labourers and Sinhala peasant as co-victims of a colonialist's policy that continues to this day.

e) *Tulana* Research Centre (1974, Kelaniya)

The *Tulana* Research and Encounter Center was founded by Aloysius Pieris, S.J. The use of the word *Tulana* is to be understood as *discernment* from the Sanskrit root *tul* meaning to elevate, weigh, compare. While the Center has evolved to become a forum for various academic encounters, and a Center for socio-cultural animation renewal, it continues to keep to its original purpose of Academic Research that would be deeply involved with the rural youth in the South.

In the emergence of contextual theological perspectives in Sri Lanka, the following Catholic initiatives too played a very significant role in a different sphere: Fr. Michael Rodrigo, OMI, engaged in *dialogue of life* for justice based at his centre, *Suba Seth Gedara* (1984) created a meaningful Christian presence in Buttala, in rural Lanka; Fr. Mervyn Fernando founded *Subodhi*, the Institute of Integral Education which provided the opportunity for humanistic education of youth and adults of all religious persuasion; Fr. Oscar Abeyratna played a significant role in the formation of a new Sri Lankan ecclesiology through *Pubuduwa*, the Catholic Charismatic Movement of Sri Lanka founded by him. It began as an inward-looking evangelistic revivalism but changed direction in the early eighties when the social reality of the

country, appeared to them as a *locus* of the Holy Spirit's transforming action. In the nineties it gave birth to a movement of inter-religious dialogue called *Agamika Samagi Sandhanaya*. It broadened the horizon of dialogue with clergy of other religions to include a dialogue of peace and justice, ecological preservation and a re-affirmation of core-religious values of our cultures in the face of a thriving market economy.

As a final remark of this section we need to acknowledge that these various Catholic/Christian attempts, movements, and groups in their common orientation are indeed the forerunners of the Sri Lankan Church's struggle to interpret and articulate its new religious identity. However, the present impression of *foreignness* of the Church in Sri Lanka in the eyes of the Buddhist majority and the Hindus would bear witness to the fact that Sri Lankan Christian theology has suffered from the polarization between divine revelation and context. As a result of not having considered the context of Sri Lanka, mainly consisting of poverty and religiousness, as a source of theology, the Sri Lankan Church and its theology continue to remain in its foreign garb since it was *planted* in Sri Lankan soil. Hence, it is evident that the Cross which is a daily living reality of the victims, the poor of Sri Lanka and their hopes, was for a long time either neglected by the theology of dialogue, or considered only in contrast with it. Therefore, the theology that operates at present in the Sri Lankan Church is in urgent need of finding the link between the Cross and the theology of inter-religious dialogue.

1.5 Conclusion

The Church *in* Asia must become the Church *of* Asia if it is to *communicate* the life-giving power and freedom of Christ to Asian people. The above analysis proves that it is exactly what the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, as any other Asian local church, should be in search of

since the Sri Lankan Church still has a foreign image fundamentally due to the polarization of divine revelation and context. However, this *communication* needs a code of *language* that evolves from within the uniqueness and peculiarities of Sri Lankan culture: the liberative core of its religions, its way of doing things, and modes of thoughts in so far as they are humanized ways of being. This is precisely the position of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC) in its invitation to Asian Churches and Christians to engage relentlessly and wholeheartedly in the Triple-Dialogue with Asian culture (inculturation), Asian religions (inter-religious dialogue), and Asians themselves, especially the poor (liberation). In other words, inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, and liberation must be considered as the integral dimensions of the Church's task of proclamation in Sri Lanka, coalesced around the building of the 'Reign of God.' It gives rise to a credible theology of revelation. In this dissertation I propose to make Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified, a central notion of his theology of religions, a compass to pilot the right direction and attitude in the search of a *language* to communicate the credibility of revelation in the Sri Lankan context.

However, in our authentic search for the credibility of Christian revelation in the Sri Lankan context (contextualization) we need to be aware of the official Church's legitimate concerns over the risk of "cultural captivity" and the danger of relativism in the context of religious pluralism. On the one hand there is a danger of identifying the Gospel too closely with a particular set of socioeconomic and political conditions or aspirations thus losing the needed healthy distance for the transformation of the local culture. On the other hand the inter-religious hermeneutics in the context of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka needs to be properly and scientifically handled to avoid the danger of relativism, skepticism, indifferentism, syncretism and nihilism of which the Asian theologians are often being cautioned by the official church.

However, in our search for a credible *language* of theology of revelation that affects the whole of theology we need to consider positively religious pluralism as a constitutive and intrinsic dimension of human knowing. As Asian theologians would say, religious pluralism should be regarded as belonging to God's intention and purpose for humankind, and not as a mere historical accident that requires us to regard religious pluralism as a curse to overcome.

In fact, to change the perspective in Asia, various religious traditions must be viewed primarily as 'expressions' of God's search for human beings, rather than a human search for God. Here the basic unity in pluralism is found in the Trinitarian God who is the origin of all things. However, this unity still has to be achieved in history, precisely through dialogue, where divine revelation (self-communication) takes place. This implies that a religion is basically viewed not as a system of doctrines, rituals and rules for behaviour but as a *saving-encounter* between God the creator and human person the creature. This saving relationship between God and the human person is lived in the cultural and of the historical context of the time in which one lives. This realization is not so much the conclusion of an argument, but is born out of the lived experience of other believers particularly in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka on which this thesis is focused.

CHAPTER TWO

The Theological and Spiritual Journey of Aloysius Pieris

2.1 Introduction

In the Second Chapter of my dissertation, I will concentrate on the unique theological and spiritual journey of Aloysius Pieris who has extensive scholarly training in philosophy and theology both in the Eastern and the Western schools of thought. The overall purpose of this Chapter is to shed light on the originality of Pieris' contribution to the theology of religions. I will deal with his profound understanding of revelation that makes a significant impact on his theology of religious pluralism in the Sri Lankan context. He also has the distinction of being the first Sri Lankan Catholic priest to obtain a doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy from a Buddhist University in Sri Lanka. He accomplished this in Sri Lanka in 1971. This Chapter will provide an overview of Pieris' childhood and family atmosphere leading to his vocation as a member of the Jesuit religious Order. With this general background I will proceed to study Pieris' theological and Buddhist philosophical formation journey in view of identifying the sources for the key elements of his theology of religions. It will analyze his autobiography which is being written at present and is expected to see the light of day in the near future.

I must acknowledge here with utmost gratitude the generosity of Aloysius Pieris who let me have access to his unpublished autobiography and the personal interviews he gave me when I returned to Sri Lanka in 2008, for research work at his Study Centre. Pieris calls his autobiography a *theography* by which he means *God's writing in Pieris' life, copied and read out in Pieris' own words*. This autobiography is still being written and will be published for public reading with due permission of the Superiors of Jesuit religious Order on a later date.

2.2 Brief Biographical Note on Aloysius Pieris S.J.¹

Aloysius Pieris is one of the most eminent of Asian theologians. He was born on 9th April, 1934 to a traditional Catholic family. He is academically trained both as a theologian and an Ideologist. He has been a Sri Lankan Jesuit since 23rd December 1953. He was ordained Catholic priest on 4th July, 1965.

He did his Licentiate in Philosophy at the Sacred Heart College (here after SHC) in Shembaganur, India before he was sent to Naples, Italy for theological studies (1962-66). His thesis for the Licentiate in Philosophy was entitled *Thomistic Critique of Buddhist Epistemology*. With the coming of Vatican II Council, Pieris, who was an avid Thomist had to de-scholasticise his mind during his theological studies. However, Pieris while greatly valuing his early philosophical and theological formation, later became a specialist in Buddhist *Abhidhammic* Scholasticism (Buddhist philosophy).

He has to his credit BA, First Class Honours, in Pāli and Sanskrit (University of London) in 1961; L. Ph. (SHC, Shembaganur, India) in 1959; Diploma in Prepolyphonic Music (Fond. Cini, Venice, Italy) in 1964; S.T.L. (Pontifical Theological Faculty, S. Luigi, Naples) in 1966; Th. D. (*Honoris Causa*, Tilburg University, Holland) in 1987;² and Ph.D. in Buddhist Philosophy (University of Sri Lanka) in 1971.

He has held a variety of professorships: Franciscan Chair of Missiology at Washington Theological Union (1987), Henry Luce Professorship at the Union Theological Seminary in New York (1988), and A. P. Wilson Distinguished Visiting Chair of Theology at Vanderbilt

¹ Cf. Robert Cruz et al. (eds.), *Encounters with the Word: Essays to Honour Aloysius Pieris* (hereafter, *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004, pp. 673- 676. The same source carries further Bio-Bibliographical information.

² This Honorary Doctorate was conferred on Pieirs in recognition of his Asian contribution to theology. Precisely, it was in recognition of his work *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, which at the time was still not brought into a book form. But it had been going round the world as an anthology made by private individuals and institutions such as the Office of Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (OHD-FABC).

University, Nashville, USA (1992). He was also the 1982 Teape Wescott Lecturer at Cambridge University, the 1990 Martin D'Arcy Lecturer at Oxford University. In 1990, he delivered the Drawbridge Lecture at King's College, London University, UK, and the Von Hugel Lecture at St. Edmund's College, Cambridge University. He has taught courses at Universities and learning institutes such as the Gregorian University, Rome (1972-73); Graduate Theological Union, Berkley, USA (1976); East Asian Pastoral Institute of the Athaneo de Manila University, Philippines (1972/3 to 1993/94). He also taught at the Vidyodaya Campus of the University of Sri Lanka (1993). He edits *Dialogue*, an international journal for Buddhists and Christians. He was a member of the Board of Editorial Directors of the International Theological Journal *Concilium* since 1986. After he resigned in 1994, he continued to serve on its overseas advisory board.

At present he is the director of the Tulana Research Center, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka which he founded in 1974. Looking at a detailed and unique profile of Pieris' theological education in Europe and Buddhist education in Asia, one would begin to appreciate his genuine authority and obligation in the field of theology of religious pluralism in Asia. Pieris' unique and creative theological contribution accounts for his being equally well grounded both in Buddhist philosophy of the East and in Christian/Catholic theology of the West. His theological mission and vision is best expressed in his own words: "I feel obliged in conscience to exercise a ministry of reconciliation whereby the *implicit judgment of the non-Christian East is brought to the threshold of Western theology.*"³ The above statement of Pieris stands for his positive and progressive theological attitude in his attempt to take the dialogue of religious pluralism beyond the confines of mere tolerance, with which dialogue begins, to positive participation, in which

³ A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, p.18.

dialogue should culminate.

In engaging in his theological mission of reconciliation between the East and the West Pieris chooses Buddhism out of the many Asian religions. He justifies his deliberate choice of Buddhism among other main religions in Asia for two unique reasons. First, he sees Buddhism as the most Asian among world religions because it is *pan-Asian* in cultural integration, numerical strength, geographical extension and political maturity. Second, Buddhism which originated as a reaction and a critique of prevailing theologies of the time in India legitimately presents itself as a counter-thesis to traditional Christianity. Thus it deserves due attention and a critical theological response on the part of the Christian/Catholic Church.⁴

2.3 An Overview of Pieris' Childhood and Family Atmosphere (1934-1953)

2.3.1 The Immediate Family⁵

Marian Aloysius Pieirs was born on 9th April, 1934 into an upper middle class traditional Catholic family in Sri Lanka. His mother, a devout Catholic, had longed to have a Jesuit son, named her tenth child Marian Aloysius wanting him to grow up into an Aloysius Gonzaga, S.J., imbued with Marian spirituality. Humorously and yet very symbolically Pieris states that it took long years of meditation and reflection to make Mary and Aloysius finally come to terms with each other in his heart and mind in his continuous effort to be true to his name, Marian Aloysius. He is the tenth in a family of twelve children. Pieris attended the

⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 18. A. Pieris' choice of Buddhism in his theological perusal of the Asian context does not imply that Buddhism exhausts the whole reality of Asian religiousness. However, he is convinced that Buddhism is the most Asian religion and that Asia will always remain a non-Christian continent. Therefore, Christianity must engage in a dialogue and consultation with the liberative core of Asian Buddhism to regain its lost "Asian sense" or to evolve an Asian theology (Also see A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, pp. 72-74).

⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, pp. 3-6 and 11-14.

village Catholic school where his father was the head master. He left for Galle Seminary in 1949 when he was fifteen years of age.

Aloysius Pieris father is Walter John Pieris, the Second son of Dajahetti Muhamdiramge Don David Pieris. His mother is Setunga Mudalige Dona Anselmina the daughter of Setunga Mudalige Don Jusey Appuhamy. They lived at St Joseph's Villa, Hallolouwa, Kandy. Walter John Pieris, saw three of his six daughters become nuns as well as two of his six sons become priests and a granddaughter a nun.

2.3.2 An Early Childhood Memory of the “Sword” in his Maternal Ancestry

Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified is amplified in his vision of “action on behalf of the poor” and “Church of the Poor.” It can be traced back to his *childhood dreams* and to the atmosphere in which he grew up as a child.

One of the early and strongest symbolic childhood memory Pieris recounts is of a story of a *Sword* in his *theography*. He referred to it as the *Sword in his Maternal Ancestry*. This sword was a part of the Mudlier's attire⁶ of Pieris' maternal grandfather. That sword had been very symbolic of his character since he had stood for justice of the poor particularly of the lower castes of his village. As Pieris notes his maternal grandfather had been a self-appointed judge who settled village disputes in favour of the poor and paid his lawyer-friend in Kandy for cases he brought against the unscrupulous who intimidated the weak.⁷ Pieris' grandfather, who had been a deeply spiritual minded person had lived up to his

⁶ Mudlier's attire consists of the silver-buttoned black coat covering even the neck, and the horse-shoe shaped ornamental comb fixed firmly on his head, and, a *sword* serving as the walking stick.

⁷ Pieris notes how his maternal Grandfather had boasted in his old age saying that he had fought for the down-trodden and that out of one hundred and fifty three cases he had fought at his expense and had won one hundred and fifty one, and the other two on appeal (Cf. A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 6).

catholic faith and convictions and, had taken pride in leading a life in defense of victims: the poor, the lower caste. This practice of Pieris' grandfather had been so close to his heart that Pieris' mother had often described it as the *first hobby* of her father among others. The grandfather of Pieris, a man of prayer and one who stood for justice for the poor, has had an impact on Pieris' life and spiritual journey. As he notes, the *Sword*, which is symbolic of his grandfather's character, still remains among their family possessions reminding them that he was a man who fought the cause of the poor.

2.3.3 Nurturing Vocation to the Priesthood

Pieris talks of the "Pole" in his Jesuit ancestry namely Mgr. Ladislaus Zaleski. He was the Papal Nuncio for India, Burma and Ceylon. Pieris gratefully remembers Zaleski, whom God, as he says, used as the stylus to write the introduction to the Jesuit part of his *theography*. Zaleski made the daring decision to establish his headquarters in Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon, the smallest of all three countries. His decision to establish the papal Seminary at Ampitiya in the hill city of Kandy where Aloysius Pieris was to be born a few decades later was providential. Coincidentally, it was Kandy, the home town of Pieris, which became the location of Zaleski's Nunciature as well.

Zaleski who was in search of the best possible men to run the Papal Seminary at Ampitiya was impressed by the Belgian Jesuits working in Ranchi, in India. After his unsuccessful initial attempts with Jesuit authorities, he went to the Pope and got the request relayed to the Belgian Jesuits of Ranchi. They sent some men to take up the new task of founding and managing the Papal Seminary in Ampitiya. It was these learned Belgian Jesuits who molded Pieris and his family by their friendship and guidance. They were instrumental in laying a strong foundation in

Pieris' vocation as a Jesuit religious priest and in his theological journey. According to him these people were not only learned professors but were spiritual giants. They in fact have created the first childhood impressions of 'Catholic Priests', particularly of Jesuits' and their love for the poor, in the mind of little Pieris. It was with these men of wisdom and knowledge that he spent after school hours. Such was the humility of those erudite men of God who groomed Master Pieris, as they would call him, to be a pathfinder in uncharted territories of the Asian multi-religious world. In the preface of his booklet, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, Pieris offers a glowing tribute to his childhood role models, the Belgian Jesuits, who taught at the then Papal Seminary in Ampitiya, Kandy.⁸ Pieris dedicated the booklet to these learned but humble professors who had an influence on his character and education.

Fr. Cyprian Lambert, one of the Seminary professors, who was also known as the "working dispensary," had been a childhood role model of Pieris who instilled in his mind that *action on behalf of the poor* was the Jesuits' mission and their spirituality even though they are academicians. In fact the exemplary life of Fr. Lambert in particular has indelibly engraved in the mind of Pieris the image of an academician immersed in the life of the suffering poor. His mission of healing the sick and comforting the suffering extended to everyone who was in need, irrespective of creed or caste of a person. As Pieris recounts, Fr. Lambert who eventually died of cancer drew unprecedented throngs of mourners: Christian and Buddhist, Tamil and Sinhalese.

Fr. Ancot, the rector of the Papal Seminary at the time had also been supportive of Fr. Lambert's mission. He had dispensed some of the seminarians from attending lectures and sent them to help Fr. Lambert to take care of the sick and the dying. Pieris recalls that Fr. Ancot who invariably was laden with administrative responsibilities as the rector of the Seminary with

⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor: A Return to the Jesus Formula* (hereafter, *God's Reign for God's Poor*) TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 1998, p. iii.

hundred or more seminarians, still had time to listen to what little Pieris had to say when he barged into the seminary after school. Pieris writes: “He [Fr. Ancot] had time for a little person like me. “Time is Love” became my motto in adult life. I learnt to give time to people in need.”⁹

Pieris remembers the Parish Priest of Ampitiya, Kandy, Fr. Peter de Silva, as one of the first Sinhala Jesuits who had a deep impact on his Jesuit life and spiritual journey. Peiris, in fact had joined Fr. Peter de Silva’s pastoral journeys to the scattered Christian families of the parish already at the age of twelve. In Pieris’ biographical account we can perceive that he was first moved by the work and the spirituality of these great priests of the poor and marginalized, and their religious order which he came to admire later. Pieris who did not know initially that Fr. Peter was a Jesuit even after joining with him in his pastoral ministry nevertheless vividly remembers how Fr. Peter took a special note of his scattered parishioners who were struggling to live their faith in pastorally hostile surroundings. Pieris, highlighting the dedication of Fr. Peter and the impact he made on his entry into the Jesuit Order with a spirituality of love of the poor writes thus:

Once, our pastoral journeys fell on a New Year’s Day. My father had been waiting in vain for me to turn up for the family lunch. When I returned home in the evening famished and filthy from travel, he received me with a complaint, “Son you were not with us for the family lunch on a day like this!” and I replied quite spontaneously “But Papa, Fr. Peter de Silva did not have a family lunch either”. If he did not have it, why should I make a fuss about it? My admired apostle was my model. He was my hero. He gave himself fully to his ministry without counting the cost. In fact, one day, Fr. Giuseppe Gardenal, professor of Latin in that seminary, asked me whether I wanted to be a Jesuit or a Diocesan priest. I did not know the difference then. But I pointed my finger at Fr. Peter and said, I want to be like him! It was then that I heard from Fr. Gardenal himself that Fr. Peter was also a Jesuit. His example of self-less service came first in my mind; the Jesuit label was appended later. Gradually I began to identify the two in my mind. My ambition in life thus appeared on the horizon with greater clarity than before. I began to walk towards it.¹⁰

⁹ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p.7.

¹⁰ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p.8.

Pieris traces a pattern of growth in his life from infancy to a typical Jesuit with an apostolic spirituality. In fact at one point he gratefully and positively states in his *theography*, “I must have grown into my Jesuit vocation from infancy for I knew no other ethos than the one those great Jesuits had created.”¹¹ Pieris further writes,

I seemed to have been a “priestling” (*sic*) by birth and I found myself growing into what I was born to be. This may be why, despite all the obstacles and challenges, all the trials and temptations that my vocation encountered in later life, I could never think of abandoning what had been born in me and had grown with me!¹²

In the process of growing into his God-given vocation he also trained himself in a spirituality keeping with his call and acquired certain skills to be a better instrument of God. Thus providentially he acquired proficiency both in Latin and Pāli (the canonical language of Buddhism) when he was just fourteen.¹³ That was one year before he entered the minor Seminary, in Galle in 1949. Pieris sees that language training was a strong indication of the “Invisible Hand” at work in laying within him the foundation for his later work in both the Western and the Eastern religio-cultural fields. Furthermore, though in a more seminal way, his evening visits to the Papal Seminary had drawn him into informal spiritual chats, first with Fr. Giuseppe Gardenal and then in a more professional manner with Fr. Michael de Give. In fact these two *spiritual giants*, as Pieris would call them, fostered his vocation to the Society of Jesus since the time he came in contact with them at the Papal

¹¹ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 9.

¹² A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 23.

¹³ By the age of fourteen, the year before young Pieris left for Galle, he could read the gospels as well as Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi* in Latin thanks to able tutorship of Fr. Michael de Give, a professor at the Papal Seminary in Kandy. Pieris had practically finished the course that Major Seminarians were expected to complete after several years in the Minor Seminary and polish in the Year of Rhetoric in the Major Seminary before proceeding to the study of philosophy and theology in the medium of Latin. His parents who were quite worried about A. Pieris’ overly western orientation arranged for an ex-Buddhist monk, and later Mr. P. J. Fernando to come home and teach Pali to him without interfering with his Latin classes. By the time he went to Galle, the *Adikaram Pali Reader* (an anthology of Pali texts from Canonical and other Buddhist literature edited by E.W. Adikaram) had become quite as easy to understand as the text of the Latin Tridentine Mass which he has followed daily with the Latin Missal.

Seminary at Ampitiya, Kandy. Pieris talks of promises he made secretly to God, under the guidance of the above mentioned two spiritual gurus. These promises he kept close to his heart. One of those promises was on *evangelical poverty* which he had been practicing quite scrupulously.¹⁴ It was Fr. Michael de Give who gave Pieris the initial training in the art of contemplation and ascetical practices, in keeping with the tradition of the Jesuit Order. This initial ascetical training and his daily practice of long hours of morning prayers in the parish church before leaving for school laid the foundation of a more relaxed spirituality he later acquired under the able guidance of Fr Luigi de Mattia. Fr. Luigi was a Neapolitan Jesuit who became Pieris' confessor when he went to the seminary in Galle in Sri Lanka at the age of fifteen. Narrating one of his daily spiritual routines at the parish church Pieris writes:

Fr. Peter de Silva [then parish priest] entrusted me with the task of opening the parish church early in the morning, ringing the Angelus at 5.30 am and preparing the altar for the daily mass. I served the mass, put things back in order and came home in time for breakfast and school. This daily exercise accustomed me to an early morning prayer in a church that was all to myself and my God. Those were treasured moments in which my desire to be a Jesuit priest was sending deep roots into my soul.¹⁵

2.4 Vocation as a Jesuit

2.4.1 Pieris Enters the Seminary

With this background and initial spiritual formation, Pieris turned once again to Fr. de Give at a time he needed him most. At this point in his spiritual journey Fr. de Give with his wise counsel encouraged Pieris to enter the Minor Seminary in Kalegana, a suburb of Galle, and pursue his studies at St. Aloysius College. He made all the necessary arrangements with the Superiors at the Seminary and even visited Pieris' home to explain the matters to the parents in a convincing manner. It was while the Jesuits were running the diocese

¹⁴ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 32.

¹⁵ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 23.

as well as the diocesan Seminary of Galle. Pieris entered the Seminary in January, 1949. He speaks of the day he entered the Seminary as the day that gave the start to an entirely new chapter in his life. He entered the Seminary not as a candidate to the diocesan priesthood but as an already accepted candidate to the Society of Jesus. Pieris' *Jesuit identity* in the diocesan Seminary was kept a secret until the time he moved to Saint Aloysius College (SAC) boarding house under the care of Fr. Vito Perniola, the rector of the college.¹⁶ Pieris, who had been growing since his days at home with passion to be at the service of the poor and needy showed equal enthusiasm to become a member of the Jesuit religious Order even as a student in the diocesan Seminary in Galle. He writes:

The most graceful surprise that awaited me was to be told that the minor seminary, where I was stationed was annexed to the church dedicated to the Jesuit Missionary Saint, Francis Xavier and built on a mound marked by the saint's visit to Sri Lanka. For a youthful and enthusiastic aspirant to the Society of Jesus, this was not a coincidence; it was a providential confirmation of a vocation to the Jesuit Order. I believed that the invisible hand that I felt so often in my life had literally lifted me from Ampititya and transported me to Kalegana. Nothing could keep me back from my ambition to be a Jesuit.¹⁷

His genuine love towards the poor and the initial efforts to make it more tangible and effective can be seen as early as his days in the college boarding house where he moved from the seminary. Thus he writes:

I even wondered whether I could form a "poverty group" among the boarders at SAC. (. . .). I wanted to share the spirit of evangelical poverty with them but did not know how to communicate my desire. Whatever money I received from home, I left with the Rector, Fr. Perniola and asked only when I needed. I never stood in the queue on Saturday mornings to get the pocket money from the Prefect of Boarders as the others did. They never saw me going to the tuck shop. I did not have any money in my person. I deliberately used my clothes sparingly and never asked my mother for new clothes. I wore what I had with frugality. My sister Matilda often provided me with new clothes, unasked. I wore the same shoes till

¹⁶ Pieris had to move from the Galle Diocesan Seminary when he clearly expressed his intention of joining the Society of Jesus.

¹⁷ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p.26.

someone in the family noticed their state and bought me a new pair. That I thought was how I had to live. But my idea of forming a “poverty group” in the boarding house did not materialize.¹⁸

2.4.2 The Early Jesuit Training (1953-1956)

As time passed Pieris joined the Society of Jesus on December 23rd, 1953 when he was nineteen. However, he was made to comply with an important decision of Fr. Vito Perniola before joining the Society of Jesus in 1953 by entering the Novitiate in India. In the same year, 1953, the Jesuits in Sri Lanka decided to set up an Apostolic School, the Jesuit counterpart of the Minor Seminary in a diocese. Pieris and four others became the founding members of the new community. This was in fact a significant result of the Italian Jesuits of the Naples Province taking over the diocese of Galle as well as the Jesuit mission from the Belgians. They unlike the Belgian Jesuits realized very early the need to recruit young men for the Society of Jesus in Sri Lanka. This change of administration from Belgian Jesuits to Italian Jesuits of the Naples Province and Pieris’ one year stay at the Apostolic School were two significant events that definitely influenced the future of Pieris’ spiritual and theological journey. It was in fact Fr. Vito Perniola who founded and directed the Jesuit Apostolic School. Contrary to the wishes of Pieris Fr. Perniola decided that he should spend one year at the new house of formation before joining the Novitiate immediately after his Ordinary Level examination. This historical Jesuit Apostolic School in Sri Lanka thus started in a large house rented from a Muslim owner. Pieris gratefully acknowledged the prophetic decisions Fr. Perniola made *for* him before and after joining the Jesuits which determined the form of his future academic career. The main reason for Pieris being kept back from the novitiate was to study for the London G.C.E.-Advanced Level examination. Within ten months of study Pieris passed his London Advanced Level

¹⁸ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, pp.32-33.

extremely well: a very good pass in geography and a distinction in Pāli. Pieris appreciates the decisions of Fr. Perniola which in fact determined his future academic career.

It was entirely Fr. Perniola's idea that I should go for oriental studies and I am fully in this field today because he not only pushed me into it even before joining the Jesuits but because he convinced the superiors to endorse his plans for me and was behind me at every stage of my formation. My theography can never be complete if I fail to record in golden letters his providential role in directing my future Jesuit career.¹⁹

On the 19th December, 1953 Pieris left home for good, to travel to India with lots of enthusiasm to begin his Jesuit-Novitiate formation, a major step towards making his dream of becoming a Jesuit priest come true. He had to go to Kozhikode, formally known as Calicut, India. On December 23, 1953 Pieris entered the Novitiate, thus starting canonically his Jesuit life keeping to the typical Jesuit tradition. It is also the first part of the Novitiate known as the *First Probation*.

As Pieris stepped on Indian soil for the first time he was struck by the reality of adverse poverty. And it reminded him of God's hand and the pattern of his growth into Jesuit apostolic spirituality. His natural reaction to the situation is succinctly described in his own words as follows:

I stepped on the Indian soil for the first time without too much enthusiasm, to put it euphemistically. What caught my eyes was the barren sandy stretch called Mandapam. (. . .). My desolation was doubled by the sore sight of the scandalous poverty that stared at me everywhere. As I re-entered the train and settled myself at a window-seat to take the meal (. . .), a cluster of tiny heads popped in through the window and pleaded for food or money. *Thày!*, *Thày!* *Thày!* *Thày!* *Thày!* *Thày!* (mother, mother) they were wailing in hunger..... and I just could not eat what I had opened up before me when I saw those anemic eyes and emaciated bodies. I gave the parcel to them despite protests from Indian train-mates who tried to drive those urchins away. That wretched scene of poverty was never witnessed in Sri Lanka then, though it has begun to show its ugly head during the last 25 years.²⁰

¹⁹ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p.39.

²⁰ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p.42.

By exception, Pieris was allowed by his Novice Master to commence his Greek Classes. Thus, he already as a novice was privileged to read and enjoy St Augustine's works in Latin, with Fr. Pullen as their tutor. This atmosphere of studies created in Pieris a taste for Patristics which had later become a passion. Pieris, nostalgically reliving that unique experience, puts it in his own words thus:

The taste I acquired then for the writings of Patres Latini grew into an addiction later. Augustine was born to think in such mellifluous Latin that I was tempted to relish his ideas and digest them without questioning whether they were good for my spiritual health. They tasted delicious and that was enough for me to swallow them. Whatever he said sank into me simply because of the way he said it. Not until I started studying theology ten years later in the new climate of Vatican II in Naples did I learn to be critically appreciative of his thought while reveling in his poetic prose.²¹

Pieris, who may not be nostalgic for the two years he spent in the Novitiate, has much respect for the strong spiritual formation he received. Notwithstanding the grueling formation style and its ascetical model of prayer and penance, he appreciates the spiritual training received which enabled him to survive any kind of mental stress or physical discomfort later in his life.²²

Completing the required two-year Novitiate formation in December, 1955, Pieris entered the "Juniorate". According to the general understanding it was again a two year period devoted to the study of humanities in a relaxed atmosphere. There he began to experience the ideal Jesuit spirituality which is a blend of sparkling intelligence and selfless service. However, he was exempted from going through the full period of the Juniorate formation since the superiors judged him to be prepared and qualified to begin his philosophical studies without any delay.

²¹ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 48.

²² A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 45. Pieris makes a brief note to say that barely a decade after the death of Ignatius of Loyola, the Society of Jesus was formed into a semi-monastic religious Order with an ascetical model of prayer and penance starting with Francis Borgia. It was as a total alienation to the apostolic orientation envisaged by the founding fathers of the Society. The original apostolic orientation was re-appropriated in the Thirty First General Congregation 1965.

Hence, Pieris after a brief period of two months and a half in the Juniorate, moved to Madras State to begin his studies in Philosophy at the Sacred Heart College in the hill town of Shembaganur, in the district of Madurai. Pieris recounts how his exception originated:

And finally I was privileged with yet another bonanza, the fourth in the list! Zanolin, who had supervised my Latin translations of difficult English texts went to the Superiors and said that I would be wasting my time in the Juniorate as he had no time to concentrate on a student like me and that as a matter of fact a Juniorate was not necessary for me since, apart from my “super-efficiency in Latin” (his opinion), I had also done my Greek studies already as a novice! After consulting my own Mission Superior in Sri Lanka, who happened to be Fr. Carmelo Iannacone, they decided to send me to Philosophy straight away!²³

2.5 Academic Formation

2.5.1 Philosophical Training in India (1956-1959)

After his very brief Juniorate formation Pieris started his three-year philosophical studies at the Sacred Heart Collage, Shembaganur, in 1956. Sacred Heart College known today as *Satya Nilayam* was and is a Pontifical Faculty. As Pieris notes, the main thrust of the curriculum did not differ much from what was universally followed in any such Faculty in any part of the world during that time. It was predominantly European and Aristotelio-Thomism, with substantial courses on all the modern Western philosophers. To be precise, according to him, the main focus of the study programme was a thorough knowledge of Western Philosophy, its history and its main representatives, within an overall study of Thomism. During his philosophical studies of the Latin writers the one that appealed to him most was Thomas Aquinas. In fact he admits that his intense reading of *Summa Theologiae- Prima Pars* forged him an avid Thomist and thus scholasticism became his mentality.²⁴ For his thesis for the

²³ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 49.

²⁴ Cf. Georg Evers, “A Self Portrait of Aloysius Pieris” in: R. Cruz, *et al.* (eds.), *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p. 648. This is an interview of Pieris given to Dr. Georg Evers which was first published in the *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies*, Aachen, MWI, 2001.

Licentiate in Philosophy he wrote no more than a rigid *Thomistic Critique* of Buddhist Epistemology. In fact at this time of his theological journey one of his mentors, Fr. Ignatius Gnanaprakasam who knew Pieris' rigid Thomistic mentality had the Herculean task trying to instil in him a more sympathetic approach to the study of Buddhism. But during his philosophical studies at SHC he was so Thomist that he thought Thomism was *philosophia perennis* 'timeless philosophy', something that surpasses time and space. Nevertheless he further admires SHC for offering the students very valuable supplementary classes on Classical Indian thought (the six Indian systems of Philosophy). For those who had no degrees in the Science disciplines, a basic course in physics and chemistry too was provided. However, as Pieris notes, Buddhism was hardly touched; nor was Islam mentioned. He talks of his three-year philosophical studies as follows:

After a solid drilling in the science of Logic, we devoted the first year to Epistemology (the philosophy of knowledge) and Metaphysics (philosophy of being as such); the second year to Psychology (practical and rational study of the human person) and Cosmology (philosophy of the physical world outside); and the final year to Ethics (moral philosophy) and Theodicy (philosophical approach to the Ultimate Reality). This six-fold philosophy was known as *ancilla theologiae*, the handmaid of theology, for it was the rational basis on which, at a later stage of training, we would be building our knowledge of Western scholastic theology! The curriculum also included a study of a Text of St Thomas in Latin (we studied his theory of *esse et essentia*) and a Text of Aristotle in Greek (which that year was his treatise on hylemorphism, matter and form). Of course, Latin was the medium of instruction and examinations.²⁵

Pieris, who *de-scholasticised* his mind later on and opted to pursue the uncharted path of Asian theology of liberation, feels deeply indebted to and appreciative of the philosophical training he received at SHC during those pre-Vatican II days. He acknowledges the immense help SHC training had rendered him to grow into what he is today through an adventurous path-finding theological and spiritual journey. Thus he writes:

²⁵ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 50.

But I do not regret having spent three years on mastering this medieval synthesis as well as the history of Western thought. In fact after each course, I wrote a little manual in Latin. Only three of those manuscripts have survived the vicissitude of time and are now preserved in the Tulana Library as a reminder to my students and colleagues that, it was my perfect comprehension of the medieval European system of thought, and not any anti-Western prejudice, that drove me to abandon it in search of an alternative in my later years.²⁶

However, Pieris in an interview given to Dr. George Evers says that he has no regrets for “having had *that* formation *then*,” meaning formation before the Council of Vatican II, but it did not prepare students for the world of *today*.²⁷ Paradoxically, at a later stage in his spiritual journey, Pieris had burnt his Licentiate Thesis since he felt embarrassed about the content in it.²⁸ It was never an act of arrogance on his part but an act of self-emptying as he began to live and be challenged with the Asian realities, to use his own words, *The Calvary of Asian poverty* and *The Jordan of Asian Religion*.

Apart from academic pursuits SCH provided ample space for the students to improve their skills in sports, music and aesthetics and has even created an atmosphere to foster genuine humanists with a true zeal for the poor (social work). Pieris who had taken part in many of these diversions and equally enjoyed them developed his interest in sacred music and drama. He had spent a lot of his spare time improving on creative aesthetics, and it kindled in him the hope that he would one day dedicate himself to an apostolate among the youth through arts and crafts, music and drama. If not for the providential intervention which changed the course of his direction Pieris would have chosen Music and Mathematics, with a special interest of serving youth through drama, dance and theatre as his career within the Society of Jesus. In his *Theography* Pieris expresses his enthusiasm and eagerness to engage in creative aesthetic activities until today as follows:

²⁶ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 51.

²⁷ Cf. R. Crusz, *et al.* (eds.), *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p. 649.

²⁸ Cf. R. Crusz, *et al.* (eds.), *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p. 648.

During the major holidays, there was a month and a half of seminars on various topics of current interest by nationally renowned specialists. One year it was political science. What I enjoyed most was the course of Karnatic Music conducted by the well-known Jesuit musician, Michael Raj. That was my first introduction to the *ragas* and the *thalas* of Bharata Music. I wrote to my father that I had begun to understand why he was so enamoured of the traditional ragas and that I had at last come to appreciate that he had had a taste for something truly exquisite and even exotic. Transposed from one world of aesthetics to another, I have never adopted an either-or approach to the two paradigms. Even now I take every opportunity to hear and enjoy classics from both traditions.²⁹

However, as already noted Pieris was destined to serve the academic community particularly in the area of “oriental Studies” and not of music and drama. Hence he needed to sharpen his prowess to cater to the academic community. Determining his future career the providential turning point occurred while he was a final year student in philosophy in 1958-59. It was a decision made for Pieris by his superiors to get him registered at the London University for his B.A. Honours degree in Pāli and Sanskrit in preparation for the examination that was to be held in June 1961.

April 1959 Pieris left for Loyola College, Madras (Chennai) after philosophical studies at SHC to get himself coached in Sanskrit language and literature under the personal guidance of Prof. V. Varadachari before returning to Sri Lanka in August. Prof. Varadachari, a Brahmin Ramanujite, a learned scholar spoke excellent English, too, and had a Diploma in French and German. After the ground course was over perhaps which took less than a month Prof. Varadachari quickly gauged the potentials of Pieris and chose to teach him in detail the Sanskrit classic, *Kumàrasambhava*, an epic poem (*mahākāvya*) composed by the greatest Bharata poet,

²⁹ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, pp. 52-53.

Kālidāsa.³⁰ Then he taught Pieris a method of doing the other text prescribed by his examination. Prof. Varadachari laid a firm foundation for Pieris to build on when he returned to Sri Lanka with the plan to sit for B.A. Honours degree in Pāli and Sanskrit. Well equipped with a foundational knowledge of Sanskrit Pieris could master all the other text books prescribed for the examination. Pieris sat for his London Examination in 1961, and obtained a first Class Honours as predicted with assurance by his Sanskrit guru before he left for Sri Lanka. He was the only candidate that year in the London University to get a First Class in Pāli and Sanskrit. Pieris in his retrospective reflection realizes that his guru made him move so freely in the *cultural ethos* created by the Sanskrit language that he did not feel he was studying a text that was foreign to him.

Sanskrit was not the only thing Prof. Varadachari taught Pieris. This revered teacher of Sanskrit even engaged Pieris in profound philosophical conversations after the daily lessons. However, Pieris admits that though he thought he was well prepared to enter into an informed conversation with his guru, he in fact was far behind in his knowledge to engage in a *civilized* conversation. Pieris who was an avid Thomist regrettably admits that during these philosophical conversations he used to speak down from putative heights of Thomism, *philosophia perennis*, thus even irritating his Sanskrit guru. During this time of his theological journey Pieris believed in the clear distinction between philosophy and religion advocated by Scholastic philosophy. Since then Pieris took quite a while to see Knowledge (*gnosis*) and Love (*agapè*) converging in his profound understanding of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In other words the perspective that a philosophy (*daràna*) is also a spiritual path (*pratipadà*) which his Sanskrit guru believed in took

³⁰ Kālidāsa was a renowned Indian classical Sanskrit writer, widely regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language of any epoch. His floruit cannot be dated with precision. But according to an opinion accepted by many he is associated within the reign Chandra Gupta II period, probably in the 4th or 5th century. His place in Sanskrit literature is akin to that of Shakespeare in English. His plays and poetry are primarily based on Hindu mythology and philosophy (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. – 6, 15th edition, Chicago, 1998, pp.692-93).

a while to sink in. Prof. Varadachari's philosophical conversations definitely challenged Pieris to think profoundly and balanced in his later theological search. At one point as Pieris recounts, his Scholastic attitude was seriously challenged by Prof. Varadachari when he said, "Young Father, I see that intellectually you are very well equipped for your age, but you don't speak as a person who knows God!" As the following citation expresses it well this remark of Prof. Varadachari prepared Pieris for long uncharted theological journey ahead of him. He too was made to realize that strictly speaking religions cannot be compared since each religion is a *unique language, an idiom*, with which a human person in a given context expresses his longing for and experience of integral liberation. Thus he expresses briefly in the following citation his struggle to come to terms with respecting and appreciating different religious-cultural ethos and eventually to see God's liberative plan in all of them.

Already at SHC, my mentor, Fr. Ignatius Gnanaprakasam, had been exhorting me to be appreciative rather than argumentative in my Licentiate thesis on Buddhist epistemology. Varadachari's remark should have jolted me into that healthy path, but it took a few more years before I learnt to traverse it! I tried my best to be more accommodative towards his religious convictions but the tiger in me did not really change its stripes. For after that spurious conversion, I stopped arguing and tried to draw "parallels" between the two systems of thought and perhaps indulged in facile comparisons, which as I see retrospectively, were a veiled version of the same apologetical posture that irritated him earlier. Most probably, I would have sounded as saying, "Whatever truth you have in your Vedantic system, is found also in Christianity's Thomistic thought". This time Varadachari was not brusque. He simply cited a Sanskrit loka from the Ramayana: Gaganam gaganàkàram, sàgarap sàgaropamaḥ: "The sky is just like the sky; the ocean is just like the ocean". They defy comparison!³¹

These after class discussions in fact uncovered the important discoveries he made in his study of great poet Kalidasa's *Kumàrasambhava*, "The Birth of the Child-saviour". This eventually had a notable bearing on his original brand of Asian Theology of liberation. In

³¹ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 62. Thomism was so imbedded in Pieris that Fr. Ignatius Gnanaprakasam, one of Pieris' mentors during his philosophical studies, had to make an extra effort to pursue Pieris to take a more sympathetic approach towards Buddhism (Cf. Robert Cruzs *et al.* (eds.), *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p. 648).

admiration of the person and in gratitude to his Sanskrit guru Pieris prints the name of Prof. Varadachari among the three teachers to whom his book *Studies in the Philosophy and Literature of Pāli Abhidhammika Buddhism* is dedicated.³² Pieris' study of classical Hinduism during his Philosophical studies at Shembaganur and his study of Hindi *Puranas*³³ have certainly given him a much needed inspiration to discover an original thinking in his long path-finding theological journey. He appreciates particularly his initiation to the study of Sanskrit epics and Hindu *Puranas* that set the stage for him to discover later, with his deep knowledge of Buddhism and Christian Theology, a Covenant-Christology. With this background he later makes a choice of Buddhism out of all major religions in Asia to demonstrate the interplay of the *cosmic* and *metacosmic* levels of religious experience. This eventually impacted his path-finding mission towards an Asian Theology of Liberation. Thus Pieris writes as follows:

I realized to my dismay that the classical Hinduism we learnt in Shembaganur was more of another-worldly philosophy whereas the Hindu purāṇas, which unfortunately we were not taught, had a down-to-earth soteriology. It was precisely this puranic Brahmanism that Kālidās had elevated into a work of art. A decade or two later I would be inventing two terms metacosmic and cosmic to identify these two forms of Hinduism, drawing far-reaching conclusions for an Asian theology.³⁴

³² Cf. A. Pieris, "How I Learnt the ABC of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in: *Vāgadevī*, The Society of Jesus, Sri Lankan Province, Colombo, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008, p. 31.

³³ The *Puranas* are a group of important Hindu (Or Jain and Buddhists) religious texts, consisting of legends and mythological narrations dealing with the history of the universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and description of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. The *Puranas* usually give prominence to a particular deity and use an abundance of religious and philosophical concepts. They are usually written in the form of stories related by one person to another. Hindu *Puranas* are eighteen ancient books in number.

³⁴ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 61. Pieris, derived these two terms from a Buddhist self-understanding of the two levels: *Lokiya* (cosmic) and *Lok'uttara* (meta-cosmic). Pieris, later observes these two levels as two complementary elements within which the institutional framework of Asian religiosity operates. This neologism, "cosmic religions" and "meta-cosmic soteriologies" in Asian theology was first introduced by Pieris. Pieris in a letter written to me on November 03, 2008 states that he is grateful to Marcello Zago, OMI, the Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of People (1998-2001) and Jacques Dupuis, S.J. for incorporating the words *cosmic* and the *meta-cosmic* he coined into the Official teaching of the Church. He states, "I am grateful to them for brining into *Redemptoris Missio* my terminology and concepts of the *cosmic* and the *meta-cosmic* dimensions of religiosity. Now it is in the official teaching of the Church as well as in FABC documents! I thanked them both for it". This will be discussed in the Fourth Chapter of this dissertation. For further clarity ref. A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1980, (pp.75-95), here pp. 78-80.

Pieris who is well trained in the art of reading and appropriating various branches of the sacred language of Hinduism, recognizes *Kumàrasambhava* by Kālidāsa, the greatest poet in the history of ancient Indic³⁵ literature, more as a great epic poem than as “sacred literature”. Nevertheless, Pieris who traces this epic poem’s influence from the *Puranic* literature is greatly appreciative of its soteriological theme sacred to Hindus. According to him the *Puranic* literature often talks about gods intervening in the lives of suffering people and winning battles against demons.³⁶ However, Pieris who respects the uniqueness of soteriologies of other religions in his understanding of the Word firmly upholds the uncompromising uniqueness in what was revealed as God-in-Christ: *God who is covenant with the poor*. That does not find a parallel in other Scriptures.

2.5.2 Theological Studies and Pastoral Exposure in Naples, Italy (1962-66)

The Provincial of the Naples Province of the Society of Jesus, under whose jurisdiction the Galle ‘Mission’ of Sri Lanka was operated at the time, decided that Pieris should go to Naples for theological studies.³⁷ Pieris admits that his theological studies at the

³⁵ Many Asian theologians including Pieris and Raymond Panikkar make a distinction between what is “Indian” and what is “Indic.” What is “Indic” is a larger reality than what is “Indian.” The word “Indian” stands for *the politico-geographical unit* that the British formed in the 19th century, and later partitioned, with Pakistan forming a separate State. ‘Indic’ refers to *the cultural unit* that always existed in and beyond what is now known as ‘India.’ The first is the natural region known as South Asia today; the second was an artificial and arbitrary conglomeration of countries. Certainly, India as a political unit is the most extensive territorial concentration of the Indic culture.

³⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *God’s Reign for God’s Poor*, pp. 85-86. As Pieris argues this descent of God to the poor in Hindu *Puranic* literature and a similar belief developed in “messianic” *Suttas* of *Tripitaka* known as *Anagatavamsa* about future Buddha *Maitreya* cannot find a parallel or remote resemblance with “Biblical God-covenanted with the oppressed.” According to great “messianic” *suttas* of *Tripitaka*, the future Buddha *Maitreya* is prophesied to appear in company of a Universal King of Righteousness and preach the path of deliverance during a general awakening that will follow a dark period of socio-spiritual decadence (For further clarity see A. Pieris, “Millenniarist Messianism in Buddhist History,” in: *Concilium*, September-October, 1998/4, pp. 106-15; Idem, “The Mahāpurisa Ideal and the Principal of Dual Authority,” [Review Article], in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. XXIII, 1996, pp. 168-175).

³⁷ At a particular time in the history of Jesuits in Sri Lanka the Naples Province took over the Galle ‘Mission’ in Sri Lanka from the Belgians. There had been two Jesuits ‘Missions’ in the country before 1962, namely the Galle ‘Mission’ governed by Naples Province of Italy and Trincomalee ‘Mission’ governed by the New Orleans Province (USA). These ‘Missions’ were amalgamated by a decree of the Jesuit General, J-B Janssen into an independent Vice-Province in 1962, with Fr. Emmanuel Crowther as the new Provincial.

Pontifical Faculty of Villa San Luigi, Posillipo, Naples which coincided with the Council of Vatican II, opened an entirely a new chapter in his life. Pieris' studies began with this great Council and ended six months after the Council did.

The atmosphere created by the Pope John the XXIII and the Vatican II Council certainly influenced both the theological faculty in Naples and more so the theological thinking of Pieris. He began to think critically of the scholastic theology that was still being taught. At this point of his journey his knowledge of scholastic philosophy, which was the "handmaid" of that scholastic theology (*ancilla theologiae*), helped him well enough to see the difference between scholastic theology and what he had been discovering in the Scriptures then. However, he also greatly appreciated the teaching and the presence of some of the excellent professors in the faculty who applied a social dimension to the study of theology. He had the opportunity of meeting and discussing with the many *Periti* and Council fathers from various countries who used to visit the Jesuit house in Naples for weekends. He mentions his great interest in reading the reports of the Council which were published in papers like *L'Avvenire*. Pieris also makes a special note of the encounter he and his colleagues once had with the eminent theologian Karl Rahner. Rahner had strongly reminded them of their duty to enter into the *spirit* of the Council and move forward rather than literally following its inadequate formulation of the vision as contained in the Conciliar documents.³⁸ Pieris who took great interest in the liturgical renewal that emerged during the time of the Council of Vatican II began to realize that liturgy and life are inseparable.³⁹ He had got into habit of 'improvising' canons within 'orthodoxy' in the slums of Naples. Pieris also had the rare chance of taking part in the Liturgical Congress organized in Bologna under the patronage of Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro who had already anticipated in

³⁸ Cf. R. Cruzs *et al.* (eds.), *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p. 651-652.

³⁹ For Licentiate in theology Pieris' thesis was, *Biblico-liturgical Analysis of Psalms: How Psalms Served the Christian Liturgy as a Biblical Prayer*.

his diocese the liturgical renewal of Vatican II.⁴⁰ Pieris was taken by the architectural structures of the new churches built under the supervision of Cardinal Lercaro which gave prominence to the People of God and to the Word of God in liturgical worship. He who even had personally talked with Cardinal Lercaro and seeing for himself the socially oriented and simple life style of the prelate says that in Lercaro's life "Jesus in the Eucharist and Jesus in the Poor were inseparable."

Furthermore, Pieris' study of theology in Naples was not simply limited to books, room lectures and seminars. As he acknowledges in gratitude it was during his theological studies in Naples that he positively was awakened to the reality of *the church of the poor*.⁴¹ His pastoral exposure in Naples was a strong spiritual awakening. There his childhood memories of Jesuit seminary professors in Kandy, Sri Lanka, serving the poor in hostile pastoral situations began to emerge from his passive memory. These personal experiences and *ceaseless* baptism, later in his life, into the twofold Asian reality, namely multi-religiousness and abject poverty, moulded him to be the *first*⁴² to put forward the thesis that any serious theological inquiry in Asia should grapple with these two mutually conditioned poles of Asia reality.

He was assigned by his superiors to hear the confessions of the patients at the *Clinica Mediterranea*, a private hospital close to his Theological Faculty. According to Pieris the most

⁴⁰ Cardinal Lercaro, who was a member of the Liturgical Commission, became regarded as one of the main architects of the Council's liturgical reforms. He was also the first to popularize the theory of a "Church of the poor" that developed further in Latin America during the 1970s. His involvement in student movements gave him a great interest in engaging Catholic theology with modern culture. Lercaro, Giacomo (1891-1976) was the Cardinal-archbishop of Bologna from 1952 to 1968. To be precise he was created a Cardinal in 1953. He was thought to be *papabile* after the death of John XXIII. However, in this instance the conclave elected Giovanni Battista Montini, who eventually became Pope Paul VI, by a relatively close margin. Lercaro was one of the four 'moderators' appointed to the Coordinating Commission by the Pope Paul VI to 'direct the work of the Vatican II Council'. (Ref. John W. O'Malley, *What happened at Vatican II*, Harvard University Press, USA, 2008, pp.166-167, 324).

⁴¹ Cf. R. Crusz et al. (eds.), *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p.644.

⁴² Cf. R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Frontiers in Asian Theology: Emerging Trends*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1994, (p. 141-146) here p. 141. However, A. Pieris criticizes the editorial changes made to the substance of the text that appears in Sugirtharajah's book which was published without Pieris' permission. Pieris published his authentic updated text, which originally given as a talk, in the publication *Dialogue* (Colombo, Sri Lanka), vol. 31, 2004, pp. 8- 21.

difficult thing he found there was to prepare the *de-churched* Christians for their death. Being innovative in his apostolate in the hospital Pieris has made use of his musical talents to catechize the sick in profound truths of the divine mysteries. He sang to them popular hymns with simple lyrics originally composed and sang by Alphonsus de Liguori to catechize the Italian peasants during the post-reformation period. Pieris talks about how this profound experience impacted another future apostolate other than the academic one reviving an early dream of his life.

It was in that hospital that I vowed that one day I would do what Alphonsus Liguori did. I would compose gospel songs, bible songs for children. It was thanks to Vatican II that I realized how far we have deviated from the Scriptures, and how difficult it was at my age to assimilate something which I had not imbibed in my early childhood. Now that I have discovered the newness and the power of the Word of God I felt obliged to share it with others, especially with the next generation. And I thought, if I sow the seed of the Word of God in the little tender hearts of children, they will be Christians of another kind. I was determined to start an apostolate of educating children through bible songs and bible dramas. This was a dream my superiors did not allow me to realize as they later sent me for Buddhist studies. But in my seventies, as I write these lines, I have already put my hand to the plough. I have just finished two gospel songs for children and tried it out on a small scale. It is a promising venture. I do hope that by the time I reach my end, I will have realized this dream.⁴³

Furthermore, Pieris' exposure to Italian peasantry in the outskirts of Naples, brought him in touch with the neglected youth of the suburbs, the poor peasant and *de-churched* catholics practically every Sunday. In extending his services in a more organized manner Pieris had joined an enthusiastic group of university students in bringing Christian education and social betterment to the poorer area of the city known as *Rione de Traiano*. He let himself be taught by the patients in the hospital beds, by the poor in the suburbs of Naples, by the suburban people at the confessional, by the youth and teenagers who sought his spiritual direction. Pieris also talks about his participation in a social survey at the shrine of the *Madonna di Sacro Monte*, in the Province of Sorrento, one month after his Ordination. The survey was conducted by Pieris'

⁴³ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 84.

Sociology professor Paolo Tufari. This study was a trailblazer for Pieris' future academic undertakings back in Sri Lanka particularly at the *Tulana* Research Center which he would found later.

Tufari educated us in the art of observing and understanding popular religiosity. My personal encounter with the peasants in the confessional and outside, as well as my study of their beliefs and behaviour in the light of Tufari's analysis and comments, opened before me a new horizon on a significant phenomenon, which a decade later, I would recognize and name in Asian societies as 'cosmic spirituality'. This social survey at Sacro Monte kindled in me a desire to undertake such studies in my own country. And that was what I did at the Tulana Research Centre which I founded in 1974.⁴⁴

Pieris who successfully combined apostolic involvement with serious study during the fourth year of theological studies in Naples came out with distinction at his STL examination. Pieris in a great debt of gratitude to the poor whom he served in Naples considers them all to be his formators. Pieris' exposure to the aspirations and the problems of the poor of the outskirts of Naples, particularly that of the youth, taught him not only to think *with the church* (*sentire cum Ecclesia*), but also to engage in the risky and pioneering task of *thinking for the church* (*sentire pro ecclesia*). He, who thus appreciates the theological studies in Naples and the poor who broadened his theological horizon, expresses his sentiment as follows:

That contact with the poor was so much in keeping with what Pope John XXIII envisaged when he declared that the church should be "church of the poor, the church of all". My biblical theology and spirituality, already germinating in my heart and mind, was sprouting forth with vigour and vitality and one day I would carry this massive task of discovering a Theology of Liberation for the Asians. That work in the poor quarters of Naples was a small beginning of a great journey.⁴⁵

At the end of his theological studies, Pieris was ordained a priest on 4th July, 1965 at the Church of the *Gesu Nuovo* in Naples. And this also was the year that marked a turning point in the history of the Society of Jesus following the renewal brought about by the Council of Vatican II

⁴⁴ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, pp. 84-85.

and the 31st General Congregation (hereafter GC) that reinforced the spirit of Vatican II within the Society. These two paradigm-changing events and the Marxist Youth insurrection of 1971 in Sri Lanka stand as the major events accounting for the shaping and sharpening the theological vision and mission of Pieris. Pieris has the following to say about the first two events:

These two new paradigms, which I had appropriated, imparted a dramatically new texture to both my personal spirituality and my professional life, and was the actual cause of much misapprehension within the Province, with certain superiors, who were stuck in the monastic model.⁴⁶

A few words on the 31st GC of the Society of Jesus are needed to appreciate the impact it made on Pieris' path-finding spiritual and theological journey. The 31st GC began on May 7, 1965, between the 3rd and 4th sessions of Vatican II electing Pedro Arrupe as the Superior General of the Society on May 22, 1965. It returned to the Founder Ignatius's insights on prayer, affirmed greater liturgical participation, and expanded work in the social apostolate.⁴⁷ Fr. Pedro Arrupe remained the Superior General of the Society from May 22, 1965 to September 3, 1983. Thus Pieris can be seen as a priest molded by Vatican II and a Jesuit of the Arrupe era. As already described, he was immersed and trained in an atmosphere of apostolic spirituality and Conciliar renewal. Pieris certainly was one of many during that era who caught the spirit of GC 31 and the charism of Arrupe and who persevered in the spiritual renewal begun in 1965. Fr. Emmanuel Crowther, his Provincial, a participant of GC 31, had supported Pieris, and encouraged him even after some Jesuits belonging to the old school took over the governance of the Province back in Sri Lanka. Pieris had his own years of pain and frustration within his home province in Sri Lanka

⁴⁶ A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 93.

⁴⁷ The 31st General Congregation took place during and after Vatican Council II (1962-65), which looked clearly at the inner life of the Church and called on all religious Orders to recover and return to their original charism, or inspiration, and to renew and adapt their activities accordingly. After the Vatican II Council the Church and the Society would never be the same. The changes and the adaptations made in the Church and the Society in the following years were widespread. They were liberation to some, dismaying to others. New works began, some solid and lasting, others quixotic and ephemeral. Praise and blame abounded. By 1970 Pedro Arrupe convoked a congregation to assess the Society's efforts to live out the mandate of the Council and the congregation.

due to certain misconstructions of the *apostolic spirituality* and Conciliar renewal he was immersed in. It was a friction between the spirituality of Jesuit apostolic mysticism discovered with Conciliar renewal and, the Jesuit spirituality understood in terms of monastic asceticism in keeping with the pre-1965 tradition. Pieris who went into active silence during these difficult times came up with a positive answer by founding *Tulana* Research Centre in 1974.

2.5.3 Buddhist Studies and Apostolate in Sri Lanka (1966-71)

Pieris is not only an academically trained scholar in Buddhism but also one who has close dialogical and experiential contact with Buddhists and is in touch with many multi-religious groups engaged in the struggle for the liberation of the *poor by circumstances* (poverty structurally imposed).⁴⁸ Furthermore, Pieris' Asian sources of learning are of various kinds. They are, the youth of non-urban Sri Lanka, with whom he had interacted in the course of an ongoing study of Buddhist and Christian Scriptures, his personal study of all religious movements and social revolutions of the Asian continent; twenty three years of teaching students from all parts of the Asian Continent based in Manila, and personal travels to various parts of Asia witnessing cultural vitality.⁴⁹

It is commendable how A. Pieris combined his Buddhist doctoral studies with a whole range of apostolic activities with due permission of his superiors. Inspired by the spirit of the

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 57-58.

⁴⁹ Pieris was mandated by his Superiors after he finished his semester at the Gregorian, to go to the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila, to lecture there, before returning to Sri Lanka. However, after some time he continued to give regular two-week-course at the EAPI. Pieris, whose lectures were very much appreciated both by the students and the successive Directors of the EAPI, was given a gradual increase of lecture-hours reaching up to 36 within a period of two weeks by the time he resigned in 1994. He in fact dropped the Gregorian University deal despite of requests made by the university authorities and stuck to EAPI assignment. For him, EAPI was an important area of apostolic engagement since it exposed him to the variety of cultures that constitute the Asian Reality. Besides, this teaching assignment gave him opportunities to visit other Asian countries, and get firsthand knowledge of the cultural ethos of the continent (Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhist and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. 31, 2004, p. 21. Also see Idem, *A Theography of My Life*, pp. 94-95).

mission received by the Superiors, Pieris initiated a lot of Christian-Buddhist dialogue encounters joining with Sri Lankan Methodist pastor and Scholar, Lynn de Silva. These dialogues went beyond academic interests to embrace the pastoral area of Buddhist-Christian mixed marriages which is very prevalent in Sri Lanka. He too has organized regular health clinics for low income people (slums) with the help of medical experts in cooperation with a local parish priest in Colombo. Apart from Sunday liturgical services organized for slum dwellers he also has done some conscientization programmes, and met with some opposition. The apostolate served as the source of Pieris' understanding of theology of revelation and theology of liberation. This is the experiential context of his theological reflection.

Pieris' entry into the realm of Buddhist studies, ending up earning a doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy *in* Sri Lanka as the very first Christian, and *a fortiori*, the first catholic priest⁵⁰ is not something that was planned from the beginning nor is it an accident. It was a natural consequence of the *Providential Hand*, as Pieris identifies, at work in his life that groomed him through various "coincidences" such as his study of Pali and Latin at an early age followed by his languages degree taken under obedience to the Superiors.⁵¹ However, finally it was Pieris' Provincial Superior Fr. Emmanuel Crowther who made known to him his administration's decision that Pieris should study Buddhism on his return to Sri Lanka from Naples. This confirmed the earlier initiations made by Fr. Perniola to

⁵⁰ Some Sri Lankan Christians such as Bryan de Kretzer (Presbyterian pastor) and Michael Rodrigo, OMI (Catholic priest) had done comparative studies between Buddhism and Christianity, on the basis of secondary sources in Buddhism. Their doctorates were from Western Universities which did not have faculties in Buddhist studies. Their doctorates were not in Buddhism but in theology or Western Philosophy (or Thomistic theology as in Rodrigo's case).

⁵¹A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 648 and 654. Pieris knew the canonical language of Roman Catholicism (Latin) and the canonical language of the Buddhist (Pāli) even before he joined the Society of Jesus in 1953. As a boy of twelve he started Latin under Fr. Michael de Give. Incidentally, his parents who feared he was getting too Westernized got an ex-Buddhist monk to teach him Pāli at home. They even opted for a better teacher when they realized their son was not making much progress. Pieris offered these two languages for the Government examination in 1952 through the Jesuit run school, St. Aloysius College, Galle, Sri Lanka, where he finished the latter part of his secondary studies and got distinction passes in both.

make him an Indologist. Once again it was because of the farsighted plan of Fr. Perniola that Pieris was asked to return to do his doctoral studies in Buddhism *in* Sri Lanka under the monastic and lay scholars, rather than in London as planned immediately after his studies in Naples, Rome. Pieris gratefully recollects the memorable words of his Provincial Superior Fr. Emmanuel Crowther in commissioning him to do doctorate studies in Buddhism in 1966:

Son, we are sending you on an uncharted territory. We cannot guide you; you will have to guide us one day. Therefore do not be afraid to make mistakes, even serious ones; but just keep us informed.⁵²

However, his application for doctoral studies in Buddhism at Vidyodaya Campus⁵³ of the University of Sri Lanka made in November 1966 was approved only in February 1968. The delay in approving Pieris' application by the authorities of the university was due to a suspicion of the motive of Pieris in some circles of the same university. The suspicion in fact was grounded in the unpleasant memories Buddhists had of many betrayals at the hands of many Christian missionaries, who studied Buddhism under the monks only to abuse the knowledge so gained in publishing anti-Buddhist literature.⁵⁴ This is a reflection of the centuries of bitterness created by the colonial past which helped to heighten the estrangement between Christians and Buddhists. At this juncture it was Ven. Dr. Walpola Rahula Thera, then Vice Chancellor of the University Campus, who intervened to clear Pieris' *bona fides* among those who had reservations about his motives. By the time his application was officially accepted by the University he was able to complete his basic research using the Colombo Museum Library.⁵⁵

⁵² A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 41.

⁵³ During the time of Pieris' doctoral studies there was only one university in the country called the University of Sri Lanka with several Campuses. They were Vidyalankara Campus, presently named as the University of Kelaniya, Vidyodaya Campus presently called as the University of Sri Jayawardhanapura, and the Peradeniya Campus, presently known as the University of Peradeniya.

⁵⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 8-12.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 12-13.

Pieris' entrance to the University was marked by an act of self-abasement which provided him the *key*, as Pieris puts it, to "open the old musty-looking treasure chest which contained the wisdom of generations of holy people."⁵⁶ It was a colourful symbolic event of Pieris taking a basket full of fruits and vegetables and prostrating himself before a monk and humbly asking to be his disciple. This act in the Sri Lankan/ Asian context reflects one's humility to empty (renounce) oneself and be opened to be taught by one's Guru. Pieris, who thus initiated himself into a cultural immersion, was subsequently led into the *unknown*. He faced many challenges including reinterpreting three fundamental Christian beliefs, regarding God, Christ, and the Church since traditional presentations were inadequate in the religious pluralistic context of Sri Lanka/Asia. This self-abasing act of Pieris and the self-humbling encounter he had with a particular rural Buddhist student in the same university marked the beginning of a radical change of perspective in his understanding of the gospel narrative of Jesus' Baptism at the Jordan.⁵⁷ Pieris began to see Jesus' humble submission to John's baptism at once as *a prophetic gesture* (self-emptying servant-Messiah) of seeking discipleship under the great Asian Guru of his day and as *the* appropriate point of departure for Jesus' own prophetic mission leading up to his last prophetic gesture, his *Baptism on Calvary*.⁵⁸ It was this second Baptism, the crucifixion, that Jesus referred to as *his* Baptism (Mk. 8: 35-40). Pieris, notes that the insurrection of 1971, a landmark in the history of Sri Lanka, awakened him to the need of the second Baptism both in our lives as Christians and in our participation in Jesus' mission. The *first* Baptism, in the river Jordan where Jesus lost his identity among the religious poor, *the anawim*, (solidarity with the poor) led him necessarily to his own Baptism on Calvary: the Word-Crucified. Pieris, later went on to propose

⁵⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 14.

⁵⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 14-18.

⁵⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 14. For further clarity, see A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 45-50. Here, in his reading of Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, Pieris draws four missiological principles for the local church in Asia.

this thesis as the *double baptism* that the Church in Asia must undergo if it wants to be the Church of Asia, namely, *the baptism in the Jordan of Asian Religiosity* and *the baptism on the Calvary of Asian Poverty*. In retrospect, Pieris appreciated the mission he received from this double baptism. This reading of John's Baptism of Jesus at Jordan which necessarily led Jesus to his own baptism on the Cross in fact provides a much needed spirituality to develop an Asian/Sri Lankan theology of liberation/revelation and a relevant ecclesiology. This understanding of Jesus' baptism will be discussed in detail in the third Chapter.

Pieris admits that he took pride in his Western academic achievements so much that he was blind to the centuries of wisdom which lay hidden in master Buddhist-meditation monks who were recommended for Pieris' own experience of Buddhist ethico-psychology (Buddhist consciousness). As Pieris' thesis director Ven. Dr. Kotagama Wachissara Thera rightly thought, Pieris needed a personal experience of the subtle implication of Buddhist consciousness in the Sri Lankan Buddhist culture to do justice to the theme of his dissertation, "*Some Salient Aspects of Consciousness and Reality in Pāli Scholasticism as Reflected in the Commentaries of Ācariya Dhammapāla.*" He humbly acknowledges that he began to rediscover his cultural and religious roots as he pursued his doctoral studies in Buddhism and in his observance of Buddhist meditation. However, the credit should be given to Pieris for his choice in specializing in Buddhist *Abhidhammic* Scholasticism, a very difficult subject which very few students pursue even in a Buddhist University.

After his doctoral studies in Buddhism, Pieris went for his Tertianship⁵⁹ (September 1971 to April 1972) to Ahamadabad, India. Pieris is appreciative of his Tertian instructor, Fr. Conget, who instructed him to comply with his Superior's decision to assign him to Gregorian University in Rome, while respecting Pieris' reservations. However, Pieris who was accompanied by Fr.

⁵⁹ Tertianship is the final training period of an ordained Jesuit priest before his final profession.

Juan Alfaro, in discerning the best possible manner and location to carry out the Superior's mandate to serve in the 'international academic apostolate' decided to return to Sri Lanka after the first semester (September 1972-73) at the Gregorian University.⁶⁰ Immediately after his semester-assignment in Rome, Pieris readily agreed to go to the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, to lecture there, before returning to Sri Lanka. Pieris returns to Sri Lanka with the strong conviction of making his base for the international academic apostolate located in a rural place in Sri Lanka. He also wanted to give an important space for his aspiration to work among the youth which was made urgent after the 1971-insurrection in Sri Lanka. Accordingly on his return, Pieris, "created a space of freedom" for himself wherein he could serve the rural youth in their twofold aspiration of *personal freedom from greed* and *social freedom from poverty*.⁶¹ In creating a much needed 'space of freedom' Pieris himself opted to go through a re-learning process in association with the rural Sinhala-Buddhist youth away from the urban Colombo-community to which he belonged. The end result of these years of discernment and struggle was the establishment of the "Tulana," the Centre for Research and Encounter, on 7th June, 1974.

However, Pieris who in obedience to his Superiors never deviated from the mandate given to him to work in the academic world, made his theological speculations thoroughly contextual through engaging in various apostolic activities. It should be noted that Pieris' hours of Buddhist

⁶⁰ It was Pieris' personal "awakening" experience of the 1971 youth insurrection in Sri Lanka that made him reluctant to accept the decision of his Superiors that he should teach at the Gregorian University in Rome. Had Pieris accepted teaching at the Gregorian as a permanent assignment he would have spent six months in Rome every year. Hence, it was with the best of intentions that he decided to keep his roots firmly sunk in the Sri Lankan soil rather than in the West, lest he suffer the fate of many who write books from books and become a spent force in no time. Pieris, in fact says that he wrote books but they are books from experience (Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 19. See also A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, pp. 93-95).

⁶¹ The identification and the articulation of these twofold aspiration of Sri Lankan rural youth by Pieris was originated through his facing the perspective changing 1971 Marxist insurrection of the Buddhist rural youth in Sri Lanka and his unique experience of Buddhist meditation under a Buddhist Monk in the late sixties (Cf. A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 93. See also Georg Evers, "A Self Portrait of Aloysius Pieris" in: *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, pp. 653-654; A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 13-19).

meditation under Buddhist Monks in the late sixties and his traumatic experience of the Youth Insurrection of 1971, which swept through the university campuses including the one where he was doing his doctoral studies, dramatically changed his theological perspectives.⁶² In fact, it was from the 1971-Youth Insurrection that Pieris began to search for a way to hold together interior liberation from greed, *provided* by Buddhist meditation and the social liberation from poverty, *promised* by Marxist revolutionaries.⁶³ This thesis of Pieris will be elaborated in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation. It is through these two themes that Pieris came to realize that *the religiousness of the poor* and *the poverty of the religious* are the two poles of a tension that must sustain the dynamism of his apostolic life. Later he discovered and named them as two inseparable poles of the Asian reality that constitute the matrix of any truly Sri Lankan / Asian theology, and more so of the theology of revelation /redemption. In fact, Pieris' seminal thinking that emerged through his personal experience, especially from 1971, came to the limelight as an ever more coherent thesis at the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) conference held at Wennappuwa in Sri Lanka in 1979. Pieris' presentation titled, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religious-Cultural Guidelines", at this third international conference of EATWOT, held for the first time in Asia, changed its existing dominant Latin American perspective of the poor and their struggle for the for liberation.⁶⁴

⁶² A. Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, p. 93. See also Georg Evers, "A Self Portrait of Aloysius Pieris," in: *A Festschrift Honouring Aloysius Pieris*, p. 653 and 654. Also see A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 13-19.

⁶³ The Asian religions, Buddhism in particular, have seen that the cause of *forced poverty* is the craving for material goods that leads some to exploit and impoverish others. This craving is therefore countered by the religious force of opting to *be poor* (*voluntary poverty*), giving up both the desire for and the actual possession of material goods. However, for Pieris, opting to *be poor* can be liberative only when it leads to the option *for* the poor in order to struggle together for liberation of everyone from the craving for material goods and the equitable sharing of goods among all. Hence, it is only when the positive elements of poverty and religiousness come together in this way that both become liberative. And this is exactly what Pieris proposes as the specificity of Asian liberation theology. Marxist traditions, on the other hand, simply focus on development rejecting Asian religiousness as superstitious and alienating. They only opt to struggle *with* the poor and not address the root causes of poverty, namely, craving for money, power and prestige. Such development projects designed to alleviate poverty are bound to fail.

⁶⁴ Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1997, p. 93.

2.6 Key Elements of Pieris' Asian Theology of Religions

With this background of Pieris' theological thinking, we turn to the major and interrelated components of his theology of religion/liberation.⁶⁵ Pieris' places himself in the Sri Lankan/Asian context and holds that authentic theology is always a theology of liberation. According to Pieris there cannot be non-liberational theology. As Pieris always claims, he never invented but *discovered* a theology through a ceaseless baptism into the twofold Asian reality, namely, *many poor and many religions*, the situation he finds himself in.

a) A Matrix of Sri Lankan/Asian Theology of Liberation

Pieris' contention is that a relevant theology for the Church in Sri Lankan/Asian context not only must respond to *both* challenging realities, namely, *many-poor* and *many-religions*, but that it must respond to both of them *together*. For Pieris the specific character defining Asia within the *Third World* is its multi-religiousness while the reality of overwhelming poverty is the common denominator that it shares with the rest of the *Third World*.⁶⁶ These realities are mutually conditioned. Hence, for him these two inseparable poles of the Asian reality, or, more precisely in his words, "the religiousness of the poor and the poverty of the religious", constitute the matrix of any truly Sri Lankan/Asian theology, and more so of the theology of revelation/redemption, the area of concern of this research.

⁶⁵ Paul F. Knitter writing the forward to Pieris' work *An Asian Theology of liberation* rightly states that for Pieris *liberation* is not an adjective but a synonym for *theology* (Cf. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. xii).

⁶⁶ Cf. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, pp. 75-76 (This is in fact one of the major papers presented by Pieris at the Third International Conference of The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), held for the first time in Asia, in Sri Lanka in 1979. Until then, as Michael Amaladoss points out, the dominant theology of the EATWOT was the Latin American perspective of the poor and their struggle for liberation (see M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, p. 93).

b) Theological Insight on Liberation and Inculturation

The other significant element of Pieris' theology of thinking is the issue of inculturation. He argues that the *inculturation* intended by Vatican II is a call to a "change of life" and not merely a "change of rite". Hence, he affirms strongly that inculturation starts not with the sacramental celebrations in the Church but with the liturgy of life, that is, with our living out the daily Paschal Mystery to usher in the Kingdom of God within us and around us.⁶⁷ It is in the Holy Eucharist that inculturation should ultimately manifest itself and culminate as something that has evolved through the struggle for full humanity. It is in this conviction of Pieris' that we need to view his argument that to be truly inculturated, the Church must be rooted in the *liberating* aspects of poverty and religiousness.⁶⁸ A Church inculturated in Sri Lanka/Asia is indeed a Church liberated from mammon. For Pieris, inculturation is the complex encounter (dialogue) between the Gospel and a local church, in the whole Asian reality, made up of religions, cultures and the poor. Thus in the final analysis for Pieris Liberation and inculturation are inseparable dimensions of one and the same incarnational process. To be involved in the liberation of masses is to be involved in the process of the authentic inculturation of the Church. To be precise, for Pieris inculturation is the by-product of an *involvement* with a people (particularly the biblical poor) rather than a conscious target of a program of action.

c) Overwhelming Presence of non-Christian Soteriologies and Inter-religious Dialogue

For Pieris, Asia will always remain a non-Christian continent.⁶⁹ It is in this context that Pieris and others, for example, R. Panikkar, discern the presence of non-Christian

⁶⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* (hereafter *VJTR*), vol. 57, 1993 (pp.641-651), here pp. 643-644.

⁶⁸ Cf. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 38. Pieris, identifies the liberating and the enslaving elements both in "poverty" and "religion". This will be discussed in detail in the Third Chapter.

⁶⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 74.

soteriologies. In the non-biblical soteriologies of Asia, religion and philosophy are inseparably infused. Philosophy is a religious vision and religion is a philosophy lived. Speaking on inter-religious dialogue, Pieris places emphasis on respect for the different paradigms which impart an unrepeatable identity on each religion in terms of its cultural geography, its philosophical idiom and soteriological orientation.⁷⁰ Then placing himself specifically in the Sri Lankan and predominantly Buddhist context, he holds that the reality of poverty can only be adequately addressed within the context of a genuine dialogue with Sri Lankan/Asian religions. At the same time an authentic and successful interreligious dialogue can be carried out only on the basis of poverty.⁷¹ The failure to keep these two poles of the Sri Lankan /Asian reality together has rendered the Sri Lankan / Asian “*basileia* theology” irrelevant and, consequently, lost the credibility of the Christian mission itself.

All scriptural religions in Sri Lanka, namely, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are soteriological in character, having their specific interpretation of Supreme Being, human person and Universe. The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod for Asia (1998) rightly acknowledges that “the religions of Asia have moulded the lives and cultures of Asian people for several millennia and continue to give meaning and direction for their lives even today.”⁷² Hence, for Pieris Christianity which has been alienated from the ethos of Sri Lanka for not having found the proper *language* of communication of ‘The Way’ of Christ, needs to find its point of re-entry in the Sri Lankan setting, if it is

⁷⁰ Cf. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp.105-135.

⁷¹ Aloysius Pieris elaborating his thought of universal thirst for liberation distinguishes between “forced poverty” and “voluntary poverty”. It is through the latter that the former will be eliminated. The *thirst for freedom from needs* (voluntary poverty) will bring about the *thirst for freedom from want* (enforced poverty) (Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp 20, 37, 61, 88). *Want* is the absence of basic *needs*. Voluntary poverty is a value in Asia that is expressed in the Buddhist term *alpecchatā* and its corresponding Hindu term *vairāgya*.

⁷² See Asian Synod, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1998: The *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 7.

going make a transformative impact in the country. Thus Pieris would argue, “The door once closed to Jesus in Asia is the only door that can take him in today – namely, the soteriological nucleus or the liberative core of various religions that have given shape and stability to our cultures.”⁷³ What is noteworthy in Pieris’ understanding of Sri Lankan religions is that he postulates that religions practiced in Sri Lanka, including non-theistic religions such as Buddhism, originate from a soteriological core, a primordial liberative experience.⁷⁴ And, he strongly believes that it is only at the level of the soteriological core of religions that an authentic interreligious dialogue can be developed. However, he recognizes the validity of two essential preceding levels of interreligious dialogue, namely, the theological level, and the religious level which Pieris designates as *communicatio in sacris* (communication in rituals).⁷⁵

2.7 Conclusion

The study of this chapter accounts for the originality of theology, of Pieris as discovered and explicated by him. Pieris admits that his contribution to Asian theology is “an Asian Theology”, one among many in Asia. He does not claim it to be a personal invention but a discovery. Furthermore, he considers himself to be part of a contribution to the Asian and global theology rather than the author of this theology. He insists that his contribution to theology is a

⁷³ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 59. Pieris, arrives at this thesis from the fact that when Jesus reentered Asia, the continent of his birth, in a foreign garb, it was often the non-Christian religions which have already stuck institutional roots in Asia that awakened the cultural ego of subdued nations and thus prevented them from being surrendered to Christianity except for just two percent of the population after four centuries of colonialism.

⁷⁴ Cf. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 111, 119. Pieris would argue that in the Sri Lankan context, the Buddhist core experience of “liberative knowledge” (*gnosis*) and the Christian core experience of “redemptive love” (*agape*) are complementary and necessary for salvation since each in itself is inadequate as a medium.

⁷⁵ Pieris distinguishes three dimensions or levels within any religion in terms of interreligious dialogue: primordial soteriological experience (the experiential level), collective memory (the religious level), and interpretation (the theological level) (Ref. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 120. Also see Frederik Glorieux, “Does Christ Have an Asian Face? An Analysis of Aloysius Pieris’ Theology of Religions,” in: *Louvain Studies* 30, 2005, pp. 332-337).

result of a collective effort of so many people whom he came into contact with, specially the *religious poor* with whom he interacted in his commitment to the gospel.

As noted in this chapter, it is in Pieris' profound study in philosophy of Buddhism that qualifies him to make a creative use of Buddhist spirituality and Asian poverty for a healthy Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Asia. And he enriches his theological thinking to offer a radical and a transformative approach to Asian reality. This unique background of Pieris gives him the moral authority and obligation for a fresh "*Asia's search for Christ*" centred on Christ's *mission* which in fact he articulates in his thesis, *Covenant Christology*. In his *Covenant Christology*, an alternative paradigm to Chalcedon Christology,⁷⁶ Pieris sees *Jesus as God's Covenantal Word of Promise to the poor*, which for him constitutes the *uniqueness* of the person and mission of *Jesus*.⁷⁷ This *promise* of eternal life (total liberation) *to the poor* through love of God and neighbour was fulfilled in the extreme manner in the Word-Crucified, on Calvary. However, for him the Cross is not only salvation offered by Christ (the Crucified-Word) to us but also our covenantal participation in his redemptive act.⁷⁸ Pieris, who perceives *Love* as the all pervasive *mission* of God in Christ finds a twofold Love-Command, love of God and neighbour, as the basis of *Covenant Christology*. These two mutually inclusive Love-Commands, for Pieris, express the sum and substance of revelation and salvation. This will be discussed in detail in the Third Chapter.

Hence, the positive and progressive attitude of Pieris adequately substantiated with the study of Chapter Two warrants the claim of my thesis that the notion of the Word-crucified is a

⁷⁶ In Chalcedon Christology the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in one divine person is cited as the basis of Christ's uniqueness as universal Saviour.

⁷⁷ For Pieris, Jesus is God's Word to us. Jesus is also our human response to God, our fidelity to God, our covenant with God. Hence, Jesus, God's Word to us, is both eliciting and embodying our love for God and neighbour. In Jesus, God says "yes" to us and we say "amen" to God (2Cor. 1:18-22).

⁷⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary: An Asian Perspective," in: *Logos*, vol. 39, no.3, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2000, p. 55.

key concept for the understanding of the theological contribution of Pieris. At the same time one could see that there is a gradual theological development of the notion Word-Crucified and, that it is not an afterthought.

CHAPTER THREE

The Word-Crucified, Centre of Pieris' Theology

3.1 Introduction

The principal aim of the Third Chapter is to demonstrate that the Word-Crucified constitutes the centre of Pieris' theology of revelation and Christology. It possesses the right orientation to develop a new Asian theological paradigm to make the Christian message of salvation "credible" in Asia and to help the Church *in* Sri Lanka to become the Church *of* Sri Lanka.¹ This requires a study of the foundation and the development of Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified which undergirds his Christology and theology of revelation. I will endeavour to show how Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified gives the Sri Lankan Church and its theology a credible and necessary basis for a much needed Triple-Dialogue. There is no doubt that if the Church *in* Sri Lanka is to become truly *of* Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Christians and the Church must be engaged, relentlessly and wholeheartedly, in the Triple-Dialogue with Sri Lankan religions, culture, and the Sri Lankan people themselves, especially the poor. This Chapter involves a study of the major works and writings of Pieris with the aim of extracting from them the implicit revelation theology they contain from the perspective of his notion of the Word-Crucified. Here my overall attempt is to demonstrate Pieris' unique theological contribution

¹ Here, Pieris' choice of Buddhism in his search of a new Sri Lankan/Asian theological paradigm is not accidental. It is reasonable that one should concentrate on one of the major religions to understand and sharpen the focus on Asian religiosity in view of presenting Jesus Christ, Christianity and the Church to the people in a credible manner. For Pieris, Buddhism is the one religion that is pan-Asian in cultural integration, numerical strength, geographical extension, and political maturity. Michael Amaladoss, an Indian theologian, agrees that it is Buddhism that underlies the Asian cultural unity just as the cultural unity of Euro-America is based on Greek philosophy and the religions of the Books, namely, Judaism and Christianity. However, Pieris is aware that Buddhism does not exhaust the whole phenomenon of Asian religiousness (Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, pp. 72-73; Also see M. Amaladoss, "Is There an Asian Way of Doing Theology," in: *EAPR*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2008, p. 12).

which fills the lacuna of the present theological thinking in Sri Lanka in the context of religious pluralism.

3.2 The Quest for a New Sri Lankan Theological Paradigm

Before expounding Pieris' paradigm of Covenant Christology² and the Word-Crucified as a key concept for the understanding his theology, it would be helpful to spell out, albeit cursorily, the basic theological concerns of the Sri Lankan phenomena of religious pluralism.

Today in Sri Lanka what the theologians are concerned about is not merely the Christian theology of religions but the Christian theology of religious pluralism. The change in terminology calls for a better understanding within the universal Church of the basic fact that religious pluralism belongs to God's intention and purpose for humankind. This is not a mere historical accident that pushes us to regard religious pluralism as an obstacle to overcome. This positive attitude towards other religions as being within God's one single universal plan therefore demands a change in theological perspective. Thus the traditional theology of religions developed in terms of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism is no longer adequate.

However, this right attitude towards religious pluralism is the best entry point to engage in a respectful and dignified dialogue with cultures and other religious traditions and the Sri Lankans, especially the poor in bearing witness to Jesus. This basic acceptance of religious pluralism would certainly call for a reinterpretation of three fundamental Christian beliefs, regarding God, Christ, and the Church since the traditional presentation of them is inadequate in the Sri Lankan/Asian setting. This process of reinterpretation would ultimately shape the

² This Christological paradigm will be discussed in detail later in this dissertation. However, in brief, it has as its basis the two love-commands: love of God and of neighbour which sums up the Law and the Prophets, that is to say, which recapitulates the whole range of revelation and salvation. Thus this paradigm not only basically makes Christ's mission its focal point but also finds that mission embodied in Christ who is both our God and our neighbour.

traditional way of doing theology and the evangelizing mission of the Asian church. In her search for a viable methodology for a sound theology and mission the church in Sri Lanka needs to establish a coherent explanation for complex issues such as the following:

- a) The unity of God's plan of salvation. However, the different religions cannot be seen as mere different paths to the same end placed in juxtaposition as though they represent parallel economies of salvation. Hence, should we not view different religions as God's interventions or covenants in history through the Word and His Spirit in divergent socio-cultural contexts within one single but progressive and holistic economy of salvation orientated towards eschatological realization, the *Ultimate Future* (God)?
- b) The salvific significance of the Christ-event: Christ's decisive eschatological moment on the Cross. Here we need to propose a credible account of the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ as the Saviour. Should we not think that the Cross is not only salvation offered by Christ to us but also our covenantal participation in his redemptive act? Thus the all encompassing or cosmic Christhood of Jesus (Jesus as a "corporate person"), and discipleship *converge* on the Cross.³

This general Asian theological concern and trend is affirmed in the form of a rhetorical question by the First Plenary (1974) of Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference (FABC I)⁴ which called

³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma: Doing Christology in the Context of the Religions and the Poor" (hereafter, "Christ Beyond Dogma"), in: *Louvain Studies*, vol.25, 2000, (pp. 187-231), here pp. 208 and 214. Pieris argues that Jesus of Nazareth grows into the all encompassing Christhood towards which all creation and all history converges as to its ultimate future. In this process Yahweh and his covenant partners, especially the poor, sealed their irrevocable covenant in Jesus on the Cross. It is also the anticipation of cosmic Christhood. In his Covenant Christology, Pieris further argues that Jesus, in whom the Triune God is covenanted with the poor, needs their collaboration to arrive *with them* at the fullness of Christhood. Jesus cannot be the Christ without them.

⁴ For the documents of the FABC and its various institutes see G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arévalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Maryknoll, N.Y./Quezon City, Philippines, Orbis/Claretian Publications, 1992; Franz-Josef Eilers (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1992 to 1996*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines, 1997; and Franz-Josef Eilers (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2002*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines, 2002. Hereafter, these will be cited as *FAPA*, followed by their years of publication in parentheses and the number of the page.

for respect and dialogue among religions. As they pointed out such sincere and honourable dialogue will enable us as Christians to identify authentic ways of living and expressing the mystery of Christ:

In Asia especially this [evangelization] involves a dialogue with the great religious traditions of our people. In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations. How then can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our people to Himself through them? (FABC I, nos. 14-15).⁵

However insightful the above points look, they find friction with the traditional presentation of theology since they require or operate on a methodology different from that of traditional theology. This is made evident from the Vatican declaration, *Dominus Iesus* in 2000.

The traditional or classical theology is basically and primarily defined as faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). In such a paradigm faith expresses itself as knowledge and intellectual understanding. As Pieris points out the definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* is based on the *logos* model of theology.⁶ This theological method of St. Anselm addresses the quest for meaning that rises in the human mind rather than the salvation of the integral human person. Here, theology is the rational explanation of revelation which gave rise to the dictum such as 'I believe that I may understand' – *credo ut intelligam*. In this view, salvation is knowledge of God.⁷ Pieris, further argues that it is the definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* which led scholastics to subordinate the faculty of love to the faculty of

⁵ Cf. FAPA, (1992), p. 14.

⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.196.

⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with Regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking," in: *Concilium*, 1994/6, (pp. 70-79), here p.72.

understanding.⁸ However, according to Pieris, Jesus is the Word of God in the sense of *dabar*, event-Word. Jesus Christ as the event-Word is not merely a speech that displays authoritative knowledge, but an utterance that creates and transforms. In the *dabar* model it is the execution of the Word that brings understanding of the Word. For Pieris, in a *dabar* pattern of theology knowledge comes from love and fidelity (1 Jn 4:8, 20). It is the fidelity to the Covenant of Love that is Jesus Christ, the Word-Crucified himself.⁹ It is that knowledge or understanding which is salvific. Hence, the knowledge in the *dabar* model calls for *an encounter* with the One who is our Love and our Salvation and, a *commitment* to his mission of love rather than mere logical inference as in the *logos* model.¹⁰ This encounter with the Word continually takes place in history. Here, therefore, history and revelation meet. Pieris referring to *Lumen Gentium* 55, states:

The church that is conspicuously present among “the poor and the humble” in a Marian fashion, *sperans salutem* (hoping for salvation) and receiving it, exercises a faith that unfolds itself as a theology of liberation (or salvation).¹¹

As a result Pieris opts for *fides sperans salutem* (faith that hopes for liberation) to define his theology, *a fortiori* his theology of Revelation and Christology, going beyond the *logos* model of theology. Following the same line of thought, Pieris argues that faith is primarily not about truths revealed and accurately formulated for the intellectually inquiring minds, but a *fidelity* to a faithful God who has made the *promise of salvation*. According to this basic argument therefore

⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.197.

⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.197.

¹⁰ For detailed reading of *Logos*, *dabar*, and *hodos* patterns of theological thinking, see A. Pieris, “The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with Regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking,” in: *Concilium*, 1994/6, pp. 70-79).

¹¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 197. *LG*. no.55 “She (Mary) stands out among the poor and the humble of the Lord, who confidently awaits (*sperant*) and receives salvation (*salutem*) from Him.” In the Latin version, “*Ipsa praecellit inter humiles ac pauperes Domini, qui salutem cum fiducia ab Eo (i.e. Deo) sperant et accipiunt.*”

what corresponds to *faith* precisely is *the divine promise that breathes hope*, and not simply the *doctrinal view* of revelation.¹²

Furthermore, the modern and postmodern approaches to theology, particularly Asian liberation theologies, would place their emphasis on and begin from the human subject in his or her religio-cultural and socio-political dimensions of existence. At the same time they respect the normative voices from the past: above all, Scripture and official church teaching. Hence, there is a continuous dialectical process of hermeneutic in operation here. In this dynamism, efforts are made to find new meaning in the experience in the light of tradition while there is an attempt to reinterpret tradition in the context of experience.¹³ In this anthropological turn of theology, faith gets a new formulation and experience acquires a new meaning. This is exactly what Vatican II acknowledges in talking of two lines of ongoing communication. It asserts that there is growth in the understanding of biblical revelation as well as a continuing actualization of revelation as the sacred Word, in particular the Gospels, comes to reside in human heart,¹⁴ with its light for life and power to lead one to share in the truth, God himself (Cf. *DV*. 8, 21, 25).

Pieris' explanation of the dialectics between the "Christian texts" and the "common human experience and language", is based on his thesis of Covenant Christology where he highlights the co-partnership of the poor with the Crucified-Word in the mission of liberation.

The poor as God's covenant partners in Jesus, the Crucified-Word, call for a new way of reading

¹² Cf. A. Pieris, "The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary," in: *Logos*, vol.39, no.3, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2000, pp.16 and 86. Here Pieris alludes to J. Moltmann's insistence that faith and promise correspond to each other. See also J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, SCM London, 1967, p. 44. For a detailed study of revelation as doctrinal and other models of revelation see Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1992.

¹³ Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Is There an Asian Way of Doing Theology," in: *EAPR*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2008, p.13.

¹⁴ The Church strongly believes that divine revelation is at once past and present. She believes in the decisive character of divine revelation in the past, in Jesus Christ, while acknowledging divine revelation being repeatedly actualized in the present in view of a fuller revelation yet to be given. As Avery Dulles says, "Within time, revelation is given only under the form of promise or anticipation of a fuller revelation yet to come" (Cf. A. Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, (pp.228-29, 240-42), here p.229. The present revelation actualizes the living event of the divine self-revelation (self-communication) through liturgy (*SC*. 7, 33), through prayerful reading of the Scriptures (*DV*. 25), missionary activity (*AG*. 8), the signs of the times (*GS*. 4, 11), the Christian education of all young children (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 36), the lives of saintly persons (*LG*. 50) and so forth.

Scriptures in their struggle to bring about the Reign of God, a new heaven and new earth, with a new humanity (Lev. 25: 8-17). According to Pieris this was the origin of liberation theology as a brand of theology. It is not a result of a Marxist reading of the scriptures or a Christian reading of the Marxist ideology as some would suspect. In concrete terms he elaborates on the correlating of Scripture and its reader within his understanding of the process of inculturation. It will be discussed in detail later in this Chapter. There he sees an inseparable integration of the *Liturgy of the Word* (both the reading of the Word in the Bible and the reading of the sign of the present times) and the *Liturgy of Life* (our living out the Paschal Mystery in our struggle to anticipate the Reign of God in our local context). For Pieris, *Liturgy of Life* presupposes a constant communitarian hearing of the Word of God in the Scriptures and in the history of our people, in the midst of the poor of Yahweh, the principle addressees of the Living Word.¹⁵ Strictly speaking, for Pieris, Scripture (Bible) as such is not the total Living Word of God or the whole of Revelation but is the Sacrament of the Living Word of God.¹⁶ According to him the total Living Word of God is both the Scriptural history (the history of Israel and the first Christians) and the history of today's people guided by the Spirit taken together.¹⁷ Hence, the Word of God surpasses the inspired and interpreted written Scriptures.¹⁸ Biblical Revelation is essentially Historical Revelation (Gal. 4:4; *DV.* 2, 4; *Fides et Ratio* 10-12). It unfolded itself through the history of the people of Israel and reached its climax in the Jesus of Nazareth. However, God

¹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* (hereafter *VJTR*), vol. 57, no.11, (pp. 641-651), here p. 644.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, pp.648-49. The written Scriptures are the Sacrament of the living Word of God because "it is a school where our ears are trained and our hearts are tuned to hear and recognize God's voice in the scriptures beyond the Bible and in the religious communities beyond the Church and in the events that determined the destiny of our nation and our continent." (Cf. Idem, "The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary," *Logos*, vol. 39, no. 3, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka 2000, p. 104).

¹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, p.649.

¹⁸ For further details see G. O'Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1993, Chapter 11(pp. 129-135); and also see Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 1999, p. 44 ff.

continues to speak in the context of the history of today's people through the multiple actualization of his Revelation including various religions (*DV*. 8.3; *AG*.11; *NA*. 2; Rom. 3.29).¹⁹ The Word of God has sown seed not only in the human heart but also in the religious traditions of humanity.

However, we need to highlight at least briefly Pieris' explanation of God's intervention in history particularly through Jesus Christ. According to Pieris' thesis of Covenant Christology, the Word of God which took the human form in Jesus, whom we now know as Christ, needs rather be *encountered* as a "corporate person" covenanted with the poor than be merely *conceived* of as a person of two natures.²⁰ Jesus, in becoming the "corporate person" called Christ, continues to gather his covenant partners,²¹ and transform the cosmos through his continuous intervention in history through the power of the Holy Spirit. For Pieris, history is not just a setting for God's Word to be expressed but rather history is itself revelatory. That is Pieris' explanation of ongoing revelation in the present history in brief.

It is evident therefore that Sri Lankan theologians have the challenge of working out a broad-based theology of Revelation/Christology and a theology of religious pluralism, without diluting the Christian doctrine, since theologizing in Asia is necessarily an interreligious task. It should be noted that this interreligious task is not a new phenomenon in theology since

¹⁹ *Dei Verbum* 8.3 states that through the force of tradition divine self-revelation recorded in the Scriptures is not only more profoundly understood, but also "actualised" as a living revelation of God to the Church and through her to the world. However, as Gerald O'Collins points out there is a false move to say that the present revelation is *only* a development in the understanding of a closed and past revelation recorded by the Scriptures through force of tradition. Therefore the present revelation is not revelation in the proper sense. However, as stated in 2nd paragraph of *DV*. 8 the Council admits the possibility of growth in the understanding of the past revelation, but asserts its conviction, in the 3rd paragraph of the same article that biblical revelation brings about an actual revelation (See G. O'Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, pp. 89-90, 134; Jared Wicks, *Introduction to Theological Method*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1994, pp. 92-93; Idem, "Deposit of faith" in: R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (eds.), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1996, pp. 234-235).

²⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp.202 and 208.

²¹ Pieris recognizes these covenant partners in two categories. Namely, victims of mammon (poor by circumstances) and renouncers of mammon (poor by choice) that includes guides in the path of righteousness, discovers and announcers of the Saving Truth, founders and advocates of other religions.

Christianity as a religion itself came into being through a process of dialogue within Judaism in the early centuries and a dialogue with Hellenistic culture and its mystery religions.²² However, in the contemporary context of religious pluralism in Asia the theology of religious pluralism is not another theme or branch in theology but it is a new way or method of theologizing. That is why it is commonly accepted in the Asian church that religious pluralism is more a pluralism *de jure* than an accidental fact in history. As such it belongs to God's intention for the salvation of humankind itself. Religious pluralism therefore is regarded as a constitutive and intrinsic dimension of human knowing. However, this epistemological pluralism needs to be properly and scientifically handled to avoid the dangers of relativism, scepticism, indifferentism, syncretism and nihilism for which the Asian theologians are often being cautioned by the Roman Curia.

3.2.1 The Social Location of Pieris' Theology

Pieris' social locations of theologizing are the Basic Human Communities (BHCs) where the *magisterium of the poor* is taken seriously.²³ In Pieris' understanding BHCs are the "third magisterium" of the Poor. It is where, in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka, the Christian and non-Christian membership can come together without cultural or religious barriers to be enriched and to find the specificity of one's religion and culture. These are communities where

²² Cf. Dermot Lane, "Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1999, (pp.147-170), here p.159.

²³ Pieris, distinguishes between the "*pastoral magisterium*" of the bishops, the "*academic magisterium*" of the theologians and "*the magisterium of the people*," particularly of the poor which he calls the "*third magisterium*" of the poor. However, he signals a caveat about the application of the word *magisterium* to the first two offices. He prefers to call them two *ministeria* and reserves the word *magisterium* to the Poor since he is convinced that it is the Poor who are qualified to be true teachers (Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issue in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (hereafter, *Fire and Water*), Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis, 1996, p. 154-157; Ibid., "Two There Are, Your Holiness: Suggestions for the next Pope's Agenda in Line with John Paul II's Invitation in *Ut Unum Sint*," in: *EAPR*, vol.41, no.3, 2004, (pp. 288-309), here p.299. He further underlines that the emergence of liberation theology (for example in Latin America and Minjung theology in Korea) has illustrated how the two *ministeria* of the Church leadership and theologians have collaborated with the *magisterium of the poor*. The collaboration in fact means an invitation to the twofold *ministerium* of the Church to be in a permanent learning relationship with the poor of Asia. The *magisterium* of the poor must guide the two *ministeria* that are called to be "subservient to the Word" (*DV*. 10) (Cf. A. Pieris, "The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary," in: *Logos*, pp. 33, 105).

symbiosis occurs, where Buddhists and Christians share life and life's most articulated self-expression: religious experience.²⁴ These grassroots communities which serve as new *locus theologicus* combine study with practice of one's own religion.

The members of the BHCs gather together not with a conscious target of inter-religious dialogue or with the preoccupation of one's religious identity or uniqueness but with the main concern of the total liberation of nonpersons and non-peoples.²⁵ Thus, primarily what brings the members of BHCs together is the liberational thrust of their respective religions. That will eventually lead to a core-to-core dialogue between religions and thus to a profound level of interreligious dialogue within a process of liberative praxis. For Pieris the "core" of any religion is the liberative experience that brought it into existence.²⁶

What exactly happens in the BHCs, as Pieris would put it, is a "veritable *symbiosis*" of religions: a living encounter of the texts (Scriptures) within the encounter of religions and a mutual challenge of religions' unique approach to the liberationist aspiration of the poor.²⁷ Thereby each religion discovers and renames itself in its specificity in response to the other approaches to the total liberation. It is within this process of ongoing liberative praxis that each member of the BHC discovers the uniqueness²⁸ of one's own religion. Therefore, one's religious identity is not something that is sought through a strictly academic discussion but it is something religionists in a BHC impart to each other in the process of common struggle for full humanity. Similarly, the Christian faith within these communities is not a question of mere intellectual

²⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (hereafter, *Love Meets Wisdom*) Obris Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, p. 120.

²⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Chapter 14, p. 158.

²⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 110-111, and 119.

²⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Chapter 14, p. 161. For a further discussion in the same lines see also, Idem, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 31, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004, pp. 69-104, esp. pp. 87-100.

²⁸ In the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka uniqueness is *not* synonymous with *superiority* but merely refers to the *specificity* of each religion. For, it is the uniqueness of each religion that accounts for pluralism of religions.

reflection, but a life-forming and transforming daily experience.²⁹ Furthermore, the Christian members of BHCs get the opportunity to join other religionists in the struggle of conversion to the spiritual heritage common to all religions. This common spirituality in Asia, is identified by Pieris as the spirit of non-acquisitiveness or the renunciation of mammon. It is the evangelical poverty proclaimed in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount as constitutive of discipleship (Mt. 5: 3-11).³⁰ This will be discussed in detail later in this Chapter. Pieris articulating how the story of God's public agreement with the poor, embodied in Jesus, unravels in the context of BHCs, states:

Whenever the Christian members of BHCs make themselves one with the poor in their total dependence on God (opted poverty as common spirituality), and thus qualify themselves to proclaim the new covenant between God and the poor (Christian uniqueness), there Jesus comes out convincingly as God's story in the lives of the covenant partners (the Asian poor) rather than as subtle combination of natures and persons.³¹

Furthermore, BHCs are privileged *loci* that facilitate a living encounter of the Scriptures of various religions within this process of veritable symbiosis in multi-religious countries like Sri Lanka. It results in the further articulation of the hidden meaning which these texts would not reveal unless they are mutually exposed to each other's illuminating discourses. Such discourse is not the intellectual luxury of a few but a source of spiritual nourishment for the faithful of various religions. Pieris proposes a symbiotic approach as a very useful exegetical principle in the cross-scriptural reading among members of the multi-religious communities in the Asian

²⁹ Pieris illustrates this experience by recounting a story of a participant in one of his seminars conducted in a Basic Human Community in Sri Lanka popularly known as the 'Christian Workers' Fellowship.' The participant, a Marxist with a Buddhist background who did not accept the idea of God confessed that if he ever would believe in a God, it is the one that he came to understand as the God who covenanted with the poor in their struggle for liberation (Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Chapter 14, p. 159).

³⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Chapter 14, pp. 160-61.

³¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Chapter 14, p. 161.

context. However, it requires the right understanding of the truly Asian (Hebraic) idiom of the Bible.³² It is in this context we need to understand Pieris' use of the word "complementarity".³³

Hence given the urgent need to be the Church not *in* but *of* Sri Lanka/Asia the BHCs provide the kind of community no less necessary than the Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) elsewhere.³⁴ BHCs create the best location for the Triple-Dialogue in Sri Lanka/Asia because within them the religions acquire their respective religious uniqueness and enrichment, cultures that are generally infused with the religions are respected and the poor are taken seriously. Hence the Asian Churches are in the process of evolving a new normative tradition to guide the Asian Christians in the core-to-core dialogue with other religions through BHCs.

3.2.2 Pieris' Perception of Dialogue

Pieris understands the mission of dialogue as a 'dialogue of life'. For him the 'dialogue of life' takes place by immersion in Asian realities of poverty and multifaceted religiousness. R. S. Sugirtharajah points out that it was Pieris who first put forward the thesis that any authentic theological inquiry in Asia should respond to both these Asian realities together.³⁵ In this dialogue people of other cultures and faiths are never considered as "objects of Christian faith" but as partners in a common mission of ushering in a new heaven and new earth, with new

³² According to Pieris what makes this exercise easy is that the Bible is also a thoroughly Asian text. Here, Pieris finds support from Sri Lankan Methodist Pastor and Scholar, late Rev. Lynn De Silva (Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 31, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004, pp. 88- 100).

³³ In support of possible *spiritual enrichment* in the encounter between Christianity and other religions G. O'Collins clarifies the intent behind the term "complementarity" used by Dupuis in his monumental work *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* which Dupuis later fine tuned with the adjective "asymmetrical" in his subsequent book *Christianity and the Religions*. He states how some elements of one divine mystery can be vividly expressed by the practices and sacred writings found beyond Christianity (Cf. Kendall D., and G. O'Collins (eds.), *In Many and Divers Ways: In Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2003, pp. 24-25). Dupuis finds support from Pieris for his basic notion of "complementarity". However, Pieris takes this discussion on "mutual complementarity" to another level of theological discourse. It will be discussed later in the 4th Chapter.

³⁴ Cf. P. Phan, "Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity," in: *EAPR*, vol. 37, no.3, 2000, (pp. 215-232), here p. 225.

³⁵ Cf. R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1994, p.141.

humanity, a total healing of the entire creation. His insistence on dialogue, instead of debate, directly shows his acceptance of the validity of religio-cultural pluralism within God's one single but progressive and holistic plan of salvation. However, for Christians to engage in dialogue with people of other religions, particularly with Buddhists in Sri Lanka, is an uphill task due to an aggressive Christianity that arrived in Sri Lanka/Asia in the sixteenth century. Even today, though unfortunate, dialogue initiatives of Christians are held in suspicion by some Buddhists in Sri Lanka as another tactic to get around the Buddhist masses.

With this background, according to Pieris a genuine dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism in the Asian context is possible only when it truly springs from the liberative *core* (the primordial *experience*) of each religion that gave birth to it. Pieris identifies the core experience of Buddhism as *gnosis* or "liberative knowledge", and the corresponding Christian experience as *agape* or "redemptive love". According to him nothing short of such core-to-core dialogue is said to be a genuine dialogue.³⁶ Furthermore, Pieris, like Raimondo Panikkar, identifies two more important preliminary levels of dialogue leading to core-to-core dialogue and in which any religion operates.³⁷ First, he sees the validity of intellectual discussion: the interpretation of the *primordial experience* in philosophical, theological and exegetical schools. Second, he also recognizes the necessity of the mediation of the *collective memory* of that core experience, stored up in religious traditions, practices and beliefs, in penetrating to the core experience. These two levels of dialogue in fact preserve and protect the core liberative experience of a religion. However, Pieris who values the level of interpretation as a remote preparation for a core-to-core dialogue cautions us of the danger of remaining at the same level without ever being disposed to the core experience. He recognizes its real function as leading each generation of people towards

³⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 110-11.

³⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 120-124. Also see Idem, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 107-110 and 118-123.

the collective memory and through the memory, to the first primordial experience of liberation. At the same time Pieris is quick to recognize even the collective memory as another “interpretive” level of the core experience of a religion. All interpretations of the core experience, as always, are couched in particular historical and cultural categories which have their own limitations. Hence, he argues that those who consult the collective memory of a religion must be ready to transcend it at some moment or other if they wish to touch the core of one’s own or another’s religion.³⁸

Pieris applies his perception of dialogue to the Sri Lankan/Asian task of Triple-Dialogue, which will be discussed in the following subtitle. However, an overview of the FABC’s theological development of Triple-Dialogue will highlight briefly Pieris’ influence on the subject. The FABC, being aware of its responsibility to enable the local church to affirm what is “life- serving” and transform what is “death-dealing” in the Asian context, chooses dialogue as a suitable mode of theological response. The First Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (*BIRA I*) of the FABC³⁹ in 1979 sees dialogue as “a process of talking and listening, of giving and receiving, of searching and studying, for the deepening and enriching of one another’s faith and understanding” (*BIRA I*, no.11).⁴⁰ The stated objectives of dialogue are

³⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 121.

³⁹ For a correct understanding of the various texts of the FABC, it is important to know the basic structure of the Federation. The *Plenary Assembly*, in which the presidents of the member conferences participate, is the highest body and it is generally convened once every four years. At the operational level, the various activities of the Federation are carried on through offices relating to various fields in the life of the Church and society. They function regularly. Thus there are Offices for Evangelization (OE), Laity (OL), Social Communication (OSC), Human Development (OHD), Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), and Education and Student Chaplaincy (OESC). In addition to these six offices, there is also a Theological Advisory Committee (*TAC*) which is at the service of the FABC and its various organs. There are also the Bishops’ Institutes organized by the FABC’s Offices over the years, such as Bishops’ Institute for Social Action (*BISA*), Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate (*BIMA*), Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (*BIRA*), and Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate (*BILA*). They are seminars whose scope is in the first place to conscientize the Asian bishops about the respective problems of social action, missionary activities and dialogue, etc. (Cf. Felix Wilfred, “The Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conference: Orientation, Challenges and Impact,” in: *FAPA* (1992), p. xxiv. Also see R. Renson, “Lay Apostolate. A Report on *BILA I*,” in: *Japan Miss. Bul.*, vol. 39, 1985, pp. 1 and 22).

⁴⁰ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 111.

“to promote mutual understanding and harmony” (*BIRA I*, no. 15),⁴¹ “to promote whatever leads to unity, love, truth, justice and peace” (*BIRA I*, no 16),⁴² and sharing the riches of our spiritual heritages” (*BIRA I*, no. 17).⁴³

It was, however, as early as 1970, that the Asian Bishop’s Meeting (ABM) passed a resolution to engage in “an open, sincere and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development” (ABM, Resolution 12).⁴⁴ Four years later, the FABC’s First Plenary Assembly developed this nascent perspective on dialogue into a call for a Triple-Dialogue. It comprises mutually respectful and critical encounters between the local Asian Churches and the rich, diverse and pluralistic myriad of Asian cultures, Asian religious traditions and the multitude of the poor (FABC I, nos. 12 and 19).⁴⁵ The FABC initially conceived and practiced these three dialogues as three distinct activities. But gradually, by 1990, at its Fifth Plenary Assembly the FABC became clear that they form but a three-pronged single approach to Christian mission in Asia.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it was during the *BISA VII* (Bishops’ Institute for Social Action, 1986) that the Federation articulated more clearly the profound mutual relationship that exists between poverty, culture and religiosity.

⁴¹ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 111.

⁴² Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 111.

⁴³ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 111.

⁴⁴ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), pp. 14-15. This call for a Triple-Dialogue has been repeatedly emphasized by both the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly (1990) and the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (1995). The Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly equated the Triple-Dialogue with the Christian mission imperative: “mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in culture and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God’s Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. *Mission will mean a dialogue with Asian’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions*” (FABC V, no. 3.1.2. Italics mine. In *FAPA*, (1992), p. 280). The Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly reiterated that “the church in Asia must foster a three-fold dialogue: with the many different faiths of Asia, with the cultures of Asia, and with the poor multitude of Asia” (FABC VI, no. 3; In: *FAPA*, (1997), p.2).

⁴⁶ Cf. P. Phan, “Reception” or ‘Subversion’ of Vatican II by the Asian Churches?: A new way of Being Church in Asia,” in: William Madges (ed.), *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2005, (pp.26-54), here p.39.

Culture, religion and society are interdependent, interacting and mutually transforming. In our Asian continent, which is the cradle for all the great world religions, culture and religion are integrated. Religion is the dynamic element of culture. Together they form the religio-cultural system which interacts with the socio-economic-political system of society, permeating every sphere of human life. Asian poverty is not a purely economic concept, neither is its religiosity merely cultural. Poverty and religiosity are interwoven in the Asian ethos, in such a way that at a certain point they seem to coalesce in order to procreate the specific character of Asia. Within the fabric of this rich and varied religio-cultural heritage of Asia, but especially in the lives of the poor, the bishops sought to discern the creative impulses of God's liberating Spirit as the poor struggle to free themselves from deprivation and oppression and strive for genuine communion among people and nations (*BISA VII*, no. 6).⁴⁷

This text of *BISA VII* reflects clearly the influence of Pieris who served as one of its resource persons. Pieris, already presenting one of his major papers in 1979 at the third conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) strongly affirmed that Asian theology, to be authentic, must respond to both poverty and religiosity together. He further stressed that "Asian poverty cannot be reduced to mere 'economic' categories, just as Asian religiousness cannot be defined merely in 'cultural' terms. They are both interwoven culturally and economically to constitute the vast socio-political reality that is Asia."⁴⁸

Peter Phan recognizes Pieris as one of the forceful proponents of taking these three dialogues together if the Church *in* Asia wants to become a Church *of* Asia, which has been repeatedly affirmed by the FABC.⁴⁹ Pieris insists that in this dialogical process the Sri Lankan Church must transform herself into a humble Church. She should be ready to die to herself and disappear with the millions of poor in a similar manner Jesus identified himself with the "religious poor" at his baptism. Here, Pieris' logical argument is that Asian liberation theology,

⁴⁷ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), pp. 230-231.

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, (hereafter, *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*) Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1980, (pp.75-95), here p. 76.

⁴⁹ Cf. P. Phan, "Reception" of 'Subversion' of Vatican II by the Asian Churches?: A new way of Being Church in Asia," in: W. Madges (ed.), *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, p.39.

to be precise Asian Liberation Christology and the theology of dialogue constitute a common project insofar as they demonstrate different aspects of the evangelization mission of the Church. They collaborate more closely in Asia where they address the fundamental challenges which confront the Asian peoples: poverty and religiousness.⁵⁰ So too, as Pieris has tirelessly argued, in Sri Lanka/Asia the conjunction of these two elements, poverty and religiousness, must be practiced in both interreligious dialogue and inculturation.

3.2.3 Pieris' Contribution to the Triple-Dialogue

Here, the focus is to place Pieris's contribution to the discussion on Triple-Dialogue in Sri Lanka/Asia in parallel to that of the FABC.

It is vitally important to note that for the Sri Lankan/Asian Church dialogue is not simply one activity among others but is the comprehensive *modus operandi* of its entire mission (or rather evangelization) and theology. Dialogue is not only a mission, but a way of being the Church for reflection and action. In Sri Lanka this dialogue is not primarily an intellectual exercise among experts and religious leaders of various religions, as the term "dialogue" tends to suggest. As stated in the introduction there is no doubt in the Sri Lankan mind that if the Church *in* Sri Lanka is to become truly *of* Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Christians must be engaged, relentlessly and wholeheartedly, in the Triple-Dialogue with Sri Lankan cultures (inculturation), its religions (interreligious dialogue), and Sri Lankan themselves, especially the poor (liberation).

⁵⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 41. This logical argument of Pieris undergirds his whole work: *An Asian Theology of Liberation*.

3.2.3.1 Dialogue with Religions

As observed, Pieris highlights multifaceted religiousness as the specific character that defines Asia within other poor countries in the Third World.⁵¹ He sees the other religions as significant and positive elements within one single but progressive economy of God's design of salvation. In his new paradigm of Covenant Christology this economy of salvation is viewed as a Word-centered dynamic movement, orientated towards eschatological realization, the Ultimate Future.⁵² Pieris' appreciation of other religions based on his personal experience does not allow him to use the three significant categories traditional theology of religions has developed, namely, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Pieris does not dismiss the paradigms, namely ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism, and theocentrism, which gave rise to these three traditional categories as wrong. Rather, he developed a more Asian paradigm wherein the three categories do not make sense.⁵³ The FABC too does not subscribe to the conventional categories of theology of religions.⁵⁴ This issue will be taken up in detail in Chapter IV which will discuss theology of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka.

For Pieris the primary focus of any genuine inter-religious dialogue, that takes place in the BHCs, is our common calling to God's Reign for which there are many names according to

⁵¹ Cf. A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, p. 78.

⁵² Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 214.

⁵³ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p. 155.

⁵⁴ Felix Wilfred commenting on FABC's position in this regard says, "The religiously pluralist environment in which the Asian Churches live raises the important question of Jesus and his universal mediation of salvation. (. . .). Categories such as inclusivism and pluralism are used in the current discussion of the issue. If the position of Vatican II in this regard can be characterized as inclusivism, so too can that of the Asian bishops in the early years of FABC. However, there has been an evolution in the thought of the bishops. Greater experimental and existential relationships with the faith of peoples of other faiths seem to have led the bishops a step further than inclusivism. (. . .). On the other hand, the bishops do not subscribe to a multiplicity of theophanies and divine mediations, each one independent in its own religious universe and equally valid. So we could say that the position of the Asian bishops is neither inclusivism nor pluralism. It seems to break with these conventional categories and call for a new frame of interpretation." (Cf. F. Wilfred, "Images of Jesus Christ in the Asian Pastoral Context: An Interpretation of Documents from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," in: *Concilium*, 1993/2, (pp.51-62), here p.57).

various religious traditions.⁵⁵ This common calling implies a return to the liberative core of one's own religion while mutually confirming the common liberative orientation of one another's religion. In the final analysis for Pieris it is a common call to all religionists for a radical conversion or transformation of the whole universe (*kosmos*) in its present age (*aiōn*) with its complex mixture of good and bad, into *another age*, namely into the Reign of God. It is important to note here that, according to Pieris, biblical faith does not postulate another world for us to enter in order to enjoy the fruits of redemption but to *another age* into which this same universe is summoned.⁵⁶ This, as Pieris states, is the sum and substance of both Christopraxis and Christology, or salvation and revelation.⁵⁷

In the liberative praxis this conversion is not only a turning towards God, but also a turning towards the poor (Mk. 10: 23-25). For Pieris, it is in the context of liberation (dialogue with the poor) that a true conversation between religionists could take place.⁵⁸ In Sri Lanka the majority of "covenant partners" are non-Christians and are poor. Hence, in the Sri Lankan context an inter-religious dialogue advocates a change of direction or a change of mentality (*metanoia*) rather than a change of religion. Religion is a matter of God's call, a vocation. Conversion to another religion is only justified when one hears the call of God. As Pieris stresses, a Christian theology of religious pluralism has to be a blend of two imperatives, namely, *fidelity* to what is unique to Christian faith, and *fairness* towards every other religion's distinctive

⁵⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 219.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Holy Spirit and Asia's Religiousness," *Spiritus*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, vol., no. 2, 2007, p.130. Pieris makes this observation by reading the *FABC Papers* No. 81, *The Spirit at Work in Asia*, (May 1997) where it speaks of Spirit's redemptive activity in the whole of creation, in human communities and in the celebration of life in its ups and downs. In fact the biblical expression "heaven and earth" is a Hebraism for the whole created universe; therefore, "new heaven and new earth" means a totally transformed or totally redeemed or resurrected version of *this same* universe in which we live. It is therefore a dawning of this world-order. See also idem, "What on Earth is God Doing with Us?: A Search for Authentic Christian Theism," in: *Gleanings*, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, January-June, 2008, (pp.3-16), p. 4.

⁵⁷ For an elaborative discussion on this topic see, A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp.187-231.

⁵⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 107.

otherness.⁵⁹ Thus, Pieris advocates due respect to the non-negotiables of any religion and stresses that we contribute to an interreligious dialogue for mutual enrichment by highlighting the universality and uniqueness of our Christian belief. For Pieris the universality of Christian belief is found in Jesus embodying the beatitudinal spirituality common to all religions and the uniqueness in God crucified in Christ who is One Body with the Oppressed. This will be discussed later in this dissertation in the section: The Foundation of the new Paradigm. According to Pieris, the uniqueness or specificity of each religion accounts for the pluralism of religions. Besides, whatever is unique to a particular religion is also a constitutive dimension of its own soteriology, inseparable from the common thrust of religiousness which it shares with others.⁶⁰ This implies that what is unique to a religion is not an optional extra for the religion.

The spirituality that sustains such inter-religious dialogue is well expressed in the struggle against mammon which Pieris identifies as the collective spirituality of every religion, be it theistic or non-theistic, which has liberative experience as its origin. This spirituality common to all religions is formulated in a theistic idiom by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:3-12) and in the Address on the Plain (Lk. 6:20-23) as *beatitudinal* life. Hence, Christian divine revelation, the purpose of which is salvation from mammon through a spirituality of voluntary poverty, and Buddhism which advocates liberation from acquisitiveness and greed through a spirituality of simple life style (*appicchatā*), find a common ground on the basis of liberation from mammon.

As observed earlier Pieris, strongly asserts that the ‘core’ of any religion is the *liberative experience*. He affirms that Buddhism is basically *gnostic* in its search for final liberation, while

⁵⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism,” (ms), TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. This is an amended, expanded and more accurately formulated version of an article originally written for the Lieve Troch Felicitation Volume and published in Portuguese, in: *Theologias com sabor de Mangostao*, Nhanduti Editora Sao Bernadino de Campo, 2009, 151-160.

⁶⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism,” (ms), p. 1.

Christianity is primarily *agapeic* in its commitment to the Kingdom of God. He then argues that in the Sri Lankan context, the Buddhist core experience of *gnosis* and the Christian core experience of *agape* are mutually complementary and necessary for salvation. For Pieris they are not soteriological alternatives or optional paths to human liberation. They are two irreducibly distinct languages of the same *divine* Spirit (as far as the Christian partner in dialogue is concerned) that need each other to mediate the self-transcending experience called “salvation”. They are two legitimate languages that the Spirit speaks alternatively in each one of us. Hence, both these salvific idioms each in themselves are inadequate as a medium, not only for experiencing but also for expressing the human encounter with the Ultimate Source of Liberation.⁶¹ Pieris argues that those religions that do not retain the dialectical interplay of these two idioms would sooner or later succumb to decay. For him there is a legitimate *Christian gnosis* that is necessarily *agapeic* and that there is also a legitimate *Buddhist agape* that remains *gnostic*.⁶² Therefore each tradition contains as secondary traits the primary tendencies of the other. He is convinced that the secondary traits of each tradition can be strengthened by an authentic mutual dialogue. Highlighting this mutual idiomatic exchange Pieris phrases these core experiences as the “*agapeic gnosis*” of Christians and the “*gnostic agape*” of Buddhists.⁶³ In Pieris’ own words:

It is not farfetched to conclude that the core experience of Christianity is not *agape* pure and simple but *agape* in dialogue with *gnosis*; conversely, the core experience of Buddhism is not mere *gnosis*, but a *gnosis* intrinsically in dialogue with *agape*. Hence, a true Buddhist-Christian encounter is possible only at the depths of our being where the core-to-core dialogue had already taken place! (Italics mine)⁶⁴

⁶¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 9, 27 and 111.

⁶² Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 56; Idem, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 27 and 113.

⁶³ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 114 and 116.

⁶⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 119. For detailed study of this argument refer pages 110- 119 of the same work.

However, refusal on the part of Buddhists and Christians to admit the reciprocity of these two irreducibly distinct idioms already within each tradition continues to remain the major obstacle to core-to-core dialogue between the two traditions. He argues that the abuses of Gnostics which created an anti-gnostic attitude and even a phobia of the “West Christianity”, thus preventing theologians from approaching the question afresh, should not deter us from a good use of Gnosticism. He further reminds that *gnosis* constituted the basis of a legitimate line of Christian thought in the early Church, thanks especially to the Alexandrian school.⁶⁵ However, Pieris, by illustrating the dialectical tension between these distinct salvific idioms, reminds us that we can only find homologues between the religions and not exact equivalents.⁶⁶ He acknowledges the idiomatic differences and highlights that *love* is Christian *gnosis*.⁶⁷ According to the Scriptures loving one’s neighbour is the Christian way of knowing God (1 John 4:7-8). To know God, in both the Old and the New Testaments, amounts to a *fidelity* to the covenant obligation to *love*. Pieris brings out this biblical revelation in a conspicuous manner in his Covenant Christology. He says that Jesus is God’s Covenantal Word of Promise to the poor (or Jesus is the irrevocable covenant or defence pact between God and the poor).⁶⁸ He further asserts that we know Jesus *the truth* by following Jesus *the way*. This way is the Way of the Cross, the basis of all knowledge.⁶⁹ Similarly, Buddhism that has *gnosis* as its core experience is not without its own version of *agapeic* religiousness. Pieris perceives *gnosis* as the liberating

⁶⁵ Here, Pieris, joining Louis Bouyer, insists that the heretical *gnoses* were only as it were embroideries along the orthodox line of Christian *gnosis*. He is of the opinion that the Western Christian theology must revise its philosophical apparatus to accommodate the *gnostic* idiom of the East, by first dialoguing with its own monastic tradition. He is positive that this revival will bring about within Western theology a fruitful interaction between Christian *love* and Buddhist *wisdom*. Here, Pieris uses the words ‘West’ and ‘East’ not primarily as territorial divisions but as two core spiritualities incomplete without each other and manifested phenomenologically in *agapeic* and *gnostic* idioms of the biblical and non-biblical religions respectively (Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 26-28 and 112; Idem, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 56-57).

⁶⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue*, (NS), pp. 126-127. Here, Pieris makes a two column list of homologues between Buddhism and Christianity.

⁶⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 114.

⁶⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, pp. 217.

⁶⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 82.

knowledge of the saving truth dawning on a person disposed to its reception by a process of renunciation of inordinate desires and by self-purification. For him this process involves liberation from three roots of evil: (1) *rāga*: erotic and selfish love (2) *dosa*: hatred and ill will (3) *moha*: ignorance incapable of awakening to the saving truth. He then argues the first two of the three roots of evil are the absence of what Christians call *agape*; the third is the absence of *gnosis*.⁷⁰ Thus Pieris stresses the need and the importance of maintaining a balance between *gnostic* and *agapeic* components of any spirituality lest corruption set in and succumb to decay. Therefore if the Sri Lankan Church can learn from the Christian monastic tradition to blend *gnostic* and *agapeic* idioms it would truly appreciate the kind of inculturation we need today.⁷¹

As the FABC I rightly identified, inter-religious dialogue and inculturation are two very important areas for Asian local churches for their self-realization in their own milieux. The inculturated Asian Church needs to start with the reality of religions in whose midst its life and mission is situated. Dialogue with other religions is intimately linked with the process of inculturation of our Asian Churches. For as Pieris observes in the Asian context, “culture and religion are overlapping facets of one indivisible soteriology, which is at once a view of life and a path of deliverance; it is both a philosophy that is basically a religious vision, and a religion that is a philosophy of life.”⁷² In Asia culture is the variegated expression of religion. Hence the FABC is of the firm conviction that people of different religions should come together to discover and promote human dignity and common good, quest for God and human solidarity. In the words of FABC I:

Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seed of the Word of God (*Ad Gentes*, c. I, 9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples’ deepest selves, and enable us to find

⁷⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 117.

⁷¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 56-57.

⁷² Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 52, 90 and 97.

authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith, which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood among His sons (FABC I, no. 16).⁷³

This positive look out of religions and their role in the divine economy of salvation is rooted in the conviction that “God’s plan of salvation for humanity is one and leading all people to a unity. Therefore dialogue with other religions, is viewed as significant and positive, in the economy of salvation; it is an integral dimension in the mission of the Church”⁷⁴

3.2.3.2 Dialogue with Cultures

For the Church *in* Sri Lanka/Asia, inculturation⁷⁵ is an urgent challenge against its background of centuries of cultural estrangement during the colonial period and in the context of the present religio-cultural awakening. Inculturation is the local Christian Church getting involved in the local people’s struggle for full humanity which eventually gets its roots deeply embedded into the life and culture of the people, most of whom are non-Christians. Furthermore, according to Pieris, true inculturation is a rooting of the Sri Lankan Church in the *liberative*⁷⁶ dimension of voluntary poverty thus becoming the *Church of the poor*, a non-negotiable characteristic of the Church *of* Asia. Hence, inculturation is a natural process which cannot be

⁷³ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), pp. 14-15.

⁷⁴ Cf. *FABC Papers* No. 48, “Theses on Interreligious Dialogue,” 1987, no. 3, See also L. Thumma, “The Dynamics of Evangelization in Asia: A Shift in Methodology – Part I,” in: *Ind. Th. St.*, vol. 33, no.3, 1996, pp.224-225.

⁷⁵ For a detail study of the use of the missiological term “Inculturation” and its complex process in Asia Cf. Francis Clark, “Making the Gospel at Home in the Asian Cultures,” in: *Teaching All Nations*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1976, pp. 131-149. Since the time of Asian Bishops’ Meeting (ABM) in Manila in 1970 the term “inculturation” has been used frequently in Asia and in the FABC documents, although it is not accepted unanimously simply because of the complex reality of Asia. It should be noted that inculturational ecclesiology gained momentum through the works of the theologians like Rahner and Walbert Bühlmann, who saw the fundamental significance of Vatican II in its transition from a Eurocentric church to a world church (Cf. K. Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Interpretation of Vatican II,” in: *Th. St.*, Vol. 40, 1979, pp. 716-27, esp. p. 723).

⁷⁶ Pieris generally stresses on terms such as *soteriological* and *liberative* indicating that there is also a sinful and enslaving dimension to Asian religion and poverty. Therefore we must engage in the exercise of discerning the authentic core of Asian religion from the its perverted forms. Hence it is the *soteriological* and *liberative* form of religion and poverty (Asian realities) that will provide us the indigenous idiom for meaningful Christ-talk in Sri Lanka (For further clarity on this issue see A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 37-39, 60-62).

artificially induced. To use Pieris' words, it is the "by-product" of an involvement with a people and not a conscious target of a program of action. It is a process by which the Church joins the paschal journey of the poor. It is to find solidarity with the victims of organized greed in their living situations to affirm the perennial human value of hope-filled perseverance in the slow, painful but transformative struggle as taught and encouraged in all religions.⁷⁷ It implies that true disciples of Jesus, in opting to be poor, find solidarity not only with Asian monks and nuns in their quest for meta-cosmic Reality, but more so with the Asian poor who aspire for a cosmic order that is more just and holy (a contrast society). Hence, a Church inculturated in Asia, that is a Church *of* Asia, is indeed a Church liberated from mammon and is therefore composed of the poor: poor by option and poor by circumstances.⁷⁸ For Pieris inculturation and liberation, rightly understood, are two names for the same process.⁷⁹ He also asserts that inculturation and liberation are two integral dimensions of Asian inter-religious dialogue.⁸⁰ At the same time, for Pieris, interreligious dialogue and inculturation that have nothing to do with the poor are not ministries of God's Reign.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation as a Missionary/Evangelical Presence in a Religiously Plural Society: Two Examples from Sri Lanka," in: *EAPR*, vol.32, no. 1/2, 1995, (pp.81-86), here p.82.

⁷⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 57.

⁷⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 111.

⁸⁰ Pieris rejects any attempt of polarization between inculturation and liberation. For him any such attempt is only a recent manifestation of the past rift between, what he calls "Christ-against-religions" theology and "Christ-of-religions" theology that prevailed particularly during colonial times of Euro-ecclesiastical expansionism. He illustrated the futility of the debate between inculturation and liberation that erupted between two groups whom he identifies as "liberationists" and "inculturationists" at the Third World Theologians' Asian Consultation held in Sri Lanka, 1979 (EATWOT). For Pieris religions and poverty in their coalescence provide both the cultural context and the liberationist thrust required in any authentic Asian Christology/theology of Revelation. He argues in his thesis of "double-baptism" that it is along these two perspectives that Jesus himself revealed his salvific mission and true identity (Mk. 15:39) to his first Asian followers (see the relevant documents of this missiological debates in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asian Struggle for Full Humanity*; see also Idem, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Chapter 8, pp. 87-110).

⁸¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor: A Return to the Jesus Formula*, (hereafter, *God's Reign for God's Poor*) TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 1998, Chapter VI, p.68.

Furthermore, for Pieris, inculturation means the local church becoming *proclamational* at the same time.⁸² Here, he stresses the importance of the liturgy of the Church (sacramental liturgy), particularly that the Eucharist be truly a celebration of life, that is, a Christ-experience of the local community. Hence, the starting point in inculturation is not the liturgy of the Church, but the local community which must first be proclamational in its life and action. Furthermore, in the context of Sri Lanka an inculturated liturgy implies that the local church appropriates the liberative core of other religions to think, speak, pray and express itself.⁸³ Such an inculturated liturgy amounts to making our celebrations proclamational to the non-Christians as a re-assuring Word of liberation and a powerful Word of protest against the rule of mammon that all religions repudiate. For Pieris, Christ is both Words in one.⁸⁴ This point is asserted in Pieris' own words:

Inculturation, in practice, means the process by which the local church becomes *proclamational* in its life and action before the non-Christian world, in the sense that she lives her life in-Christ and celebrates it sacramentally in the religious and cultural idiom of its non-Christian neighbours. Inculturation is the process of acquiring the power to announce the mysteries we celebrate in the language and the culture that all people in and outside the Church can understand.⁸⁵

On the practical level, the mission of evangelization is the proclamation and building up the Reign of God and of the Church at its service. The Triple-Dialogue, namely, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation together constitute the Church's task of proclamation. This threefold dialogue coalesces around the building up the kingdom of God as a community of freedom and fellowship, justice, and love. In fact, what the Asian Bishops at the Asian Synod-

⁸² Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, no. 11, 1993, p. 645. Also see Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (*BIRA*) *IV/1-12*, 1988 of the FABC, "the theology of dialogue" series which amply testifies to the relationship of dialogue and proclamation (The FABC'S seven-year *BIRA / IV* series on the theology of dialogue, began with *BIRA / IV* in 1984, and ended with *BIRA IV/12* in 1991).

⁸³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation as a Missionary/Evangelical Presence in a Religiously Plural Society" in: *EAPR*, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 222.

⁸⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, p. 644.

1998, proposed was not a new doctrine but *a new way of being church*, namely, being truly Asian churches through the Triple-Dialogue mentioned above.⁸⁶

Pieris, in forging an indigenous ecclesial identity in the non-Semitic cultures of Asia, proposes the “monastic model” of *participation* in a non-Christian spirituality. Here, Pieris’ principle argument is that the source of Western Christian civilization is basically born of its encounter with Semitic and the Greco-Roman worlds, and not with the Sino-Indian religiousness. Since the Asian values spring from religious insights such as those of Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions the Asian Churches are called upon to create a new model of inculturation. However, he reminds us that the orthodoxy of this model cannot be gauged from available models. Highlighting the relevance of his proposed model he talks of three other prevalent models of inculturation, namely, the Latin model, the Greek model, and the North European model.⁸⁷ He identifies them as “Western” models of inculturation.⁸⁸ For Pieris these “Western” models as listed here take the ascending order of relevance in Sri Lanka/Asia. Hence, in Pieris’ opinion Latin and Greek models are the least applicable in the Asian context. He observes in them unproductive factors such as: negative assessment of other religions (‘Christ-against-religion theology’), separation of religion from culture (as in Latin Christianity) and religion from Philosophy (as in Hellenic Christianity), and ‘instrumental theory’ of inculturation where other cultures and religions are made to serve Christianity as tools. In addition the new historical

⁸⁶ Cf. P. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspective from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2003, (Chapter 11), p. 214.

⁸⁷ For detailed study of these models see A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Chapter 5- Western Models of Inculturation: Applicable in Asia?), pp. 51-58; and Idem, *Love meets Wisdom*, pp. 61-72; 89-96.

⁸⁸ For Pieris, the words “East” and “West”, in the case of religious and spiritual phenomena, connotes respectively, the *gnostic* and *agapeic* instinct of the human person regardless of one’s geographical provenance. He argues that there is no surviving major world religion that is not Eastern, in the conventional and geographical understanding of the term. Hence the basis on which religions are divided into “Eastern” and “Western” cannot be geographical. Pieris’ interpretation of these two terms goes beyond mere change of words to propose a paradigm shift that assures a global and comprehensive but un-confusing vision of religion and spirituality (Cf. A. Pieris, *Love meets Wisdom*, pp. 9 and 13).

circumstance created through decolonization and emergence of religious consciousness demand a new perception of inculturation. Pieris notes that the North European model of inculturation through *accommodation* to non-Christian religiousness is inadequate and obsolete in a greater part of Asia. For other meta-cosmic religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism have already preceded Christianity by centuries to take deep root (that is inculturated) into the Asian ethos by domesticating Asian cosmic religions. The interplay of these complementary elements of Asian religiousness will be discussed in the Fourth Chapter.

Thus Pieris proposes the “monastic model” of *participation* in a non-Christian spirituality as the most effective model of inculturation of the Church and Christianity in Sri Lanka/Asia.⁸⁹ He sees in this model an authentic locus of a symbiotic dialogue between core spiritualities of *agapeic* and *gnostic* with a proper guidance. Here, the inculturation is not understood in terms of an ecclesiastical expansion into non-Christian cultures but as the forging of an indigenous ecclesial identity from within the soteriological perspectives of Asian religions.⁹⁰ According to Pieris, the Monastic model is symbolized by the figure of the Asian monk who takes up poverty voluntarily and struggles for the liberation of the poor for their full humanity. This indicates that the Asian monastic spirituality is not a withdrawal from the world into leisurely “prayer centres” or “ashrams”.

In Asia, as the FABC documents clearly endorse, inculturation is a complex dialogical encounter between the Gospel and a local church, in the whole Asian reality, made up of religions, cultures, poverty and the poor. The Asian bishops see inculturation as a must for the self-realization and the growth of a local church. In that conviction the FABC in its First Plenary Assembly describes the local Church as:

⁸⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 56-58.

⁹⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 55.

A church incarnate in a people, is a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own (FABC I, no.12).⁹¹

For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time (FABC I, no.10).⁹²

Therefore in Sri Lanka/Asia the process of inculturation is much deeper than adaptation.

It is not just a process of expressing the Gospel and the Christian faith through the cultural medium. It entails experiencing, understanding and appropriating the cultural resources of a people. The local Church is born and builds up only through a mutually enriching encounter between these three main Asian realities. It is certainly a dialogical process of collaboration and critical interaction for the realization of full humanity. However, this non-negotiable dialogical encounter of all the elements of the Triple-Dialogue constitutes the process of inculturation, another way of describing the Christian mission in Sri Lanka.

3.2.3.3 Dialogue with the Poor

In Asia, a local church in dialogue with its people means dialogue with the poor. For most of Asia is made up of multitudes of poor. Since the First FABC Plenary Assembly in Taipei the Asian Bishops have repeatedly stressed the importance of participating in a “dialogue of life” with the poor which involves a genuine experience and understanding of the poverty, deprivation and oppression of many Asian People (FABC 1, no. 20).⁹³ Here the term “poor” is understood in a dialectical sense:

Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create

⁹¹ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.14.

⁹² Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.14.

⁹³ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.15.

truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them (FABC 1, no. 19).⁹⁴

This understanding of the dialogue with the poor, as FABC 1, no. 21 clearly states, calls for a genuine commitment and effort to bring about a social justice in the Asian societies. In so doing, the FABC clearly affirmed the Statement of the World Synod of Catholic Bishops, 1971 on *Justice in the World* (FABC I, no. 22).⁹⁵ The FABC further pointed out that “evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia” (FABC I, no. 23).⁹⁶ This in turn leads to a further affirmation that the *poor are privileged agents of salvation*, and that through them can emerge the true face of Christ, as well as the true face of the human person and of the Church:

Unless the Church does her missionary activity with the firm conviction that the poor are ultimately the privileged community and agents of salvation (as has always been the case in the history of salvation), then that indispensable humility will be lacking, which alone reveals the truth about Christ, about man and about the Church herself (*International Congress on Mission*, no. 4).⁹⁷

This understanding of the dialogue with the poor of the FABC is in line with Pieris’ new paradigm of Covenant Christology. However, Pieris who strongly asserts the importance of the religious heritage of the Asia’s poor and their role as true dialogue partners and co-agents of liberation further questions: Who are these poor?, What is their role in the dialogue? How are there poor at all? And why does God choose the Poor? As the story goes Mother Teresa of

⁹⁴ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.15.

⁹⁵ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 15-16). FABC I, no. 22, quoting the introduction of the Statement of 1971 Synod of Bishops states: “Action in behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

⁹⁶ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.16.

⁹⁷ Cf. *International Congress on Mission: Consensus Paper Workshop (ICM/CPW) IV*, no. 4. For the document see *FAPA*, (1992), p.144. Following the Second FABC Plenary Assembly in 1978, an International congress of Mission was organized by the FABC in Manila in December, 1979 with the participation of a large number of Asian bishops.

Calcutta once was accused by a fundamentalist Christian of failing “to bring Christ to the poor”. She spontaneously responded: “*They* are the Christ; I bring myself to Him *in them*.”⁹⁸ This reply of Mother Teresa exactly expresses what I will later describe in this chapter as Pieris’ thesis, that Jesus proclaims and embodies “*the irrevocable defence pact between God and the poor*.”

For Pieris the poor are God’s covenant partners in Jesus in bringing about a totally redeemed universe: a new heaven and a new earth. For him the term Poor is the biblical shorthand for the oppressed, the marginalized and all kinds of non-persons. Hence, he perceives the Poor in the Gospels are those who are:

Socially excluded (lepers and mentally deficient), religiously ostracized (prostitutes and publicans), culturally subjugated (women and children), socially dependent (widows and orphans), physically handicapped (deaf and dumb, maimed and blind), psychologically tormented (the demoniacs and epileptics), and spiritually humbled (God fearing simple folk and repentant sinners).⁹⁹

Pieris is of the mind that biblical poverty is basically a sociological reality that is wider than merely economic poverty.¹⁰⁰ He uses the term ‘mammon’ (the personification of riches and power through acquisitiveness and greed) to describe the sociological reality of the biblical poverty which will be discussed later in this dissertation. George Soares-Prabhu, a prominent Indian biblical scholar, would hold that throughout the bible the poor are a sociological rather than a religious group. He further states, “the identity of the biblical poor is defined not by any spiritual attitude of openness or dependence on God, but simply by their sociological situation of powerlessness and need.”¹⁰¹ Hence, Pieris identifies the various kinds of Poor listed above in two basic categories, namely, *the poor by circumstances* (imposed or involuntary poverty) and

⁹⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Asian Reality and the Christian Option,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vols. 32 & 33, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2005-2006, (pp.158-196) here p. 179.

⁹⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.198.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.69 and 122-23.

¹⁰¹ Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, “Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 49, 1985, (pp. 322-346), here p. 332.

the poor by choice (voluntary poverty). For Pieris the poor by circumstances as the *vicars of Christ* and the poor by choice as the *followers of Jesus* together form God's covenant partners or co-agents of liberation in his universal plan of salvation.¹⁰² Hence, for him these two categories of the poor are not only the primary addressees and the eventual announcers of God's Reign of love and justice, but also its inheritors and carriers of God's Reign.¹⁰³ Such is the importance given and the significant role assigned to the poor in the Bible which no other religious tradition that we know can boast of.¹⁰⁴

To arrive at the proper biblical understanding of the poor we need to determine the meanings given to the Old Testament Hebrew word *'ānī/' ānāw* and the New Testament Greek Word *ptōchos*.¹⁰⁵ They express the most accurately and completely multifaceted character of the poor. The poor in the Bible are not depicted as mere perpetual passive recipients of compassion from the powerful and the rich (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:9-10; 25:25-28; Dt. 15: 7-11; 24:14-18). Nor does it merely point to the plight of the poor as a warning against indiscipline or a wasteful life pattern (Prov. 6:6-11; 21:17; Sir. 18:32). Such ethical and proverbial statements are marginal to the main biblical concern, which is to reveal the total redemption of human history through the victims of the human history, the poor.¹⁰⁶ However, while upholding the positive theological significance of the poor in the Bible we need to take serious note of their social situation of powerlessness and need,¹⁰⁷ lest we run the risk of spiritualizing the poor in the Bible. The poor of

¹⁰² Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp. 202, 207-208.

¹⁰³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 207

¹⁰⁴ Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?," in: *VJTR*, p. 327.

¹⁰⁵ For an analytical discussion on the variety of the terms used to describe the poor in the Bible, Cf. George Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?," in: *VJTR*, vol. 49, 1985, pp. 325-332.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?," in: *VJTR*, pp. 327.

¹⁰⁷ For Soares-Prabhu the "need" of the poor in the Bible is not necessarily economic though it is a capital feature of the biblical understanding of the poor other than the destitute. The destitute who form the majority of the biblical poor includes the exploited, the oppressed, the outcast, the crippled, the sick and the like. They are deprived of the means or dignity they *need* to lead a decent human life (Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?," in: *VJTR*, p. 332).

the Bible are the “wretched of the earth”, the marginalized, those deprived of the means for a dignified full human life, and all those who are actually or potentially oppressed. Hence, for Pieris, biblical poverty goes beyond the Marxist concept of material poverty. Biblical liberation, for Pieris, therefore is more than merely a class struggle. It is the *God- encounter* of the poor, the poor by choice and the poor by circumstances.¹⁰⁸ Whatever its form, real poverty in the Bible, as distinct from metaphorical or spiritual poverty, is always identified as an avoidable and undesirable consequence of injustice and exploitation. Hence, poverty in the Bible particularly in the form of “imposed poverty” is not experienced as a natural phenomenon, the inevitable outcome of one’s *karma*, or the acceptable result of free play of market forces.¹⁰⁹

According to Pieris, the Poor, as true dialogue partners and co-agents of God’s project of liberation, have been positively assigned with the dynamic task of shaping God’s saving history.¹¹⁰ He points out that in Yahweh’s general pattern in the Bible the powerless are chosen to confound the powerful, the poor are summoned to mediate the salvation of the rich, and the weak are called to liberate the strong (1 Cor. 1: 27 -29).¹¹¹ Pieris, sees it is an essential datum of revelation that Yahweh by nature evangelizes all through his covenant partners, who are never the rich and the powerful but the weak, the lowly and the rejected as sinful. This is why Pieris argues that Asian Church’s strategy of evangelization need to conform to this divine methodology and in turn be humbled to be evangelized by the poor. However, the divine election of the poor is never to be misunderstood as a reason for exclusivism or as an election *above* others but as an election *for* mission, *for* the service of others.¹¹² Pieris, making reference to Soares-Prabhu, states that in the Bible, the Poor have always been chosen as the vehicle of God’s

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. G. Soares-Prabhu, “Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?,” in: *VJTR*, p. 334.

¹¹⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 122.

¹¹¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Asian Reality and the Christian Option,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 178.

¹¹² Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 200.

presence and action in educating the world in the ways of God and transforming human history into the history of God's salvation.¹¹³ Thus it is important that the Church *in* Sri Lanka in her attempts to be the Church *of* Sri Lanka understands the poor as those through whom God shapes our salvation history and who mediate Christ's presence for us.

As Pieris observes further, in biblical revelation the fact remains that Yahweh elects the poor/oppressed as the agents of 'evangelization'¹¹⁴ and more precisely as his *Covenant Partners* in his mission not because the poor are holy, but because the poor are poor.¹¹⁵ He underlines that the Poor become holy only when they live up to their calling to be partners with Yahweh in bringing about a just society in which Yahweh alone reigns. What constitutes the salvation of the poor, the powerless and the weak is their faithfulness to their God-given mission of mediating salvation of the rich and liberating the strong and confounding the powerful. As Pieris puts it "By no means, therefore, do we hold that they [poor] are justified or sanctified by their misery!"¹¹⁶ Therefore there is no romantic exaggeration of the poor by Pieris. However, it is a hard task for the poor to accept and be faithful to this covenantal partnership with Yahweh, and to respond to his call to witness and proclaim the Good News of Justice and peace. Here, Pieris, who identifies two categories of the poor, emphasizes the ministry of *the poor by choice* towards *the poor by circumstances*. Thus he shows the importance of the obligation of the former to "conscientize" (to evangelize, to educate) the latter to accept their God-given role in the coming of the Reign of justice and peace, and to awaken them from their passivity or complacency.¹¹⁷ A

¹¹³ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary," in: *Logos*, p.84.

¹¹⁴ Pieris' use of the word 'evangelization' is understood not simply in terms of conversion to Christianity, but as the facilitation of the self-emancipation of the rich and the poor from the psycho-social bonds that dehumanize them (Cf. Pieris, "The Asian Reality and the Christian Option," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 178-79. Also see Idem, A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 49. The Asian Bishops see evangelization, in the context of Asia, as a threefold dialogue of the Gospel with the culture, religions and the poor.

¹¹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 200.

¹¹⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 200.

¹¹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.200.

demonstration of this option to serve the poor could be seen in Moses who voluntarily renounced his institutional security to identify himself with the oppressed and to accompany them out the house of oppression towards the land of freedom (cf. Heb. 11:23-31). Here, Pieris stresses that *the poor by choice* should be careful not to turn *the poor by circumstances* into a perpetual object of compassion. Instead, they should empower and join the poor to struggle out of their slavery with the help of the Covenant Partners.¹¹⁸ This is certainly a dangerous mission of the poor by choice in the face of the rich and the powerful who refused to be educated by the poor. However, as was the remnant of Israel, the poor by choice need to render a liberative educational (or evangelization) service to both classes of people – an education that liberates one class from their poverty and the other from their riches and both of them from their greed, *tanhā* (self-centred and accumulative tendencies).¹¹⁹

Jesus identified the biblical poor with his own person (Mt. 25:31-46). Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me” (Mt. 25: 40). Jesus, the carpenter’s son (Mt. 13:55) had no place of his own to be born (Lk. 2:7), had no place of his own to lay his head (Mt. 8:20) or even to be buried (Mt. 27:60). That is the true identity of Jesus Christ, the Saving Truth that was clearly announced at the Jordan when Jesus stood before the Baptizer and among the baptized, the simple and the humble of the countryside.¹²⁰ This implies that the present Poor are the visible extension and the saving agents of the Word-Crucified, Jesus Christ. However, we in Sri Lanka need to highlight this identity and the Person of Jesus Christ and bring it to the centre-stage of theological discussion in a multi-religious context. This is the way we can salvage the identity of the Word-Crucified from the

¹¹⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Asian Reality and the Christian Option,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 179. Also see Idem, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 122.

¹¹⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Asian Reality and the Christian Option,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 177.

¹²⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 46.

present predominantly abstract and depersonalized doctrines, without offending the beliefs of other religious traditions in the context of Sri Lanka. This in turn will enable us to articulate the true identity of the Sri Lankan Church through the process of inculturation.

Furthermore, as the Scriptures testify, Jesus' prophetic mission was a mission *of* the poor and a mission *to* the poor, a mission *by* the poor and a mission *for* the poor. Jesus discovered the Baptist's stream of spirituality (prophetic asceticism) as an authentically liberative spirituality of all religious currents of Israel at the time. His baptism at the Jordan, along with the "religious poor" of the countryside, was also a point of departure for his own prophetic mission which went beyond that of John the Baptist. Hence Jesus' preferential option for the poor was not merely a negative protest nor was it just a passive solidarity with the "religious poor" of Israel. As Pieris would say it was a well calculated strategy against mammon whom Jesus declared to be God's rival (Mt. 6:24). It was this mission that Jesus began at the Jordan and was consummated on the Cross as the Word crucified and exalted. Pieris in his reading of Jesus' baptism shows that the evangelists themselves identify the inseparable relationship between Jesus' first prophetic gesture at the Jordan and his last prophetic gesture on Calvary. It is evident, in the Evangelists' deliberate use of the word baptism to describe both prophetic gestures (Mt. 3:13-15; Mk.10:35-40; Lk.12:50).

Furthermore, Pieris, by indentifying the poor as the covenantal partner throughout the economy of salvation, is not romanticizing the poor and disparaging wealth.¹²¹ Wealth is God's gift for all humanity and not the privilege of the few. In the Bible social poverty is a *counter-sign of the Kingdom* (Deut. 15:4). Furthermore, we do not associate the poor with divinely willed holiness which in fact justifies poverty, and therefore romanticizes it. As Pieris would argue, "In an Asian situation, the antonym of wealth is not poverty but *acquisitiveness* or *avarice*, which

¹²¹ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Asian Reality and the Christian Option," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 177.

makes wealth antireligious.”¹²² In fact in the Sri Lanka situation there exist the bipolarity between wealth and poverty where wealth is at the service of the *poverty* of the monastic spirituality which the Sri Lankan/Asian Monks voluntarily embrace as a way of life.¹²³ Monks who voluntarily take up poverty as a virtue are materially sustained by the wealth-acquiring laity.

Furthermore, for Pieris, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in Asia poverty (the voluntary poverty of a Monk) is the spirituality or the condition needed for the liberation from acquisitiveness and greed. The word poverty understood in this dynamic sense of a spiritual struggle rather than in the Hellenistic sense of a static virtue epitomizes the whole spirituality of Jesus: his attitude, opinions, and pattern of behaviour in his saving mission on earth. And poverty provides by far the most comprehensive *language* to describe the ethos of the Jesus event, the Word-Crucified. Jesus, the Word on the Cross where God’s revelation is brought to the supreme climax was also the sublime moment of Jesus’ total renunciation of mammon and the total manifestation of his spirituality of voluntary poverty in obedience to the Father. Hence, Pieris is convinced that our primary concern is not the *eradication of poverty*, but the *struggle against mammon*. It is mammon, that cosmic force subtly operative within human society, which makes material wealth anti-human, anti-religious, and oppressive, and creates the situation of inequality and injustice.

¹²² Cf. A. Pieris, “Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, p. 81.

¹²³ The Asian religious attitude to poverty is different from that of the Western and Latin American context. In Asia voluntary poverty is a virtue and more so a spiritual antidote. Furthermore, in Asian context there exists the bipolarity state and church, and scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom even in the context of its march to economic progress. However, in the bipolar interaction between wealth and poverty in Asia, mammon has not left the monks in peace either.

3.3 The Foundation of the New Paradigm: The Word-Crucified

Pieris' perception of the mutually inclusive Asian realities of the religious pluralism, cultural diversity, and massive poverty is based on the notion of the Word-Crucified, a key concept to understand his theology of revelation and Christology. Hence, in this section we will focus on the development of this key notion which in turn will help us appreciate the new and relevant Sri Lankan/Asian theological paradigm he is proposing: Covenant Christology.

Theology to be valid should always be liberational. For Pieris a valid theology always originates, develops, and culminates in the praxis/process of liberation. Liberation is the sole concern of Christ and his revelation. It is also the aspiration of all human beings and the intended goal of all religions. Furthermore, Pieris, who perceives inculturation and liberation as two names of the same process, believes that the genesis of a liberation theology overlaps with the genesis of an authentically local church.¹²⁴ However, it is out of the people's struggle for full humanity and through that struggle that the process of liberation begins. In this section we will come to realize that the brand of liberation theology Pieris is talking about is not based on the "praxis over knowledge" principle inherited from Marxism as some would generally suspect. It is based on the Word of God as *dabar*, an executive wish eliciting a knowledge-conferring praxis: read, accepted and obeyed by both the poor by circumstances and by choice in Basic Human Communities.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 111.

¹²⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 208.

3.3.1 Jesus as God's Two-Edged Covenantal Word

Pieris' exposition of his proposed Covenant Christology, in his attempt to reformulate the *Jesus question*, can be summarized in three formulas. He articulates his theological position in biblical categories, as follows.

Formula 1: Love is God's own Self as well as God's own Word to us.

Formula 2: God's Word to us is Jesus, both eliciting and embodying our love for God and neighbour.

Formula 3: (1) Jesus is God's Two-edged Word in Conflict with mammon.¹²⁶ [Love of God]

(or Jesus is the irreconcilable antinomy between God-mammon).

(2) Jesus is God's Covenantal Word of Promise to the poor. [Love of neighbour]

(or Jesus is the irrevocable covenant or defence pact between God and the poor).

The proposed Covenant Christology is founded on, the nuclear formula or *sūtra*¹²⁷ as

Pieris would call them: *Love is God's own self as well as God's own Word to us* (Formula 1).¹²⁸

The second formula in fact is the further articulation of the Christological content of the nuclear

¹²⁶ Mammon stands for the personification of the attachment to riches, expressed most visibly in the consumerist culture of our time. It is more than just material wealth. It is what I do, for instance, with money and what it does to me; what it both promises and brings when I come to terms with it: security and success, power and prestige – acquisitions that makes me appear privileged. It is a subtle psychological force operative within the human being in the form of inordinate attachments, acquisitive instincts, and accumulative tendencies. They drive the human person to be the rich fool whom Jesus ridiculed in the parable of the harvester who wanted to tear down his grain bins and build larger ones (Lk. 12: 13-21). Buddhists describe these innate propensities with words such as *tanhā* (insatiable "thirst" for more and more), *upādāna* (obsessive "clinging" to evanescent phenomena), and *lobha* (greed) (Cf. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 16).

¹²⁷ Pieris suggests the Indic word '*sūtra*' in place of the word 'dogma' as a relevant term in Asia. Thus Pieris call for a change in theological perspective in the traditional Christian sense of dogmas. In Pieris' contention dogmas should be treated as evocative guides inviting to faith, hope and love than mere accurately formulated declaratives of revelation. Pieris describing the word *sūtra* states: "A *sūtra* (Sanskrit for thread) connotes a "stringing together" of messageful words into a *sapiential utterance* that would guide one's life. It is, therefore, not a cold dogmatic formula, but an evocative cadence of language that stirs our imagination and spurs our will. It is a blend of *prophecy* and *poetry*" (Cf. A. Pieris, "The Christhood of Jesus and The disciple of Mary," in: *Logos*, p.107). For Pieris' argument on the choice of the word '*sūtra*' see Idem, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 191. For a debate on this issue see H. Waldenfels, "Christ Beyond Dogma? Some Remarks on Aloysius Pieris' Renewal of Christology", in R. Cruz et al. (eds.), *A Festschrift in Honouring Pieris*, pp. 209-222.

¹²⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 192 and 217.

formula. And the third formula is the further unfolding of the content of the second formulation into two mutually inclusive “dogmas” which bring out with precision the *uniqueness of Jesus* which Pieris calls twofold *Kraiṣṭa Sūtra* or twofold Love-Command.¹²⁹ The first of the twofold Love-Command spells out the *love of God* as an end-time battle; and the second specifies the *love of neighbour* as the courageous service to the victims of exploitation (Lk. 10:29-37).¹³⁰ Here, we notice how Pieris jealously safeguards the eternal identity between Jesus the Word and the twofold Word eliciting love of God and neighbour which is expressed and lived out to the full by Jesus on the Cross. Pieris goes on to identify this twofold Word-Command as the sum and substance of God’s revelation and salvation since it recapitulates the whole teaching of the Scriptures, according to Jesus himself.¹³¹ Hence for Pieris the twofold Love-Command provides the basis for the *uniqueness* of Jesus and the *universality* of Christianity.¹³²

3.3.2 Jesus as the “Revelatory Medium of Salvation”

In view of situating our discussion within the official teaching of the Church on divine revelation and on the Word let me briefly refer to a salient article of The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. As we observe in *Dei Verbum*, especially in the article no. 4, there comes a moment in history when God has fully revealed and given himself to humanity. This moment is ushered in by the Incarnation through which God’s eternal and substantial Word became a true person among humanity. In Jesus Christ the perfect exchange between God and humanity is established, and from this fellowship spreads out to embrace the entire world. The

¹²⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 217; Idem, “Universality of Christianity?,” in: *VJTR*, 57, 1993, (591-595), p. 595. Pieris, reading the centrality of Jesus’ mission in terms of two-fold Word-command brings about a paradigm shift in Christology different from that of the Council of Chalcedon.

¹³⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 217.

¹³¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, pp. 193 and 217.

¹³² Pieris through his Christological paradigm avoids universalising any particular cultural idiom. To read more on Twofold Love-Command as the Universality of Christianity see A. Pieris, “Universality of Christianity,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, 1993, pp. 591-595.

most important and unique phrase *DV*. 4, which also states the purpose of revelation, goes on to read “that God is with us, to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life.”¹³³ As Scripture would indicate it is not simply that Jesus Christ appeared on earth and announced God’s Word to the human race (Jn. 14:6 and 19). What happened is that the Word has become incarnate in an individual person and that revelation therefore has occurred first of all in this person’s (Jesus’) human heart. The perfect fellowship with the human race that God has willed to establish had now become a reality. It is important to note that this perfect union between God and humanity in Jesus is always seen in terms of deliverance or liberation from sin and death and thereby to share in the divine nature of the triune God. In Christ, God reveals and gives himself fully to each and every one of us and meets with a total response, of which the supreme act of loving obedience on the Cross is the perfect expression. In that act the union of love between God and humanity in which revelation is accomplished, the unsurpassable fullness and constitutive character of revelation for the salvation all humankind is established. Finally the true glorious character of revelation is perfectly accomplished in Jesus’ return to the Father through the resurrection and sending of his Spirit to us.

Pieris, who appreciates the great document *Dei Verbum*, shows the urgent need for expanding the Conciliar vision of the Word of God both in the light of the Church tradition and in the context of other religious traditions and scriptures in Asia.¹³⁴ Accordingly, he takes his approach of Covenant Christology to religious pluralism which will be discussed in detail in the Fourth Chapter. Thereby he avoids the exclusivist and the inclusivist tendencies of religions that

¹³³ This phrase in fact gives the real shift of Vatican II from Vatican I which stresses revealed truths. In Vatican II salvation is seen more in terms of a saving personal dialogue and communion (*koinonia*) with the triune God.

¹³⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, “Three Inadequacies in the Social Encyclicals,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, no.2, 1993, (pp. 73-94), here pp.86-87.

assert the supremacy of their religious founder or their institutions¹³⁵ and rightly identifies the Word himself as *the revelatory medium of salvation*.¹³⁶ It is this Word himself who reveals, saves and transforms. This is not to be identified with any “names” (e.g. Jesus, Gautama) or “titles” (e.g. Christ, Buddha) or any other human categories given to describe the Word itself (himself), the *illuminating* Word of revelation.

Illustrating his contention, Pieris says that the Word of God is *the speech* (*dabar* model) of the Unspoken Speaker (*Pneuma*) about the Unspeakable One (*Theos*).¹³⁷ This *speech* (the Word) is an utterance that creates and transforms and not merely a speech that explains the world without *changing* it (Jn. 1:3; DV. 3). The Word is dynamic *dabar*, the illuminating *Word of Revelation* and the executive *Word of Liberation*.¹³⁸ The Word of God is more than *Logos* of the stoic Philosophers’ intelligibility and rationality. Therefore, it is neither Christological titles (Christ, Son of God, and the like) nor Buddhological titles (Buddha, *Tathāgata*, and the like) themselves nor the interpretation of the titles that save/liberate but the *mediating dynamic reality* itself,¹³⁹ namely the Word. Thus, Pieris clearly distinguishes the Word from Jesus, the Word of God incarnate or the incarnation of *the revelatory medium of salvation*, and Gautama, the incarnation of *the revelatory medium of salvation* according to the Mahayana Tradition of

¹³⁵ Even the religions that do not claim uniqueness and universality for their religious founder or their institution still affirm that the truth they teach and ways of life they prescribe (for example, the Vedas, the Four Noble Truth and so on) are necessary for salvation or liberation.

¹³⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, p. 128. However, there remained an element of ambiguity for the reader in the writings of Pieris with regard to the identity of this “mediating reality” until his work *Fire and Water*, published in 1996. For instance, in his book *Love Meets Wisdom*, published in 1988 he talked about this “mediation reality” without specifying what it exactly was.

¹³⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, p. 128. The Spirit is the *Unspoken* speaker for the Spirit is not the object of any discourse; s/he is the subject of all discourse.

¹³⁸ Since God’s self-disclosure aims to bring salvation to us from slavery and death, and raises us up to life through his Word it follows that *revelation* and *salvation* through Christ (The Word) are practically synonymous. In *Dei verbum*, the Vatican Council II uses the terms almost interchangeably (DV. 2, 3, 4). (Ref. G. O’Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, Geoffry Chapman, London, 1993, p.19.

¹³⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 133. However, Pieris admits the legitimacy of naming or designating this *mediating reality* such as Christ, Son of God, or Buddha, *Tathāgata* (the ‘Thus Gone One’, the One who has found the Truth) or any other human categorization conditioned by any given culture or tradition.

Buddhism.¹⁴⁰ Here we can observe how Pieris firmly safeguards the Church's fundamental teaching on the non-separability between the Word of God and Jesus Christ, on one hand, and between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The Church teachings always uphold that the salvific work of the Word and the salvific significance of the historical event of Jesus Christ cannot be separated in such a way as to attribute salvific work exclusively to the Word, independently from and to the prejudice of the humanity of Jesus.¹⁴¹ However, as noted, Pieris brings out a broader perspective of the Word as *the revelatory medium of salvation* that goes beyond any human titles and names given to it. In fact differentiating the Word from any human categorization (Jesus, Gauthama, Christ, Buddha and the like), Pieris forges a link between Christological soteriology and a universal version of the revelation of the Word.¹⁴² It is this Word, *the revelatory medium of salvation*, which is the source of the enlightenment of Gautama-the-Buddha, and became flesh in Jesus. However, this should never be taken to mean that all manifestations of the Word have the same significance since, talking in the Sri Lankan context, incarnation as compared to enlightenment, has a historical paradigm and density of its own.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, all manifestations of the Word are significant partners (not rivals) in *one path* of liberation, that is, in Jesus' arriving *with them* at the fullness of Christhood. As Pieris says, Jesus cannot be the *totality* of Christ without the rest of the manifestations of the Word.¹⁴⁴ As Michael Amaladoss says, the mystery of Christ/Word includes all the other manifestations of God in

¹⁴⁰ Unlike the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, in the orthodox Theravada Buddhist tradition which is prevalent in Southeast Asia, the Buddha is never regarded as a Savior. Buddha is a human being who has attained a state of absolute freedom or nirvana that makes him a category of his own (Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis, 1988, p.133.

¹⁴¹ Cf. The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), no. 5.

¹⁴² Cf. A. Pieris, "The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking," in: *Concilium*, p. 72.

¹⁴³ For a comprehensive reading on comparative study of Buddhism and Christianity, Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue*, pp. 105-134.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 25, 2000, p.208.

history.¹⁴⁵ This perspective of Pieris, in the predominantly Buddhist context of Sri Lanka, opens up the path for both Christians and Buddhist towards accepting that liberation/salvation is possible only through what they both accept to be the “revelatory medium of salvation” and sole path to transformation, the Word: *Logos/Dabar/Hodos/Mārga/Tao/Dharma*.¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, he develops his thesis to say that the Word as *the revelatory medium of salvation* provides both for Christology and Buddhology, and for all religions and traditions,¹⁴⁷ a common dialogical horizon. It provides the ground to appreciate the mutual complementarity of the saving values of the two traditions, namely, Christian *agape* and Buddhist *gnosis* that leads to acknowledge *one path* of liberation leading towards Ultimate Source of Liberation.¹⁴⁸

However, this Word, who is not limited and equated to the Word incarnate, can be called by different names or designations conditioned by cultures and religions. As we observed earlier, the universal Word is spoken to all people of different cultures and religion by the Holy Spirit. Hence, according to Pieris, the Word, *the universal medium of revelation and salvation*, is what Christians, call Christ.¹⁴⁹ He further insists that the Word, as the ultimate liberating medium of the Father, becomes effective even among those who do not acknowledge it as Christ under the

¹⁴⁵ Cf. M. Amaladoss, “The Pluralism of Religions and the Significance of Christ,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 53, 1989, (pp.401-20), here p.412.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp.132 and 133. These different terms reflect the attempts made to present Jesus the Word in a way that is intelligible to different cultural ethos. For instance, in China where we trace the presence of Christianity as early as 8th century, following the trade routes, there had been attempts to understand or present Jesus in terms of *Tao*, literally means “the way”.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking,” in: *Concilium*, p. 71. According to Pieris the Word of revelation is also the medium of salvation and the path to intimacy with the Ultimate. And this Word-medium-path has been available to all tribes, races and people of all times and all places. It has been recognized by various names (*Dharma, Mārga, Tao* etc.), giving rise to many forms of discourses. For further study, Cf. A. Pieris’ *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 131-135; See also A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 135. The complementarity of these saving values is never meant to bypass their respective different paradigms in expressing their experience of integral liberation. Furthermore, Jacques Dupuis, S.J. quotes Pieris’ contention of the complementarity between Christianity and Buddhism in the respect of *agape* and *gnosis* to reinforce his argument on mutual -“asymmetrical”- complementarity (Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian theology of religious Pluralism*, Orbis, N.Y., 1997, p. 326; Idem., *Christianity and the Religions*, Orbis Maryknoll, N.Y., 2001, pp. 132-36 and 255-58).

¹⁴⁹ Pieris, “The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with Regard to Pattern of Theological Thinking,” in: *Concilium*, p. 71.

impulse of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁰ This is a positive theological development in the context of religious pluralism while not denying the constitutive, decisive, unsurpassable characteristic of the event of Christ in the one, but progressive universal plan of salvation of God for humanity. Thus Pieris finds a way out of the problem of making any religious founder or even the respective religious institution the exclusive medium of salvation. Hence, in the context of Sri Lanka/Asia, Pieris' proposed Covenant Christology brings about a true harmony instead of a competition with Buddhology by acknowledging the *one path* of liberation. On this *one path* of liberation Christians join Buddhists in their *gnostic detachment* (or the practice of voluntary poverty of an Asian monk) and Buddhist join the Christian *agapeic involvement* in the struggle against forced poverty as it truly happens today in the Basic Human Communities in Asia.

Furthermore, confession of the names and titles of the Word demands *discipleship* for transformation and salvation. It is not someone who says, "Lord, Lord", but the one who "does the will of the Father" who is saved (Mt. 7:21). Hence, Sri Lankan/Asian Christology needs to be focused on walking the way of Jesus, his *via crucis*, his *kenosis*. It is our living out the Paschal Mystery, our struggle towards full humanity through the *via crucis* that constitutes *the source and summit* of our Christian life – in contrast to the Vatican II's stress on the liturgy of the Church (SC. 10).¹⁵¹ On the Cross Jesus brings out in the most vivid manner his, what Pieris calls, the double ascesis that constitutes the salvific path – the *via crucis* – namely, his *renunciation* of possessions and his *denunciation* of mammon.¹⁵² However, Jesus as the *absolute* medium of

¹⁵⁰ Raimon Panikkar too interchanges "Christ" with "Word". But he uses the term "Christ" as the particular Christian way of speaking about the universal reality that all mystic know: the marvellous, unspeakable unity between the Divine, the human, and the cosmic. "Christ is ... a living symbol for the totality of reality: the human, divine, cosmic" (Ref. R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964, p. 27).

¹⁵¹ For us in Sri Lanka inculturation begins not with the liturgy of the Church (liturgical inculturation) but with the Liturgy of Life, the active participation in the transformation of history through *via crucis*, Paschal Mystery (Cf. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, pp. 643-644).

¹⁵² Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 134.

salvation, demonstrated on the Cross by his double ascesis, would be an empty boast of his followers unless the double ascesis is progressively continued in them.¹⁵³ The double ascesis should be an ongoing salvific process in covenant partners of God completing in their bodies what is still unfinished in the ascesis of Jesus (Col. 1:24).¹⁵⁴ This supports Pieris' conviction that the liberation is the only proof of liberation found in the person who proclaims it.¹⁵⁵ According to Pieris, this double ascesis is the spiritual nucleus around which Asian theology of Liberation evolves into a Christology that makes the mutual complementarity between Christianity and Buddhism (or any other traditions) *a necessity* and *a reality*. Thus in this sense Jesus, the Word-Crucified brings about a convergence of different paths of salvation on the Cross, the supreme expression and the concentrated moment of the twofold Word-Command to love God and neighbour.

3.3.3 The Uniqueness of Jesus, the Word, Rediscovered

Pieris finds meaning only in talking of the *uniqueness of Jesus*, and not of Christ. He states, "what ought to be sought is *the uniqueness of Jesus* for it is in the fact of becoming Christ that Jesus makes his uniqueness manifest. Christ is the name by which Jesus' uniqueness is expressed most consistently in Scripture and Tradition."¹⁵⁶ In Pieris' contention, Jesus, in

¹⁵³ Here the word "absolute" is not understood in the sense of being the *exclusive medium* of salvation but in terms "absoluteness" that the Christological titles such as "Christ" and "Son of God" were meant to convey. In fact *Jesus' uniqueness* consists in his *absoluteness* or the *specificity* as conveyed by certain Christological titles like "Christ". Therefore "the absoluteness" has a soteriological connotation in our discourse. In the similar manner uniqueness of Gautama can be understood in terms of the absoluteness that the word *dharma* – or in certain schools, *Buddha* – seems to convey.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 135.

¹⁵⁵ In Pieris' words, "Our discourse [*a fortiori* Christology and theology of Revelation] therefore is not a *speculative discussion* about a possible dialectic between a historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ, between Jesus in the days of the flesh and Christ as we know him now. Rather, ours is a *martyrial* (witness-backed) *proclamation* that *JESUS* of Yesterday whom we *follow* by being poor as he was 'in the days of his flesh' *IS THE CHRIST* of Today 'as we know him now' (. . .) whom we *serve* in his proxy, the victims of nations" (Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp.206-207).

¹⁵⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol.25, 2000, p. 223.

becoming Christ, continually engages in forming an *irrevocable defence pact between the poor and Yahweh*. Therefore for Pieris, the uniqueness of Jesus consists in the fact that in his becoming Christ, he embodies the irrevocable Covenant between the poor and Yahweh. Here, we observe that the basis of twofold Word-Command simultaneously posits the *uniqueness of Jesus* in his all-compassing Christhood, towards which all creation and all history converge to its Ultimate Future.

This implies Jesus is the Word-Covenant between Yahweh and the non-persons of the world. This is to say, that the covenanted God has been enfleshed as Christ Jesus for our sake. Therefore, Jesus the Word-Crucified is at once the epitome of God's self revelation and salvation for humankind, and our human response to our covenant with God. God, in Jesus, says "yes" to us by fulfilling his Promise of love, and we, in Jesus, say "amen" to God (2 Cor.1:18-22).¹⁵⁷ In fact, it is this second datum of revelation, namely, the irrevocable covenant relationship between *God and the poor* – the foundation of *the struggle for the poor* – that gives a Christian specificity to a monastic vocation and gives an added relevance to it in Sri Lanka/Asia. Pieris finds no explicit doctrinal parallel to this second biblical axiom in the Scriptures of other religions.¹⁵⁸ It is only in the Bible do we find the further liberative step of God *opting for the poor* and struggling with them for their liberation.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol.25, 2000, p. 193.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, TRC, Sri Lanka, 1998, Chapter IV, p. 37-38. Also see Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2005, p. 146.

¹⁵⁹ Pieris gives an elaborative and comprehensive answer to an objection raised by Michael Amaladoss to this specificity claimed. Amaladoss in his book *Life in Freedom* simply states without substantiating that there is a parallel found in Hinduism to what Pieris' says in the second biblical axiom. Pieris negating the claim of a parallel, says that in his proposed Covenant Christology we deal not merely with *avatāra* (descent of God to the poor), but also with *unmajjana* (an emergence of God from among the poor). Pieris who also has mastered Hindu *Purāna* literature demands clear proofs for the parallel claimed by Amaladoss: even a mythical allusion, leave alone an historical reference. In this debate Pieris asks, "Where do we find a God who becomes the loser with the lost in order to win with them their own liberation and that of their victimizers?" (Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, pp. 83-89. Also see M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1997, pp. 95-96).

Elaborating further his position on the *uniqueness of Jesus*, Pieris stresses that Jesus, by virtue of being the living Word-Covenant, continues to grow into the *totality* of Christ (Christhood or the whole of the Medium of revelation/salvation). Here, Pieris' contention is that "although Jesus is *totally* Christ (*totus Jesus est Chistus*), he is not the *totality* of Christ (*non est totum Christi*), for the whole of Christ is not Jesus (*totus Christus non est Jesus*)." ¹⁶⁰ In other words Jesus is wholly Christ but not the whole of Christ: *Jesus est totus Christus sed non totum Christi*. The whole of salvation and revelation, which is Christ (or call it by any other name, if it is offensive to others), is a bigger reality than Jesus. To be precise, Christ is the continuation of Jesus' life in his new Body whose members are the present victims of injustice, oppression and deprivation (Mt. 25: 31ff) in whom he is crucified today. ¹⁶¹ Hence, Pieris further argues that Jesus who continually becomes the *Corporate Person* called Christ, is ever engaged in the process of saving, gathering, integrating his covenant partners, namely, the majority of the poor together with the whole cosmos into what, in Christian vocabulary, is referred to as the plenitude of Christ. ¹⁶² Jesus and the oppressed (all the *little ones*) in their covenantal togetherness is the Christ. ¹⁶³ These poor, particularly "the poor by choice" who witness to God's Reign on earth, include the co-agents of liberation, guides in the path of righteousness, discoverers and announcers of the Saving Truth, founders and advocates of other religions. Here, in the context of Sri Lanka those who get pre-eminence (besides Mary and the saints etc.) are especially those who *discovered* various paths to liberation such as the Buddha. It is to avoid any irreverence to these great men and women that Pieris uses the general term *Medium of Revelation and Salvation*. The other category of the poor, "the Poor by circumstances," or the victims of

¹⁶⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 208.

¹⁶¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Mysticism of Service: A Short Treatise on Spirituality with a Pauline-Ignatian Focus on the Prayer-life of Christian Activists*, TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 2000, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶² Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp. 202 and 208.

¹⁶³ Also Cf. A. Pieris, "Whither New Evangelism?," in: *Pacifica*, vol. 6, no.3, 1993, (pp. 327-334), here p. 333.

mammon, constitutes the bulk of the world's population which is concentrated in non-Christian Asia.¹⁶⁴ This emphasis in Pieris' Christology and theology of revelation gives us a cue for a non-triumphalistic approach to the challenge of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka/Asia. Similarly, Jesus' becoming the *Corporate Person* called Christ clearly indicates that we as Christians cannot have the monopoly over Christ.

This mission-oriented theological understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus, the Word, in contrast to the Chalcedonian formula provides us "the missing link", as it were, to initiate a symbiotic dialogue among religions. Such an authentic dialogue will lead to assimilate into Christian consciousness the soteriological idiom of various Asian non-Christian religions in making sense of Christ in our cultures. Indeed in our theological dialogue we cannot overlook the fact that over the centuries the Sri Lankan/Asian cultures have been shaped and stabilized by the soteriological nucleus or the liberative core of various religions. This theological language will help the Sri Lankan Church in its pluralistic context to go beyond the *fulfillment theory* proposed by Vatican II. Thus this paradigm of Covenantal Christology will enable us, who live in cultures grown around the soteriological nucleus of various religions, to find the converging point of ultimate liberation without being subject to a "triumphalistic" theological culture.

3.3.4 Pieris on the Uniqueness of Christ in Chalcedonian Christology

In Chalcedonian Christology the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in one divine Person is cited as the basis of Christ's uniqueness as universal Saviour. In contrast to the Chalcedonian Christology, in Pieris' paradigm of Covenant Christology Jesus is not simply *conceived* as a "person" in the sense of an "individual substance of rational nature", combining

¹⁶⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp. 207-208.

divinity and humanity in himself, but is to be *encountered* as a “Corporate Person” who is one flesh and blood with all the “little ones,” the poor.

Pieris agrees that the Council of Chalcedon is correct in what it is trying to say in philosophical highbrow idiom.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, he sees the legitimacy and even necessity of such *doctrines* or *definitions* for a community of faith particularly at a time of doctrinal deviation.¹⁶⁶ Hence, he respects what Chalcedon was trying to say within its own anthropological, political and cultural paradigm. However, he and many other Asian theologians cannot but express their reservation regarding certain cultural limitations of dogmatic formulae and the increasing tendency of the Church to “doctrinize” the content of revelation to impose them on all living situations regardless of cultural divergences. This is never to mean that Pieris rejects outright the doctrinal dimension in the expression of our faith. He acknowledges the human effort at articulating our beliefs through the medium of well chosen human words as legitimate and necessary, and gives academic seriousness a high priority in any theological search. However, Pieris disagrees with any attempt to turn verbal formulae, including dogmas, into *idols*. Instead he prefers to consider such human constructs only as *icons* of God’s Word.¹⁶⁷ Hence, the primary purpose of a dogmatic assertion should be to serve the believing community, ensuring its unity as intended originally rather than turning it into an instrument of universal remote control. They should be safe guides and a practical aid to foster our faith and hope in God who is love.

In fact this thinking is endorsed and safeguarded in Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* in its approach to divine revelation which stresses the interpersonal, experiential and Christological perspective over propositional and doctrinaire approach to the same in the First Vatican Council. *Dei Verbum* 4 of Vatican II rightly states that revelation is not a mere communication of words

¹⁶⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 194.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 188.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary,” in: *Logos*, p.82.

or a mere body of truths or mere information about God, but it is *self-communication* (divine revelation) of God in the person of Jesus Christ. *Dei Verbum* rejecting an exclusive propositional view of revelation, further asserts that revelation not only makes salvation known, but brings it in person (*DV.* 2). There is a clear movement visible in *Dei Verbum*, away from revelation as simply *revelata* (truths disclosed) to *revelatio* (personal disclosure).¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the models are not mutually exclusive, even if the second now proves more helpful and popular. However, appreciating the positive and progressive development of Vatican II, particularly the monumental work of *Dei Verbum*, the question remains whether the Church as a universal body has appropriated the paradigm shift encouraged by the Council.

Pieris further argues that the Chalcedonian Christological doctrine is pedagogically misleading and culturally counter-productive in the context of the multifarious perception of the Absolute in Sri Lankan/Asian.¹⁶⁹ The Chalcedon's idiom, Christ as a *god-man*, culturally restricted, can mean an incarnation of one of the many cosmic-powers (*devas*) to whom some Asian religions will not grant a salvific status. At the same time he shows how soteriologically inconsequential it is to engage in a Greek philosophical debate in clarifying how exactly the two natures remain distinct while being united in the Asian context.¹⁷⁰ Such a discussion does not focus on the central teaching and mission of Jesus: *love of God and neighbour*. To be precise, Pieris points out that the "Definition of Chalcedon" does not deal with the salvation of humanity and the entire cosmos from their natural entropy as well as from every form of humanly induced lethality, through Love. We believe that *Love* is the all pervasive mission of God in Christ. For Pieris it is Jesus, the Word, God's executive wish and effective speech, that recapitulates all

¹⁶⁸ Cf. D. Lane, "The Nature of Revelation," in: *The Clergy Review*, vol. LXVI, no. 3, 1981, (pp. 89-101) here p.99.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christology in Asia: A reply to Felipe Gomez," *VTW*, Asian Theology Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 11/2, 1989, (pp.155-172), here p. 162; Also see Idem, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.194.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp. 194-195.

God's "words" (*debarim*) revealed through the Law and the Prophets: *Love your God and your neighbour* (Mt. 22: 37-40) *or love* [God in] *your neighbour* (Rom. 13:8-10).¹⁷¹ In Jesus, the Word, God reveals and gives himself fully to each and every one of us and meets with a total response, of which the supreme act of loving obedience on the Cross is the perfect expression. Thus Pieris shows that the Christological doctrine of Chalcedon is irrelevant and peripheral in the Sri Lankan/Asian context from the point of view of what really constitutes the uniqueness of the person and mission of Jesus.

Pieris, drawing support from the voluminous study of Chalcedonian Christology by Alois Grillmeier, argues that there exists a divorce between the person and the task of Jesus, between Christology and soteriology, in the Conciliar deliberations on the nature and the person of Christ.¹⁷² However, he never means to say that Chalcedonian Christology has denied but certainly has neglected a non-negotiable essential element of Christian revelation, that is, biblical soteriology enfolded as Jesus, God's covenant with the poor.¹⁷³ Biblical soteriology, couched in a Semitic idiom, advocates the total liberation of the humanity and the cosmos into God's Reign. It demands liberation of the whole body rather than the mere salvation of souls. Here, the God of the poor demands a change of unjust social structures rather than a change of religion as the condition for salvation.¹⁷⁴ Hence, the Chalcedon formula has failed to address this basic issue that goes to define Jesus' unique prophetic Person and Event.

As Karl Rahner, who saw classical Christology as legitimate and binding for many reasons, also pointed out that classical Christology had failed to focus on and appreciate the

¹⁷¹ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," *Louvain Studies*, p. 193.

¹⁷² Cf. A. Pieris, "The New Quest for Asian Christian Identity: Guidelines from the Pioneers of the Past," in: *EAPR*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2009, (pp.13-32), here p. 20. This article was originally published in the *Festschrift* for Georg Evers on the occasion of his 70th birthday. See also, Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition -Vol.1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (AD 451)*, London and Oxford, Mowbray, 1975, pp.36-37.

¹⁷³ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "The New Quest for Asian Christian Identity: Guidelines from the Pioneers of the Past," in: *EAPR*, pp. 20-21.

character of Jesus as the Crucified-Risen One, the Mediator of salvation.¹⁷⁵ On another occasion Rahner, articulating the view of some of the theologians who began to think that Chalcedon is not the end but only the beginning of Christological development, said: “The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulas (. . .) are not the end but the beginning, not the goal but the means, truths which open the way to the – ever greater – Truth.”¹⁷⁶ Josef Neuner, the Austrian theologian who served Vatican II as *peritus* and also served in India for long years, endorses Pieris’ contention on Chalcedon as counter-productive and irrelevant. Thus J. Neuner in his attempt for a comprehensive Christology in the poverty-ridden context of India, says:

We ought to admit that the ancient dogmatic Christological definitions, expressed in categories of Greek philosophy and anthropology, are unrelated to the frames of Indian thinking. In the words of Pieris, “the Chalcedonian (*sic*) formula sounds meaningless when translated (if translation is possible) into many Asian Languages” (*Vidyajyoti Journal* 1993, p. 595), the anthropological framework is simply different.¹⁷⁷

So too Pieris, in his viable alternative proposal to the Chalcedonian frame of mind, emphasises the mission of Jesus as the focal point of the discussion in his dialogue with other religions and thus proclaims the Christ of our faith. It is the image of Jesus’ prophetic personality and his mission to proclaim the Good News to the poor (Lk. 4:18) that will do justice in the Sri Lankan or Asian presentation of Jesus Christ. In highlighting Jesus’ mission Pieris revives the “*dabar*” model of the Word of God in the Asian setting. Thus in the fresh search for Christ in Asia what matters most is an encounter and a commitment with the Word of God that evokes love which is our salvation rather than looking for an understanding of the mystery of Christ

¹⁷⁵ Cf. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* -Vol. XVII (Jesus, Man and the Church), Crossroad, N.Y., 1981, [Eng. trans. Margaret Kohl], pp. 28-38.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* -Vol. I (God, Christ, Mary and Grace), London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961, [trans. C. Ernst, O.P.], p. 149. There has not been serious Christological development taken place during the fifteen centuries between Chalcedon and Vatican II. The reason for it been that it was strictly followed, - which was justifiable given the painful historical controversies – that whatever be the culture, language or philosophy of a particular people, Christology to be orthodox had to be in the idiom of Chalcedon.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. J. Neuner, “Mission Theology after Vatican II,” in: *VJTR*, vol.53, 1994, no. 4, p.213. Pieris makes reference to this quotation in support of his argument (See A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 194).

through abstract concepts, such as nature, substance, divinity and humanity, which will only remain speculative abstractions.

3.3.5 Cross: The Word-Crucified

The Word-Crucified, a key notion in the theology of Pieris, invariably underscores the unavoidable reality of the Cross that is inherent in his theology of revelation and Christology. The Cross, which is a daily living reality of the poor of Sri Lanka and their hope, was for a long time either neglected by the theology of interreligious dialogue, or considered only in contrast with it. Pieris argues that to get back to the basic essentials of dialogue is in Sri Lanka/Asia tantamount to taking up the cross again and to be prepared to bear the harsh consequences for siding with the poor. For him Christ and Cross are so intrinsically connected that there cannot be Christ without the Cross nor a Cross without Christ.¹⁷⁸ He views the Cross as the locus where Jesus the Word lived out the two Love-Commands to the full and thus precisely expressed the sum and substance of revelation and salvation. Jesus on the Cross is the ultimate and absolute expression of divine solidarity with human and human solidarity with God.

In the light of Pieris' Covenant Christology, the Cross is also the locus where Christhood and true discipleship converge to form an irrevocable covenant. It invariably points to the necessary condition of our involvement as true disciples in the bitter conflict between God and mammon and, to bear harsh consequences of being signatories to the defence pact between God and the non-person of this earth. This eternal conflict between God and mammon reaches its climax with the Word being crucified and thereby establishing God's reign for God's poor. The Cross is the highpoint of the conflict precisely because there the Death-Easter-Pentecost event

¹⁷⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," *Louvain Studies*, p.223. Also see Idem, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 50.

constitutes the most revealing moment of the two-fold Word-Command.¹⁷⁹ In Pieris' contention Easter and Pentecost are inseparable dimensions of Jesus victorious death (Rom. 1:3-4; 1Cor.15:42-45). They enjoy an "indissoluble" unity as attested in the Scriptures.¹⁸⁰ However, the Gospel of Luke (24: 44-49) and Acts (1:3-8) describe them as two successive post-crucifixional episodes simply because our weak human faculties of comprehension require a slow-motion replay of the event.¹⁸¹ Pieris, highlighting the Cross as the concentrated moment of the eternal conflict and the twofold Word-command states:

The Cross, therefore reveals that the great *end-time battle* had already begun when the *God-Mammon conflict* (sūtra 1) which coincides with the *God-Poor Covenant* (sūtra 2) was *enfleshed as Jesus*, the man of Contradiction and Confrontation (Lk. 2:33-35).¹⁸²

He further points out that this conflict is the universal human struggle for liberation expressed in different idioms in every religion we know of. Hence this conflict lies at the very origin of all religions, namely, at their soteriological nucleus. Since mammon is the common enemy who competes with God for our allegiance, then whoever is anti-mammon cannot be anti-Yahweh. Thus, as Pieris acknowledges, the conflict in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka/Asia is not with atheism as such but with *idolatry* (mammon-worship).

3.3.5.1 Jesus' Kenotic Spirituality: His Covenant Relationship with the Poor

The spirituality of *kenosis* is constitutive of Jesus' mission of love starting from the *kenosis* of incarnation to the *kenosis* of the Cross where the covenantal relationship with the poor

¹⁷⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp.218 and 225.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. S. Lyonnet, "Redemption through death and resurrection", in: M.R. Ryan (ed.), *Contemporary New Testament Studies*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1965, pp. 377-378. Also see John O'Donnell, "In Him and Over Him: The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus," in: *Gregorianum*, vol.70, 1989, (pp. 25-45), here pp.35-39.

¹⁸¹ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.218.

¹⁸² Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 218. According to Pieris, a true follower of Jesus must enter this battle field to fight the common enemy: mammon. The followers of Jesus who take on this common enemy should be motivated by the spirituality of both *renunciation* (struggle to be poor) and *denunciation* (struggle for the poor). Jesus demonstrated this spirituality in a dramatic manner on the Cross.

was sealed in the most supreme manner. The self-emptying spirituality of Jesus is an essential dimension of Pieris' key notion of the Word-Crucified. The scriptural basis of Pieris' *kenotic* theology is the twofold Love-Command derived from revelation: [Jesus is] the irreconcilable antinomy between *God and mammon* (love of God), and [Jesus is] the irrevocable covenant between *God and the poor* (love of neighbor). Pieris further makes reference to the letter to the Philippians 2:5-11 to reiterate his position in *kenotic* theology. Based on this Christological hymn, he further argues that the *kenotic* character is found not so much in God's becoming a human person but in God's becoming "a slave of human tyrants" in Jesus Christ.¹⁸³ Thus for Pieris the *kenosis* mentioned in this specific scripture text is understandable only in terms of God's love and fidelity to the poor and the oppressed covenanted in Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁴ God, in becoming a human person, chose the birth, the life, and the death of the dehumanized ones in an idolatrous society run on a slavery-based economy. From the manger to the Cross the life of Jesus Christ as God's Word-Covenant was consistently a self-emptying life of service. It is time we recognized this as a fact of revelation rather than solely dwelling upon a real philosophical problem of "God becoming human". Pieris who holds that God could have had no problem about becoming human states:

All that God created was good; the whole creation is God's body. God did not find demeaning to be human. God could have become a flower without lowering herself [...]. Humanity is beautiful because it is the finest creation of God, the fruit of love. But slavery is ugly, because it is a creation of human greed, the fruit of sin.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Whither New Evangelism?," in: *Pacifica*, vol. 6, 1993, p. 333.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, p. 55. Here, Pieris while yielding to the convincing arguments of Ernst Käsemann that the slavery mentioned in Phil. 2:5-11 has to do with the Hellenistic notion of spiritual slavery to the cosmic powers he strongly asserts that the New Testament in its preponderance of references points to the human and structural dimensions of these cosmic powers. Hence he holds the spiritual slavery to the "Powers" and the social structures of slave-economy into which Jesus was born as inseparable factors of the notion of *kenosis* (see *Ibid.*, footnote 51).

¹⁸⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Whither New Evangelism?," in: *Pacifica*, p. 333.

Hence, what was truly *shocking* to traditional believers and *stupid* to the gentile thinkers in Jesus was that God, the almighty and the Transcendent, lowered himself to a social condition of a slave in the manner of living and especially in the manner of dying a criminal slave's death on the Cross.¹⁸⁶ Jesus as the Victim of injustice exposed himself on the Cross as the stark reality: "that is, that poverty as an oppression inflicted on the many by the greed of the few is a *blasphemy* against God in that it *desecrates* the human and the cosmic in which the God-of-the poor has pitched Her tent."¹⁸⁷

This theological position of Pieris on the *kenosis* of Jesus helps us to understand his argument of the *eternal conflict* between God and mammon which he bases on the two-fold love command derived from divine revelation. He holds that the biblical language of the eternal conflict carries within it a spirituality common to all the major religions, be they theistic or non-theistic. This spirituality, as he describes it is the *beatitudinal spirituality* in conformity with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5: 3-11) which is the theistic formulation of the universal vision common to all religions.¹⁸⁸ This is the spirituality of the Reign of God where only God reigns and no other, where no idol is in existence. It is obvious therefore that Jesus, as God's covenant with the poor, embodies in himself this spirituality common to all religions which was vividly expressed on the Cross. In other words, it was through Jesus' *Baptism on the Cross* (Lk. 12:50) that he revealed in the most explicit manner the common spirituality that all religions demand.

Pieris, on the basis of Jesus' Baptism on the Cross, argues that Jesus, as God's own *kenosis* and as the proof and sign of the irrevocable antinomy between *God and mammon* (*sūtra* 1), is an endorsement of the Buddhist ascesis of renunciation of biological, emotional and

¹⁸⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.209.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.221.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.219.

physical ties that bound him to the world.¹⁸⁹ As noted earlier, on the Cross Jesus lived out to the full the double asceticism that constitutes the salvific path, namely, his *renunciation* of material goods (his voluntary poverty, or his struggle *to be poor*,) and his *denunciation* of mammon (or his struggle *for* the poor). He also calls this universal spirituality in Christian terms as *evangelical obedience* which necessarily calls for a categorical renunciation and denunciation of mammon, God's rival. The voluntary renunciation of mammon is what we Christians call *evangelical poverty*, as it is undertaken for the sake of the gospel.¹⁹⁰ Pieris, in his general terminology, calls it also the voluntary poverty of Asian monks. Thus, a true disciple of Christ must opt for evangelical obedience and poverty to enter the Reign of God.¹⁹¹ Borrowing the words from Pieris, one can state this universal spirituality in non-theistic terms too as "*the irrevocable commitment to an Ultimate horizon of absolute freedom* (the counterpart of evangelical obedience) coupled with *a radical renunciation of all that stands in its way* (the counterpart of evangelical poverty)."¹⁹²

Furthermore, a spirituality of *renunciation*, which Christians understand as denying oneself and taking up the Cross, not only points to an *exterior* renunciation of material possessions but also to an *interior* attitude of detachment.¹⁹³ However, the spirituality of renunciation we talk of is not a conflict as it were between God and the World. It positively

¹⁸⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, p. 36.

¹⁹¹ In biblical terms *obedience* literally means "listening", from the Latin *obaudire* (in Greek *hypakoe*), to (the word of) God. It means acting according to God's word since God's word is not merely an expression of God's Will, but also its execution (Is. 55:11). This implies that the word is not heard if it is not executed (Lk. 6:46-47; 11:28). The evangelical Obedience and Poverty as a universal spirituality is explained in detail in Pieris' work *Fire and Water*, pp. 173-178 and 203-205.

¹⁹² Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, (Chapter 4), p. 37.

¹⁹³ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 89. These two aspects of *Voluntary poverty* – interior and exterior poverty – fused into one indivisible virtue in practically every form of monastic tradition is expressed in the Buddhist term *alpecchatā* and its corresponding Hindu term *virāga*. However, this is never to be confused with the negative attitude of a *fuga mundi* or a deprivation of one's legitimate comforts essential for a dignified human life. Voluntary poverty simply means the attitude of non-addictiveness or freedom from the accumulativeness-consumerism cycle of existence.

means to desire only the basic minimum necessary for life. It is a spirituality that invites one to be “non-addictive” to any creature and to maintain a “critical distance” from every creature, the two characteristics of evangelical poverty.¹⁹⁴ Self-denial is not self-hate. It is not a call to love death, terror, violence and blood-shed that the very word “cross” tends to suggest. What Jesus laboured for is to bring about God’s non-dominating Rule over humankind, namely God’s Reign. In this perspective, therefore, the Cross is viewed as a *violent resistance* that the Word of God encountered in his struggle *to be* poor and struggle *for* the poor in the man-made System of Domination. A true servant of the Word, too, must be prepared to face this violent resistance in its varying degrees. Therefore, voluntary poverty is one of the two dimensions demanded of a true Christian discipleship (Mk.8:34) which, as Pieris argues, coincides with the Buddha’s path of interior liberation: namely, liberation from possession as well as from greed for possession.¹⁹⁵ He also identifies voluntary poverty, a major constitutive dimension of the *one* universal salvific path, as the only meeting point of the *gnostic* and the *agapeic* models of spirituality such as Buddhism and Christianity.¹⁹⁶ It is through the “voluntary poverty of Asian Monks” that the “forced poverty of Asian masses” will be eliminated. Therefore, voluntary poverty is a positive value in the Sri Lankan/Asian context in founding a “contrast society”, a new order of society. It is a society where only Yahweh would reign, a human community governed by love, where its leaders derive their authority from powerlessness and serve even unto death. Hence Pieris holds that “wherever God is loved and served and it is the poor that rules, and not poverty; wherever the poor are loved and served, it is God who rules, not mammon.”¹⁹⁷ This is what the phrase “Kingdom of God” meant for Jesus. However, for Pieris, voluntary poverty, which is a

¹⁹⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *God’s Reign for God’s Poor*, p.40.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *God’s Reign for God’s Poor*, p.36.

prerequisite for a new order of society, is an evangelical imperative for all true disciples of Jesus rather than a spiritual luxury of the Asian monks. The early Christians taking this evangelical imperative seriously voluntarily pooled their resources to share them among the needy persons in the community according to need thus preventing anyone living in need of legitimate comforts (Acts 4:34-35).

Furthermore, the basis of the twofold Love-Command of common spirituality implies that personal *renunciation* of worldly riches must be coupled with radical *denunciation* of mammon as a true disciple of Christ. In other words, to use Pieris' phrases, *voluntary poverty* must be practiced together with categorical denunciation of the "*forced poverty*" (Manipulation of mammon). Hence, Pieris stresses that, "*to be poor for the love of God* (struggle to be poor or voluntary poverty) and *to be poor for the love of the poor* (struggle for the poor) are two evangelical ideals that merge into one horizon of love, which alone gives voluntary poverty its salvific value."¹⁹⁸ Hence *the struggle for the poor* is the second constitutive dimension of one path of salvation; a condition *sine-qua-non* demanded of true Christian discipleship and is also the means by which Jesus is proclaimed the Lord of the history.¹⁹⁹ Thus Pieris describes his understanding of true Christian discipleship as follows:

A Christian is a person who has made an irrevocable option *to follow* Jesus; this option necessarily coincides with the option *to be poor*; but the "option to be poor" becomes a true "following of Jesus" only to the extent that it is also an option *for the poor*. Christian discipleship or "spirituality," therefore, is a coincidence of all these three options.²⁰⁰

For Pieris it is on the Cross that the primordial Covenant of co-responsibility was restored.²⁰¹ Jesus, the Word-Crucified and exalted, brought about this restoration not only by

¹⁹⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 87.

²⁰⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 15.

²⁰¹ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary," in: *Logos*, pp.58 and 68.

reconciling humans among themselves and humans with God, but also by reintegrating the whole cosmos that had been alienated from God and humanity through personal and collective irresponsibility. This brings us to the realization that the Cross is not only the *locus* of salvation offered to us but also the *locus* of our covenantal participation in Jesus' redemptive act as his true disciples. As stated earlier the Cross and Christ are intrinsically connected and therefore cannot be separated. So it is between disciples and the Cross. As Scripture too testifies, Jesus, immediately after acknowledging his Christhood at the public pronouncement of it by Peter (Mk. 8:29-30), re-defined the title Christ²⁰² in terms of his imminent crucifixion (Mk. 8:31). A little while later in the same episode Jesus also defined the discipleship of his followers in terms of the Cross (Mk. 8:34).²⁰³ In the perspective that the Word is an event to be engaged in and not simply a doctrine to be developed, it follows that to hear the Word is to take a clear stand on what we hear which invariably ends up meeting the Cross. It demands a further hearing and a need for standing by what is heard as did Mary our mother. Hence, true discipleship is a long process marked by the Cross of Christ. Just as the crucifixion was Jesus' baptism our cross-bearing discipleship or taking part in the paschal mystery, that is the living out our part of the covenant, is our Baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). Therefore by baptism what we truly and primarily mean is a personal or collective compliance with the *crucifying demand of service* (Mk. 9:35-45), a spirituality common to all religions expressed in their own idioms.²⁰⁴ This understanding of baptism invites us to go beyond its sacramental understanding.

Moreover, in the context of Sri Lanka/Asia, it is evident that *the poor* with whom Jesus makes his Covenant on the Cross are mostly non-Christians. Therefore, it follows that whoever

²⁰² Pieris drawing support from C.F.D. Moule says that Christ seems to be the only title which Jesus is recorded to have accepted during his earthly life although with his own new interpretation (See C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, esp. p.31-35).

²⁰³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.223.

²⁰⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.226.

carries the Cross anywhere on earth, whatever be the religion, is a *disciple* of Jesus. In this broad understanding of discipleship the God we believe in would never demand the poor change their religion but request them to join him to battle the common enemy, *idolatry* (mammon-worship).²⁰⁵ Thus for Pieris, these covenant partners of God, the poor, the majority of whom in Asia are non-Christians, constitute the *true Body of Christ* on the Cross.²⁰⁶ Here, the adherents of the non-Christian traditions who carry the Cross are not named “anonymous Christians”, to use Karl Rahner’s condescending appellation which is inadequate in a multi-religious context like Sri Lanka while acknowledging positive elements of this theory.²⁰⁷

It is this Christian specificity of covenant between God and the poor (or the struggle for the poor) against the prevailing order of mammon that eventually will break through the “language barrier” between *gnosis* and *agape*, turning human love into the supreme art of knowing God (1 Jn. 4:7-8).²⁰⁸ Thus, as noted earlier, the Crucified-Word stands as the *irrevocable covenant* between God and humanity, particularly the poor, so that one can always

²⁰⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.222.

²⁰⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary,” in: *Logos*, pp.20 and 21.

²⁰⁷ According to the theory of ‘anonymous Christianity’ Christianity is considered to be the one, absolute and universal religion to which adherents of other religions are called and for which they are destined. However, this theory acknowledges in these traditions the “supernatural elements” arising out of grace. Nevertheless, there is an obligation on the part of the Christian missionaries to bring the ‘anonymous Christians’ to explicit consciousness of the ‘Latent Christ’ who is the agent, object and goal of all salvation. In Sri Lankan context Rahner’s position could well be reversed to speak of ‘anonymous Buddhist’ or ‘anonymous Hindus’ which definitely set the pace for a rival claim of superiority among different religious traditions. At the same time our attempt is not to find so called authentic “Christian elements” in non-Christian religions as Rahner’s theory suggests but how the *Word-Crucified, the medium of salvation*, reveals and saves through all religions which have different cultural ethos causing a legitimate religious pluralism but *converging* through mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization into one path of God’s plan of salvation (This hypothesis “anonymous Christianity” is treated by Rahner in number of essays appear in *Theological Investigations*, 23 Volumes, London, Darton, Longman and Todd 1961-92. Also Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 34; Idem, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 60).

²⁰⁸ One of the major obstacles to core-to-core dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity is their failure to acknowledge the reciprocity of the two idioms. In other words it is their refusal to admit that *gnosis* and *agape* are both legitimate languages of the *human* spirit or (as far as the Christian partner in dialogue is concerned) that they are languages that the same divine Spirit speaks alternately in each one of us. For a thorough exposition on this “Language barrier” and the interpretation of these two distinct idioms in view of eliminating this first major obstacle (Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 110-119).

touch God in humanity, and touch humanity in God, *provided one opts for the Cross* where alone love for God and love for humanity are made convertible.²⁰⁹

Furthermore, according to Pieris, it is through this highpoint of the public display of conflict and exaltation on the Cross that we need to look at Jesus' incarnation and his public ministry, with a view of formulating a "language of credibility" of revelation in the context of the scandalous poverty and profound religiousness of the Sri Lankan masses. It is the Cross that explains the *kenotic* character of the incarnation, and not the other way around. Thus Pieris describes the mystery of incarnation more as an emergence of the Word in flesh from among a broken people, as a broken person himself, from the moment of his conception rather than as a mere abstract hypostatic union.²¹⁰ Thus he emphatically states, "incarnation means that God's Word of promise to Her broken people and the broken people's word of protest to their faithful God are not two words, but One Saving Word."²¹¹

Pieris, extends his understanding of Jesus' incarnation as an "emergence" in flesh from among a broken people to a new missiological paradigm proposing a *double baptism* that the Church in Asia must undergo if it wants to be the Church of Asia, namely, *the baptism in the Jordan of Asian Religiosity* and *the baptism on Calvary of Asian Poverty*. The first baptism would soon lead to the other making the Sri Lankan Church authentic. Here again it is the spirituality of the two-fold Love-Command that is operative. As Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan lost his identity among the "religious poor" in order to find his authentic self, (Lamb of God, the beloved Son and Messiah), the institutional Church planted by the colonial powers in the Sri Lankan soil must itself take the plunge into the *religiousness of the Asian poor*. It is only then the Church in Sri Lanka can be a credible word of revelation or a readable sign of salvation.

²⁰⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 9.

²¹⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p.202.

²¹¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, p.58.

The Church *in* Sri Lanka must primarily be a learning church (*ecclesia discerns*) lost among the ‘religious poor’ of Sri Lanka, and not a teaching church (*ecclesia docens*) to the Sri Lankan “pagans” in the medium of Western culture. Similarly, as Jesus’ prophetic mission of love started at the river Jordan and was consummated on the Cross thus finding *total solidarity* with the ‘religious poor’ of Israel, the Church *in* Sri Lanka must respond to the call from the Cross to become the Church of the poor by participating in *the poverty of religious Sri Lankans* in establishing God’s Reign for God’s poor. For Pieris, Jordan was only the beginning of Calvary. Pieris insists that there cannot be an Abba-experience within the Church *in* Sri Lanka without entering into the struggle against mammon in her becoming the Church *of* Sri Lanka.²¹² In this perspective today in Asia/Sri Lanka, the Cross is seen as a *social location* where *social conflict* is registered once and for all between the Freedom-conferring God in Jesus and the Enslaving system of Domination designed by the worshipers of mammon. It is on the Cross that the Word triumphs, both as revelatory and salvific; it is there that the prophetic authority from Moses to Jesus is finally vindicated. Hence, we need to appeal to the Church *in* Asia/Sri Lanka to enter into the stream at the point where *the religiousness of the Sri Lankan poor* (represented by the masses) and *the poverty of the religious Sri Lankans* (reflected in the Asian monks) meet to form the ideal community of total sharing. This point of entry is identified as the soteriological nucleus or the liberative core of various non-Christian Asian religions.²¹³

In concluding this section we could say that Pieris, in his Covenant Christology, asserts that God is revealed essentially and primarily as our Ultimate Future in Jesus. This Ultimate Future is a dynamic reality that has already made its appearance in history in Jesus of Nazareth. And this Ultimate Future has come to expression above all in God’s covenant with the poor in

²¹² Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 63.

²¹³ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 50.

Jesus sealing it on the Cross as the fulfilment of the *promise of salvation*. Jesus therefore is God's Covenantal *Word of Promise* to the poor. This specificity of Christianity, which distinguishes it from other religions, consists in its mission to promote and to realize this covenant in a world scattered by the worshipers of mammon. However, the fulfilment of this promise of salvation is the resurrection of the *whole of Christ*, that is, Jesus plus his whole anthropo-cosmic body, which includes also many co-workers of other religious persuasions who are not rivals in a conversion race but partners in a common mission. This is an ongoing process towards the *whole of Christ*, or *totality of Christ* or *plenitude of Christ*. Here, Pieris proposes "emergence-convergence" imagery for a relevant Asian Christology instead of "above-below" or "ascent/descent" imageries. Thus he, writes:

According to Covenant Christology I propose here, the Covenantal Word of *Promise*²¹⁴ [italics mine] which is *already operative within creation and human history from its inception* emerges in "flesh and blood" at the fullness of time as Jesus of Nazareth who grows into the all-compassing Christhood towards which all creation and all history converges as to its ultimate Future. Here Christology which *is soteriology* constitutes the movement towards the *Future* breaking into the present.²¹⁵

This allow us to say that Pieris' thesis of Covenant Christology, based on the twofold love-command brings Christianity and other religions to one communal platform in our attempts to make sense of Christian revelation in Sri Lanka.

²¹⁴ For Pieris the Word of God is essentially and primarily a Word of Promise constituting a Covenant. It is this God's Word-Covenant that we call Jesus the Christ. Jesus is God's promise of salvation to us and the whole of cosmos. On the other side of the Covenant Jesus is our human response to God, our fidelity to God.

²¹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 214. We further observe that for Pieris Christology *is nothing but soteriology* that necessarily takes its meaning from Christ's decisive "eschatological moment" on the Cross. Thereby he rules out any distinction between soteriology and Christology. As Pieris puts it: "what [God in] Christ did on the Cross for us, so to say, defines Who [God in] Christ is (Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 202- 203).

3.4 Some Ecclesiological Implications

This thesis insistently asks how the Church can be Church *of* Sri Lanka and not merely a Church *in* Sri Lanka. Throughout this dissertation this basic concern undergirds our search for relevant theology of revelation and Christology. From what has been exposed in this central Chapter it is made clear that the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka needs to unlearn whatever she has absorbed uncritically from the Western theoretical paradigm into her theology. This is true also of the churches that are outside the Roman communion in Sri Lanka. To this end I propose the Word-Crucified centred, *kenotic* ecclesiology relevant for the Sri Lankan Church. This theological position therefore leads to the following ecclesiological implications.

3.4.1 Vision of the Church: Word-centred and Kingdom Oriented

In Sri Lankan we should strive to be a Church that is centred on the Word-Crucified who enlightens every human being and that assigns priority to God's promised Reign that embraces all human history. This proposed ecclesiological vision safeguards the Trinitarian foundation of the Church's mission. It also recognizes the Church's distinct role of discerning God's Word, guided by the Spirit, within the community of believers, when they live their faith as an ecclesial community (*GS*. 4). This new vision neither separates the Kingdom from Jesus Christ and the Church nor relativizes them as mere servants of the Kingdom fostering values such as peace, justice, and freedom. Thus it rejects any exaggerated views of Kingdom theology.

For Pieris any discourse of theology presupposes and identifies the "truth-goal" as the Unspeakable One (*Theos*/God). The Unspeakable One becomes speakable only as the Speech (*logos*), the illuminating and liberative Word of revelation whom we call Christ, uttered by the

Unspoken Speaker (*pneuma*/Spirit).²¹⁶ Only the Spirit can speak the Word that opens the heart. The Church, therefore, should resist any tendency within herself to replace the Spirit as the Speaker. The Church can only be the voice of the Spirit, the speaker. Her word should be the Word that the Spirit utters in the nonpersons of Sri Lanka/Asia.²¹⁷ Pieris also states that, “Christ is the Triune God entering into solidarity with our flesh to redeem it into a ‘Body fully transfigured by the Spirit’ (*soma pneumatikon*).”²¹⁸ The Spirit and Word act in unison (Jn. 19:30).

This Speech, the Word, is universal. As already discussed it is also our *medium* by whom the Unspeakable One, our sources of salvation, becomes accessible to us. Accordingly the *Word of revelation* is also *the medium of salvation* and the *path* to intimacy with the Ultimate (Unspeakable One). This *Word-medium-path* has been available to all tribes, races and people of all times and all cultures through the Spirit. This reminds us of the importance of finding a suitable idiom to retell the story of Jesus in a given context as St. Paul did at Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17: 24). This *Word-medium-path* has been recognized by various names (*Dharma, Mārga, Tao* etc.), giving rise to many forms of discourses and thus demonstrating the inexhaustible nature of this Trinitarian mystery by one single form of utterance.²¹⁹ Hence, having experienced the salvific values of other religions that shaped the Sri Lankan society for centuries the Catholic Christian Church cannot claim to have the monopoly of the Word or Holy

²¹⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking,” in: *Concilium*, 1994/6, p. 71; Also see Idem, *Fire and Water*, p.128. Pieris safeguards the inseparable unity between Father, Son and the Spirit. Furthermore, Pieris amply illustrating his Christological orthodoxy says that one cannot speak of Jesus as the Christ apart from the Father and the Spirit (Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.227).

²¹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, pp. 129-130.

²¹⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.230.

²¹⁹ Pieris, insists that what is absolute and unique is not the title we give to *Theos-Logos-Pneuma* but what all major religions, theistic and non-theistic, have professed for centuries as the mystery of salvation manifesting itself at least in a “trinal” or “trinitarian” form. According to Pieris this “triune” mystery constitutes the basic soteriological datum in many of our religious cultures (See: A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 62-65; Idem, “The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking,” in: *Concilium*, p.71).

Spirit, the out-pouring of the Word. Hence, this demonstrates the urgent need of the Sri Lankan Church to evolve an ecclesiological vision centered on the Word-Crucified.

However, we need to uphold the Church's responsibility and gift of discernment within the whole community of believers while respecting the norm that not only the Church but even its *Magisterium* is not above God's Word, but subject to it (*DV*. 10). Here Pieris appreciates the bold step the document *Dei Verbum*, despite its compromises and shortcomings, took to enthrone the Word of God in the centre of Church-life leading to the table of the Eucharist.²²⁰ This implies that the Church requires a spirituality of listening to God's Voice in the midst of apostolic activity, which is what discernment means. The continuous encounter between the Gospel and cultures, in the whole Asian reality, made up of religions, cultures, poverty and the poor, in the process of inculturation requires the local church in Sri Lanka to carry out a prudent discernment. It is a discernment of the values involved in this process, of the signs of the times, of the human attitudes in the Church and outside of it, of realities that are of benefit for the Church. This discernment process takes place within a mutual exchange between the Church evangelized by the poor (that is, educated by the Spirit to become the vicar of Christ or the voice of the Spirit) and the poor evangelized by the Church (the poor recognize their covenant partner in Jesus). It is only then that the Sri Lankan/Asian nonpersons recognize the voice of the Spirit in the Church, and the Church in turn recognizes the voice of the Sri Lankan/Asian nonpersons. This leads the Church to become truly Catholic by identifying herself with the poor and thus becoming one Body with them so that she may become one Body with Christ. Hence, for Pieris this is one good criterion of the discernment of God's voice among us. According to him the Church can become the voice of the Spirit and claim to teach with Christ's authority only when she becomes the

²²⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, "Vatican II: A 'Crisigenic' Council with an Unwritten Agenda," in: *EAPR*, vol. 42, nos.1/2, 2005, (pp.7-25), here p.18.

Church of the poor of Sri Lanka.²²¹ For, as observed, the poor are the body of Jesus and vicars of Christ who are also the principle addressees of the Word.

Furthermore, the Church's mission or rather evangelization²²² has its roots in the mission of God. It is in the Word that the whole world is created. The Word became incarnate in Jesus to bring this mission to its fulfilment. The mission of Jesus and the Spirit has to be understood in the context of the mission of God. The Church continues the mission of the incarnate Word – Jesus. Hence, the Church is for the Reign of God and not for its own sake. It is the Sacrament of the Kingdom. Especially in a context of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka there is an urgent necessity of placing the Kingdom of God together with the Word-Crucified rather than the Church at the centre of Christian life and letting the *Basileia* determine the shape and the mission of the *Ecclesia*. However, the Church indeed has to be made present and be built up as a lamp on a stand, so that the adherents of other religions can articulate their own liberative aspiration more clearly in its light. In pursuing this goal of building up of the Reign of God, the Church sees the other religions as its collaborators and allies in a common struggle against the enemy of the Reign of God, namely, mammon. The focus of mission then becomes prophecy, challenging people to transformation. Such an approach avoids *instrumentalizing*, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation as means of mission understood in terms of the proclamation of the

²²¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, pp. 128- 130. Also see Idem, “‘I Believe in the Holy Spirit’: Ecumenism in the Churches and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit,” in: *EAPR*, vol.42, nos.1/2, 2005, (pp. 97-121), here, p.104.

²²² The change of term from Mission to Evangelization is itself significant. It includes not only proclamation with a view to conversion (no unethical conversion), but also inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation of the poor. The key to this change in theological perspective is the Second Vatican Council. Unethical conversion is a current issue in Sri Lanka/Asia. However, this should not bar the Church of its work of evangelization. It should be carried out with the right attitude of making Christ known both to Christians and adherents of other religious traditions in Sri Lanka without engaging in triumphalistic and conquering Christianity. It is evident that in good, practicing Buddhist (and others) the Kingdom preached by Christ has already germinated in them and our encouragement to make them better Buddhist would only further the Kingdom in them and in their environment – except in the case of one who clearly receive the vocation to the Church – that is, to be a sacramental expression of the Kingdom.

gospel leading to baptism and membership in the Church. This is a paradigm shift in the vision of mission. Here, we can see the shift in three mutually involved areas:

- a. We move from the ecclesio-centered vision of salvation history to one that is centered on the Word-crucified, the ever-growing Word, which therefore entails in it the *movement towards* the eschatological reality, Kingdom of God.²²³ This vision demands of the Sri Lankan Church a spirituality of *kenosis* of the Cross. It is only a humble church that is ready to die and disappear with the millions of Asia's poor proves its credibility.
- b. Here, a missionary is not one who goes out to conquer, but one who is ready for *kenosis*, or the paschal mystery. Looking at mission from this point of view gives us an image that is very different from a spreading empire that can be evaluated in terms of numbers and territories. The Sri Lankan Church needs to develop a *kenotic* ecclesiology, of the cross, of the loving and self-giving service. We need to shed the attitude and image of power, domination, triumphalism and influence and follow the example of the early Church where the power of the Spirit was very visible. Such a church will appeal to the Sri Lankan mind. The Sri Lankan Church as any other Asian Church needs to be a listening and learning church before offering others what is unique in Christian belief. This humble dialogical attitude will certainly help the Church to unearth the salvific values within our own Scriptures and beliefs which would otherwise remain hidden. According to FABC

²²³ In saying that the Word-Crucified is in the *movement towards* Kingdom of God implies that God's Reign is present and active in the World today, but will reach full realization only in the future. As Michael Amaladoss would say, not even this *limited and growing reality of the Kingdom*, as present in the world today, is identified with the Church, but is as wide as the presence and activity of the Spirit in the world. For Pieris the Kingdom of God becomes a present reality in our engagement in the battle against concrete enemy, mammon, in the company of clearly identified *allies*, the poor. (Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, p. 35; Also see M. Amaladoss, "Faith meets Faith," in: *VJTR*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1985, p. 111).

these learning areas can be areas such as ecology, human communities, celebration of life in its joys and tragedies.²²⁴

- c. Salvation is not only of souls, not merely of persons, but of the whole cosmos.

God is the God of universal and cosmic harmony. Harmony is a fundamental value in Sri Lankan thinking and way of life. Asian theologians have repeatedly pointed out that harmony is not “an absence of strife” but rather the result of “acceptance of diversity and richness.” It is a Sri Lankan/ Asian approach to reality.²²⁵ It is God’s plan to reconcile the whole world to God. The goal of this movement of history is not the visible Church but the Reign of God, of which the church is the servant. Because of this quest for harmony, the Christian message, that God is not only the God of justice but, precisely because of the restoration of the right order of society, but also the God of harmony, communion and reconciliation, will find a sympathetic hearing among Sri Lankans.

3.4.2 The Priority of the Local Church

Pieris observes that the Second Vatican Council in its decision to call for the development of “local churches” (*ecclesiae particulares*) reflects the ecclesiological revolution it envisaged.²²⁶ He insists that there is no church that is not local.²²⁷ Although the Council adopts a universal perspective most of the time when it described the church, it asserted quite strongly in *Lumen Gentium* that it is only in and out of the *particular churches* that the one and single Catholic Church exists (*LG*. 23). It spoke of the need for the Church to become a local church

²²⁴ Ref. *FABC Papers*, No. 81, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today”, Section 1.4.3, p. 26.

²²⁵ Universal harmony is present in the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Universal harmony is also cosmic because the human person is a microcosm reflecting macrocosm. The cosmic harmony is particularly emphasized in Taoism. (Ref. P. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2004, p.124.

²²⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country’s Independence (1948-1998),” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vols. 25-26, 1998-1999, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka (pp. 248-296), here, p. 267.

²²⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 36.

and the universal Church as a communion of local churches. Edward Schillebeeckx succinctly stated, “(. . .) people belong to the universal Church because they belong to a local community.”²²⁸ The Church at its origin was a local church, the Church in Jerusalem. Several other local churches were born due to the missionary activity of this Church in Jerusalem. Still we cannot say that the local church is first and then the universal Church. The local church is the concrete manifestation and realization of the universal Church. The universal Church is fully present in every local church. However, the term local church has a very general and ambiguous meaning. The Vatican II documents use the term local church to mean a Basic Christian Community, a Eucharistic assembly, a parish, a diocese, an individual Church (rite), a regional Church, and a national Church. Admitting all these different forms of the local churches, FABC would see primarily the local church as “the historical actualization of the mystery of God in Christ.”²²⁹ Pieris stretches this primary understanding to include various ‘basic human communities’, with Christian and non-Christian membership, which have various degrees of ecclesial character.²³⁰

The Church, both at the local and universal levels, is seen as “*a communion of communities*”. Communion requires firstly interdependence, participation and co-responsibility, not dependence.²³¹ As the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* by Pope John Paul II puts it well: “It is in fact within the perspective of ecclesial communion that the universal authority of the Successor of Peter shines forth more clearly, not primarily as juridical power over the local Churches, but above all as a pastoral primacy at the service of the unity of faith and life of the whole people of God” (EA, 25). However the fact remains, without being a communion, the

²²⁸ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, [Eng. trans. by John Bowden], Crossroad, N.Y., 1981, p.73.

²²⁹ Cf. *FABC Papers*, No. 60 titled “Theses on the Local Church,” 1991.

²³⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 112.

²³¹ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 287. Also see *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Church cannot fulfill its mission (*EA*, 24). The local church, therefore, is not merely a part or administrative unit of the universal Church. The local church is fully the Church having its bond of unity with the local Church of Rome thus forming the universal Church (the *ecclesia ecclesiarum*). There is no doubt that the local church of Sri Lanka must proclaim and live the Christian faith, the same faith handed down the ages, but not in the theological categories and with the church structures imported from without. Here the issue is not simply to strive to be totally different from the churches elsewhere, but to emerge as a church shaped by within. Hence, now that the Asian Churches have come of age they are not branch offices of the Roman Curia, a point that was stressed at the Asian synod, 1998.²³² They should be able to move to the stage of self-government, self-support, self-propagation and self-theologizing. The Vatican II solemnly affirmed that our Christian communities become autonomous self-governing local churches (*OE*. 5). This is never to deny the church-government which is collegially exercised by both the papacy and the local episcopate for unity, but with pastoral primacy.

Pieris argues that the majority of the local churches *in Asia* are not yet local churches *of Asia*. In other words, they are regrettably local churches of another continent *in Asia*, extension or branches of Western missions of local churches such as those of Rome, England and so on.²³³ This is the result of the traditional goal of the mission which has been *plantatio ecclesiae* – expansion of the Church and its structures as a visible community. The Church in Sri Lanka should primarily project herself as a transparent sign and effective instrument of the saving presence of the Reign of God of which the Church is a seed. Thus Pieris states, “What makes an Asian Christian community truly indigenous or ‘local’ is its active and risky involvement with

²³² Cf. P. Phan, “*Ecclesia in Asia: Challenge for Asian Christianity*,” in: *EAPR*, 37, 2000, (pp. 215-232), here p. 217.

²³³ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Asian Reality and the Christian Option,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.167; *Ibid.*, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 36, and 112.

Asia's cultural history, which is now being shaped by its largely non-Christian majority."²³⁴ This means, a truly local church of Sri Lanka is one that is shaped by the common struggles of the people for integral liberation. For Pieris this process has already begun in Sri Lanka by "centres" in the "periphery" of the Church though yet to reach its maturity.²³⁵ The local church is the primary locus of the inculturation process. This is exactly what he means when he stresses the need to get involved with the *Liturgy of Life*, that is, in the Kingdom-praxis in making the Church local and thus relevant. In concrete terms, as noted earlier, it is the participation of the Church in a consciously Christian manner, in the life-struggles of the local people to anticipate the Reign of God among us (*Liturgy of Life*), but listening to the Word of God in the Scriptures and reading the signs of the times (*Liturgy of the Word*).²³⁶ Hence, for Pieris the genesis of a liberation theology overlaps the genesis of an authentically local church.

The FABC in its First General Assembly in 1974 stated that "the primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church."²³⁷ The Fifth Plenary Assembly held in Indonesia in 1990 added new clarity and focus

²³⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 111-112. Here, the word 'risky' points to the difficulty that Sri Lankan Church has to deal with in labouring to forge her own ecclesial identity. This task is carried out in the face of authoritative tradition of the Church which was almost exclusively born out of her encounter with the Greco-Roman worlds, and not with the Sino-Indian religiosity. Hence, the Sri Lankan/Asian Churches are called upon to create a precedent, since we have none to follow.

²³⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka during the First Fifty Years of the Country's Independence (1948-1998)," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 280. A few Catholic individuals and groups that are operative as centres in the periphery in Sri Lanka: *Centre for Society and Religion* (1971) founded by Tissa Balasuriya, OMI; *Satyodaya* (1972) founded by Paul Casperz, S.J.; and *Tulana Research and Encounter Centre* (1974) established by Aloysius Pieris, S.J. These groups and individuals were encouraged and supported by Bishop Leo Nanayakkara OSB., (1959-82). *Pubuduwa* (1971) – Sri Lankan Catholic Charismatic movement – founded by Fr. Oscar Abeyratna; *Subodhi* (1981) – Centre for Integral Education – founded by Fr. Mervyn Fernando; *Suba seth Gedara* (1984) – founded by Michael Rodrigo, OMI., merit special mention in this connection.

²³⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, no. 11, 1993, p.648.

²³⁷ Cf. FABC I, no. 9. See in *FAPA*, (1992), p.14. The perspective of the "Reign of God" first appeared only in Bishops' institute for Social Action III (*BISA*, 1975), speaking of the involvement of the local Church in "striving for a new society by fostering Gospel values together with adherents of other faiths and people of good will". Since then there has been a theological evolution to make the Kingdom of God as the Goal of the Church. Eventually, the Reign of God constituted an important aspect of the mission perspective of the FABC V in 1990 (Cf. L. Thumma, "The Dynamics of Evangelization in Asia: A Shift in Methodology – Part II," in: *Ind. Th. St.*, vol. 33, no.4, 1996, p.323- 324).

by asserting that it is the local church which is “the acting subject of mission” living and acting in communion with the universal church.²³⁸ Its corpus is rich with statements affirming the pivotal role of the local church in inculturation, in discovering its own identity.²³⁹ It has repeatedly called the Asian Church to inculturation and to build up authentic local churches by a Triple-Dialogue with or immersion into Asia’s poor, Asia’s rich cultures and religious tradition.

Hence the Sri Lankan Church, in realizing a much needed Word-Crucified centred and Kingdom Orientated vision, must focus on the building-up of a truly local church. It should be rooted in local cultures while open to social change, in dialogue with the great religions and cosmic religions of indigenous people, above all by becoming a Church of the poor and marginalized.

3.4.3 The Challenge of Christian Ecumenism in Sri Lanka

According to Pieris the credibility and seriousness of Catholic Church’s mission towards ecumenism depends largely on the way the Church of Rome relates to other local churches which are already in communion with it.²⁴⁰ It will have a direct bearing on the ecumenical mission of the Church of Sri Lanka. For him ecumenism is a movement that tolerates neither, as he calls it, *a fruit-salad* Christianity produced out of various Church traditions nor a Roman-absorption of the individuality of such churches.²⁴¹ Instead, according to him ecumenism should be a movement which upholds the Petrine charism of unity which blends with the Pauline principle of ecclesial diversity in the frontiers.²⁴² In fact the mission of the local Bishop of Rome

²³⁸ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.281.

²³⁹ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.266; also see *FAPA*, (2002), p.110.

²⁴⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “Vatican II: A ‘Crisigenic’ Council with an Unwritten Agenda,” in: *EAPR*, p.17.

²⁴¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “‘I Believe in the Holy Spirit’: Ecumenism in the Churches and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit,” in: *EAPR*, vol.42, nos.1/2, 2005, p.106.

²⁴² Cf. A. Pieris, “Two There Are, Your Holiness: Suggestions for the next Pope’s Agenda in Line with John Paul II’s Invitation in *Ut Unum Sint*,” in: *EAPR*, p.307.

Urbi et Orbi comes from this twofold legacy. It is in this ecumenical context, as Pieris proposes, that the debate about collegiality of the bishops and primacy of the Pope in the Roman communion must take place. As Paul educated the church of Jerusalem, the centre of the nascent Christianity, it is the other local churches that feed and maintain the Pauline orientation of the local Church of Rome. Hence, unearthing and respecting the Petro-Pauline character of the local Church of Rome this debate should move from mere distribution of Episcopal power towards the reciprocity of Service between the churches. Pieris argues that this new perspective is motivated by Vatican II's redefinition of the Church as the People of God (*LG. 7*). This decision of the Council challenged the traditional pyramidal structure of the Church and implicitly redefined its hierarchical roles and functions.²⁴³ In this change of perspective the Church of Rome can contain within itself the free play of both the centripetal force of the *Petrine Primacy* and the centrifugal orientation of *Pauline mission*.²⁴⁴ In this manner the local Church of Rome will retain her indispensable role and her credibility in the ecumenical movement in Sri Lanka/Asia. Authority is the credibility which one gains by renouncing all power derived from mammon. However, as observed before, we need to stress here that the *Ministerium* of the Pastors and Theologians should resonate with the *Magisterium* of the Poor. Pieris affirms that all schisms mar the image of Christ, and more damagingly in the face of the non-Christian world. He argues that all such divisions have their roots partially in the elimination of the *Pauline challenge* to *Peter* right in the heart of Rome. He making reference to J.M. R. Tillard, O.P., shows the importance of

²⁴³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Vatican II: A 'Crisigenic' Council with an Unwritten Agenda," in: *EAPR*, pp.15-16.

²⁴⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Two There Are, Your Holiness: Suggestions for the next Pope's Agenda in Line with John Paul II's Invitation in *Ut Unum Sint*," in: *EAPR*, p.306.

safeguarding the most ancient tradition of Petro-Pauline Character of the local Church of Rome.²⁴⁵

Pieris identifies the twofold sending, namely, the sending of the Spirit and the sending of The Twelve as the common spiritual foundation of ecumenism and the common apostolic origin of all churches.²⁴⁶ He further brings to our attention that these two “Sent Ones,” namely The Twelve and the Spirit, acted as co-agents (*synergoi*) of the same mission (Acts 15:28). Hence, he suggests that our inter-ecclesial programme of corporation in Sri Lanka be grounded in the twofold sending. However, Pieris insists that ecumenical initiatives in Sri Lanka/Asia are not merely “inter-ecclesial” but “trans-ecclesial”.²⁴⁷ This means the Christians in Sri Lanka should grow into the maturity of facing other religions together, cutting across denominational boundaries and addressing the common challenges that arise out of their dialogue and collaboration with other religions. In this practical situation we are called to redefine our vision of evangelization. Here, interreligious dialogue presupposes on the Christian side a renewed understanding of other religions leading to a wholly new theology of religious pluralism. This topic will be discussed in the next chapter. The urgency of ecumenism in the Sri Lankan Church aptly justifies the need of a relevant Christological and ecclesiological vision along the lines of the proposal of this dissertation. It is evident from what has been proposed in this Chapter that we do not advocate any form of separation between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, or Church and Christ. This point has been illustrated aptly through Pieris’ thesis that Christ, the

²⁴⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, “Two There Are, Your Holiness: Suggestions for the next Pope’s Agenda in Line with John Paul II’s Invitation in *Ut Unum Sint*,” in: *EAPR*, p.291.

²⁴⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “‘I Believe in the Holy Spirit’: Ecumenism in the Churches and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit,” in: *EAPR*, p. 97.

²⁴⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican’s *Dominus Jesus*,” in: *EAPR*, vol.38, no.1, 2001, (pp. 207-230), here pp.229-230. This is a talk given at the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 30 September, 2000.

realized Reign, or the final salvation, is a larger reality than Jesus himself (*Totus Jesus est Christus, sed Jesus non est totum Christi*).

The church divisions, though marginal in Sri Lanka, is a scandal in a multi-religious society where the value of harmony is held in high esteem. The ecumenical unity should become one of the primary concerns of the Church of Sri Lanka. This church division, which was the heritage of historical circumstances in the West was imported into Sri Lanka by denominational missionaries, and is perceived as a hindrance to the mission of the church. We are yet to forge a common ground of active collaboration to present Jesus to Sri Lankan society based on the line of theological thinking my thesis proposes.

3.5 Conclusion

Theology first of all assumes the existence and *givenness* of revelation. At the same time the Latin Church *in* Sri Lanka is in need of a profound foundation of Christology and theology of Revelation for it to be a Church *of* Sri Lanka. There is no doubt that the Church *in* Sri Lanka is in urgent need of a profound theological foundation against the background of centuries of cultural estrangement during the colonial period and in the context of the contemporary “religio-cultural awakening” among Sri Lankan people. It is evident that “the Church of Rome *in* Sri Lanka” must endeavor to become “the Church *of* Sri Lanka in communion *with* Rome. Hence, the above theological demonstration would give ample reasons as to why, in my thesis, I propose the notion of the Word-Crucified, the central notion in Pieris’ theology, as a point of departure in the Sri Lankan Church’s search for a “language of credibility” of revelation/salvation. This theological point of departure will further lead the Sri Lankan Church and the non-Christian majority to understand and assess the experiences of the different forms of neo-colonization and

their impact upon the Christian mission in Sri Lanka since the political independence in 1948. In particular, as proposed in this thesis a symbiotic dialogue pursued on this theological basis will pave the way for Sri Lankan people to see for themselves the distinction between *faith in Christ* and *the stamp of colonial origin and Western imperialism* placed on Sri Lankan Christianity. As demonstrated in this thesis, Pieris' key notion of the Word-crucified will certainly make headway in avoiding the failed triumphalistic *fulfillment theory* that the local Church has been adhering to in its mission of Christ. Furthermore, it will also open the door once closed to Jesus and Christianity, branded as foreign in Sri Lanka, and allow it to re-enter the soteriological nucleus or the liberative core of various religions that have shaped and brought stability to our country and culture. Hence, I propose this paradigm shift in theological thinking in our quest for authenticity since the urgent need of the Church *in Sri Lanka* is not appropriation but encounter, not absorption but colloquy, not translation from Western theology but the freedom to allow a gradual natural growth of new embodiments of the incarnate/crucified/risen Word.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pieris and the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism in Sri Lanka

4.1 Introduction

The world of Asia is multilingual, multiracial, multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious. It is the largest Continent teeming with two-thirds of the world's population.¹ While a greater part of Asia suffers from dehumanizing poverty, some Asian countries, very few though, top the list of world's advanced economies. These extreme conditions and polarities are characteristic of all spheres of the Asian world. It is with this backdrop of diversity and plurality that the Church of Sri Lanka is placed in her mission. The basic question this Chapter attempts to address is: What is the challenge of cultural and religious pluralism for the Church in Sri Lanka? What is her possible response?

With this backdrop the principal aim of this Chapter is to highlight and appreciate the unique theological contribution of Pieris to the Sri Lankan Church shaping its way in a context of religio-cultural pluralism predominantly Buddhist. Here, I will make a brief evaluation of the ongoing conversation about the Christian theologies of religious pluralism and the theology of revelation in the context of Sri Lanka. It requires an analysis of the theological contribution of prominent Sri Lankan theologians in relation to Pieris' theology. I will briefly study three local theologians belonging to three different Christian denominations. I will also analyze some major studies done on Pieris taking into account the specific questions raised by the reality of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka in relation to the understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. I will then proceed to evaluate Pieris' understanding of the relationship between Christianity and other

¹ Gerald T. Carney reviewing Pieris' work, *Love Meets Wisdom* states, "If Vatican II represented the flowing of the rivers of German theology into the Tiber, one must be prepared for the impact of the mighty waters of Asian Christian theology, which will change both the temperature and the make-up of the theological environment." (Cf. G. Carney, "Review of *Love Meets Wisdom*," in: *Horizons*, vol.16, no.2, 1989, (pp.414-15), here p.415).

religions against the current theological thinking on religious pluralism in Sri Lanka with a view to establish a viable basis for a healthy discourse on the credibility of God's revelation and redemption.

4.2 Pieris' Perception of the Theology of Religious Pluralism

In the traditional debate on the theology of religions it is more or less customary to recognize the many "theologies of religions" on offer in terms of three fundamental perspectives – ecclesiocentric, Christocentric, and theocentric – resulting in three basic positions (or attitudes) respectively: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.² Pieris makes an equivalent distinction: Christ *against* the religions, Christ *of* the religions and Christ *among* the religions.³ For the most part, the recent debate on theology of religions has been dominated by the argument on the possibility or the need for changing these paradigms from one to the other. Pieris, goes beyond this trend to discover a more Asian paradigm. For him in all these traditional approaches to the theology of religions the basic frame of reference is the issue of uniqueness and universality of *Christ* and/or *Christianity* understood in terms of supremacy over other religious traditions and their founders.⁴ Instead, the Sri Lankan/Asian priority is poverty and religiousness of the people.

According to Pieris, these traditional positions of theology of religions cannot be considered as adequate for study, dialogue, and cooperation in a multi-religious context like Sri

² Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1997, pp.180-193. Also see Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Pattern in the Christian Theology of Religions*, SCM, London, 1983; Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1985. Paul Knitter introduces four models of theologies of religions which he labels, "replacement," "fulfilment," "mutuality," and "acceptance". The first three models correspond roughly to the traditional categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism popularized by Alan Race (see P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Orbis Maryknoll, N.Y., 2002).

³ Cf. A. Pieris, "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures, e.g., in Asia," in: *Concilium*, 153/3, 1982, pp. 65-70. He finds all these categories unsatisfactory on the ground that they all divorce Asian religiousness from Asian poverty.

⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1996, (Chapter 14: Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm), pp.154-55.

Lanka/Asia. Hence, he proposes a relevant Asian paradigm of religious pluralism which rests on three overlapping concerns that do not receive adequate emphasis in the traditional approach. The first is the acknowledgement of a “third *magisterium*”, namely, that of the poor; the second is the *liberational thrust* that defines Asian theology of religions; and finally, the social location of this theology in, namely, the Basic Human Communities (BHCs).⁵ Strictly speaking Pieris’ basic concern is not to build a new framework for a theology of religious pluralism which would run into an abstract logical and epistemological exercise. Here, his real preoccupation is to explore and experience how God salvifically reaches out to people in various ways within one single but progressive and holistic economy of salvation for humanity. In this view, Pieris insists on the importance of a veritable *symbiosis* of religions that takes place in the location of BHCs of Sri Lanka/Asia leading ideally towards the total liberation of the non-persons and non-people.⁶ As far as Christians are concerned it is an *encounter* with Christ and our *commitment* to his mission of love in the context of multi-religious and scandalous poverty of Sri Lanka.

Pieris’ perception of religious pluralism is based on his new Asian paradigm of Covenant Christology which demonstrates that Jesus, the Word-Crucified, in himself sums up the whole of revelation and salvation in the two inseparable Love Commands. Pieris calls his proposed Asian brand in the theology of religions, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism.”⁷ According to Pieris this is not another discipline of study but it is the new way or method of theologizing in the context of Sri Lanka. As already elaborated, the twofold Love-Command is the foundation of a Christology which holds together the common basis of all religions as well as the distinctive character of Christian soteriology. This is also the theological basis of Pieris’

⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p.156.

⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), pp.158, 161.

⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism,” (ms), TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 2009, p.1.

argument that Christianity not only must respond to the Asian realities of many-religions and many-poor but to both of them together.

This leads us to a new framework of study and discussion on religious pluralism in Sri Lanka/Asia. Here, keeping to Pieris' firm principle that one's basic religious convictions should be maintained in an interreligious dialogue, we need to ask, what exactly can be claimed in terms of the uniqueness and universality of one's religious affiliation? Pieris goes on to rediscover the uniqueness and universality of Jesus. He, in talking particularly for his Christian faith, grounds his argument on the uniqueness and universality of *Jesus* (not of Christ) in the twofold Word-Command.⁸ As already observed, for Pieris such a claim of faith can be defended not on the basis of philosophical arguments but by action in favour of the poor. Accordingly, he stresses that Jesus, the Word-Crucified as God's irrevocable Covenant with the "poor" – which includes all religious founders and the poor by circumstances – together with the whole cosmos, grows into the fullness of the *Corporate Person* called Christ (Christhood). This is what Pieris considers to be the *uniqueness of Jesus* for which no parallel is found in other religions (*Formula 2*).⁹ Pieris further notes that Jesus on the Cross, the locus of the whole paschal event, namely, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, in God's timeless moment, is also the anticipation of the *totality* or fullness of Christhood. For him, Jesus is *universal* because he embodies in himself the spirituality common to all religions: beatitudes, *aplecchatā*, *virāgaya* (*Formula 1*). Such a perception of uniqueness and universality of Jesus avoids the triumphalistic attitude of the traditional approaches to religious pluralism. As an endorsement of this perception, Paul Knitter finds in the *uniqueness of Jesus* rediscovered by Pieris a better orientation towards bridging the

⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Universality of Christianity?," in: *VJTR*, vol.57, no.10, 1993, (pp. 591-95), here pp.592-94.

⁹ As elaborated previously for Pieris the "scandal" or shock of the incarnation is not in God becoming human in Jesus but in God, the Divine, becoming a slave of human tyrants in Jesus. Though scandalous, such understanding of Jesus' uniqueness need not be offensive or a threat to friends in other religions. In Pieris' experience of dialogue with other religions it is indeed a "Good News" to all religionists.

gap between Catholic theology and interreligious dialogue, a problem constantly encountered in the context of religious pluralism in Asia.¹⁰ He names it as the “ethical bridge” to dialogue of which Pieris perhaps is the first proponent and primary architect.¹¹ This ethical-practical approach to other religions takes up ethical issues and ethical responsibilities in a given society as a new form of interfaith exchange in their common struggle towards total human liberation which all religion advocate in their own unique ways. In this new ethical bridge to dialogue the other religionists are seen as “true co-workers” in building up the Reign of God in this world, and not as “anonymous Christians”. However, Pieris’ perception on religious pluralism cannot and should not be regarded as a means to construct a universal theology of religions or to achieve social agenda of peace and justice as the pluralists do. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the concerns of “justice and peace” overlap in the theology Pieris promotes in his Covenant Christology.

Here, a brief comparison with Jacques Dupuis’ emphasis on the issue of uniqueness and universality of Jesus will certainly be of help to appreciate Pieris’ salient contribution to the contemporary debate on the subject in Asia. Dupuis locates Jesus’ uniqueness and universality in his personal identity as the Son of God made man, the Word who became flesh. Dupuis, states: “it must be said clearly that no other consideration except the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of God provides an adequate theological foundation for his salvific

¹⁰ Cf. P. Knitter, “Catholic and Other Religions Bridging the Gap between Dialogue and Theology,” in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 24, 1999, (pp.319-354), here pp.351-53. The primary purpose of this article is to highlight that in Catholic theology there is a problem of getting the dialogical and theological act together. To be precise, he says that what we say or seek in dialogue is not supported by what we say or teach in doctrine.

¹¹ Cf. P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 148. Paul Knitter, agreeing with Terrence Murrigan, doubts whether Dupuis has truly been successful in bridging the gap between theology and dialogue despite Dupuis’ clear recognition that fulfilment or inclusivist Catholic theology of religions is an impediment to true dialogue with other religions (See P. Knitter, “Catholic and Other Religions Bridging the Gap Between Dialogue and Theology,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.342; T. Murrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement ‘Towards a Christian Theology of Pluralism’,” in: *Louvain Studies*, vol.23, 1998, (pp. 338-359), here pp. 352 and 355).

uniqueness and universality.”¹² For Pieris this particular emphasis is neither soteriologically consequential nor viable in initiating a healthy discussion in the context of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka/Asia. Julius Cardinal Darmaatmadja of Indonesia, the President Delegate of the Synod for Asia (1998) who also delivered the closing remarks at the celebration in New Delhi, pointed out to the Pope that Asians prefer to speak about Jesus not as the “one and only Son of God and Saviour” but as the “Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Compassionate Friend of the poor, the Good Samaritan, etc.”¹³ Pieris points out that the assertive language such as “*the* only begotten Son of God” and “Jesus is *the* Saviour” would give a false start to the dialogue in the context of Sri Lanka/Asia. This would lead to rival claims among religions. Thus he states:

From the Buddhists it hears that Jesus is only a bodhisattva (aspirant for enlightenment) whereas Gautama is *the* Buddha; from Muslims it hears that he is *a* Prophet, even a special one, whereas Muhammad remains *the* prophet. Thus the Christian assertion that Jesus is *the* Son, *the* Christ, *the* Lord before whom other religious founders are mere prophets and precursors, is just one rival claim among others! Even Rahner’s “anonymous Christianity” has been anticipated in Hinduism, which tends to gather religions under its own salvific umbrella, neutralizing their uniqueness.¹⁴

Pieris too, however, without compromise affirms the unique significance of Jesus being the Son of God revealed in the supreme manner on the Cross (Rom. 1:3-5). But he couples it with the mission of Jesus and our share in it as disciples.¹⁵ For Pieris the revelation of *Sonship* of Jesus on the Cross as a Corporate Person is also the moment and the locus where *our share* in it was made possible.¹⁶ They are two dimensions of human redemption which are universally confessed in almost all churches despite variations in the way this truth is articulated. Pieris suggests that

¹² Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (hereafter, *Christianity and the Religions*), Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2001, p.157; Idem, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 297.

¹³ Cf. J. Darmaatmadja, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia,” in: *VJTR*, vol.63, 1999, (pp.887-91), here p.889.

¹⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, (Chapter 8), p.60.

¹⁵ Pieris, quoting Stanislas Lyonnet, a biblical scholar, states: “The pre-existent Sonship of Jesus (Cf. Rom. 1:3) ‘is now seen in relation to us through resurrection. He becomes capable of sharing his Sonship with us.’”(Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 25, 2000, p.226).

¹⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.226.

these two dimensions, respectively, correspond to the *Christhood* which defines the uniqueness of Jesus, and to the *discipleship* by which a Christian is identified.¹⁷ This shows that Pieris does not reduce the ontological identity of Jesus the Word to a mere functional role of revealing the divine, but brings out more explicitly the inseparability of revelation and redemption. He brings out clearly, in the context of religious pluralism, the inseparable unity between Christhood of Jesus and the discipleship of his “vicars” and “followers” that converge on the Cross (Mk.8:27-30, 34). To locate Jesus’ uniqueness within his mission of liberative love covenanted with the poor by circumstances and poor by choice is truly appealing in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka rather than a philosophical speculation on the Sonship of Jesus.

Pieris extends his argument to talk about the universality and uniqueness of Christianity as a religion within the liberational thrust of all religions. To say that Jesus is unique and universal is one thing, and to say that Christianity as a religion is unique and universal is quite another though they are mutually connected. Hence, in Pieris’ judgment, the universality and uniqueness of Christianity is to be sought in its ability to quench the universal thirst for liberation. It is such praxis alone which makes Christianity a universal religion.¹⁸ Here, therefore, “universality” is not perceived in terms of uniformity that suppresses religio-cultural diversity of the locality. This thirst for liberation is twofold: the thirst for “freedom from needs” and the thirst for “freedom from want”.¹⁹ Jesus is the embodiment and facilitator of both these freedoms. Pieris bases this universal liberative spirituality on the twofold Love-Command of biblical revelation. Accordingly, the first Love-Command – Jesus is the irreconcilable conflict between Yahweh and mammon – is at the root of the thirst for “freedom from need”. It can be described as the voluntary poverty of a monk or as struggle *to be* poor: spirituality common to all religion. It is

¹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 226.

¹⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “Universality of Christianity?,” in: *VJTR*, p.595.

¹⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Universality of Christianity?,” in: *VJTR*, pp.593-94.

the *mystic's search* for detachment and freedom from greed in view of struggling *for* the poor.

The second – Jesus is the defense pact between the Yahweh and the oppressed – is the foundation for the “freedom from want”. Pieris describes “want” as the absence of basic needs. It is the *prophet's search* for freedom from the hunger and poverty imposed on the many by the collective greed of a few. This can be seen as struggle *for* the poor. In Pieris' contention this is unique to Christianity which is appreciated by the people of other faiths in a symbiotic dialogue that takes place in BHCs. Christians as true followers of Jesus, are called to embody these two freedoms in making the Church *in* Sri Lanka a Church *of* Sri Lanka.

Pieris, sharpening his argument on religious pluralism, stresses that it is the uniqueness of Jesus, which is also the defining character of Christianity's uniqueness, and the distinguishing character of every other religion that accounts for pluralism of religions.²⁰ In other words, any religion's uniqueness, which is not to be equated with superiority, is the foundation of religious pluralism, and therefore of inter-religious dialogue. To compromise this distinctive character of Christianity or that of any other religion in the name of inter-religious harmony is to eliminate one partner of dialogue altogether.²¹ Here, in the Sri Lankan context, we are dealing with a non-negotiable element in Biblical Christianity, namely, God covenanted with the poor in Jesus, just as non-theism is a non-negotiable factor in Theravada Buddhism. The religions should be mutually enriched by each religion's specificity which is exactly what each religion is called to contribute to other religionists in their interaction. Each religion's specificity is a constitutive dimension of its own soteriology. Even irreconcilable differences between religions offer a message to be shared amongst all religionists. Pieris, consistent with his Covenant Christology

²⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism,” (ms), p. 1.

²¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “What on Earth is God Doing with Us?: A search for Authentic Christian Theism,” in: *Gleanings*, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, January-June, 2008, (pp.3-16), here p.12. Also see A. Pieris, “A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism” (ms), p.6.

insists that only those who practice the common spirituality of all religion are entitled as well as able to indulge in such exchanges in the areas specific to each religion.²² He calls this spirituality the *soteriological absolute*, that is, the universally necessary condition for salvation. The beatitudinal spirituality is the Christian version of the common *soteriological absolute*.

Furthermore, Pieris in his theology of religious pluralism advocates a basic principle of a blend of two imperatives, namely, *fidelity* to what is unique to Christian faith, and *fairness* towards every other religion's distinctive otherness. Thus he says:

Since my approach requires that I respect the non-negotiables in both my religion and those of others, my approach is coloured by my faith in the Yahweh, the "God of Moses" whom Jesus revealed as his Abba, Father, breathing Salvation (Spirit) at the supreme moment of his death and exaltation.²³

The basic principle further implies that an honest theology of religious pluralism always respects each religion's unique paradigm or framework within which a given religion can only be understood.²⁴ Thus each partner in the dialogue must try to enter into the core experience of the other, in so far as possible, in an attempt to grasp the experience of the Other through and beyond the concepts, dogmas, rituals etc. in which the core experience of each religion is imperfectly articulated.²⁵ However, the message of deliverance, which both Christianity and Buddhism offer,

²² Cf. A. Pieris, "A Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism" (ms), p. 1. Also see Idem, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 1999, p.71.

²³ This is stated by Pieris in his answer to my question about his theological position on the traditional categories of theology of religions as inadequate. This letter is dated January 22, 2009.

²⁴ Paradigm is a framework of meaning that makes sense of a body of data perceived as a system. However new paradigms are said to arise when the new data brought in by great social and scientific discoveries cannot be interpreted and integrated within the existing framework of meaning. Under this challenge the framework itself undergoes a transformation. That we experience as a paradigm shift. This is very true of physical and mathematical sciences, social sciences, history, philosophy and theology. In Sri Lanka/Asia under the impact of a positive experience of other religions the centre of the framework is shifting from church to kingdom. This demands of us a new paradigm in perceiving God, Christ, the Church, salvation and mission (For further elaboration see V. Fabella, and R. S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), *DTWT*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2000, pp. 159-60).

²⁵ This is exactly what Pieris tries to argue through mutually inclusive three specific levels in which each religion operates, namely, core experience, collective memory, and theological interpretation (see A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, Orbis Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988, pp.120-24). It is this attempt to experience empathetically the religious core of the other religions that Raimon Panikkar has termed "intra-religious" dialogue an indispensable condition for interreligious dialogue (see R. Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue* (2nd edition), Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1999).

transcends special and temporal limitations. In Christian terms, God's plan of salvation through the activity of the Word and the Spirit transcends all historical limitation and barriers though it is actualized in a given historical situation of people, which cannot be ignored, within one single plan of salvation. Within the progressive movement of *symbiosis* of religions salvation is understood in terms of God's Reign.²⁶ In other words, salvation is when Jesus' Christhood will embrace the whole body of the fully resurrected humankind and the fully redeemed universe at the end time. Christhood is the fullness of the realized Reign of God which can be predicated of Jesus the risen One. It is the constitutive dimension of Jesus which he manifested as his unique character on the Cross.²⁷ This shows, therefore, that Pieris' perception of religious pluralism cleverly combines and holds together the "uniqueness" of other religious founders and religions, and the "singular uniqueness" of Jesus without slipping into imperialism and relativism.

4.2.1 Moving Beyond the Traditional Threefold Typology of the Theology of Religions

The thought pattern of Pieris' perception of religious pluralism based on the paradigm of Covenant Christology is not in line with the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism that the academic *magisterium* of the West has developed. As previously noted, according to Pieris a new paradigm is needed, which will recognize the poor seriously and will speak a liberational theology that is located in the BHC and that affirms Jesus as God's "defence pact with the oppressed". Pieris' rejection of the three conventional or traditional categories of theology of religions is not necessarily because they are wrong but because they are irrelevant and inadequate for the Asian context of abject poverty and religiousness. For him they do not make sense because their priority-question is the uniqueness of Christ or Christianity, whereas

²⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Roman Catholic Perception of other Church's and other Religions after the Vatican's *Dominus Jesus*," in: *EAPR*, vol.38, no.3, 2001, (pp. 207-30), here p.224.

²⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," *Louvain Studies*, p.225.

the priority in Sri Lanka/Asia is “the poor” and “the liberational thrust that defines our theology of religions.”²⁸

Jacques Dupuis, Michael Amaladoss, Felix Wilfred and many Asia theologians agree with Pieris that the language of “uniqueness” has become problematic and that the traditional categories of theology of religions are not ultimately helpful.²⁹ However, Terrence Merrigan points out that Dupuis by describing himself as an “inclusivist pluralist” has not been totally successful in moving beyond the traditional threefold categories of religions but has again taken a frontier position of inclusive theology of religions, that is to say the region “in-between.”³⁰ He further doubts, therefore, whether Dupuis has moved beyond the “fulfilment theory” as regards the relationship between Christianity and other religions, and whether he develops a version of Rahner’s “anonymous Christian.”³¹ Amaladoss too views “inclusivist pluralism” (and other traditional paradigms) as an inadequate paradigm to explore a theology of religions.³² Nevertheless, as many theologians would rightly agree, Dupuis’s approach has not certainly given into the pluralist demand of other religions being placed in parallel to Christianity as independent ways of salvation.³³

²⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), pp. 155-56.

²⁹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 199. See also M. Amaladoss, “Double Religious Identity: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?,” in: *VJTR*, vol.73, 2009, (pp.519-532) here p.524; Idem, “The Pluralism of Religions and the Significance of Christ,” in: *VJTR*, vol.53, 1989, p. 403; F. Wilfred, “Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness,” in: *VJTR*, vol.57, 1993, (pp.652-672), here p. 672.

³⁰ Cf. T. Merrigan, “Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism,” in: D. Kendall and G. O’Collins (eds.), *In Many and Divers Ways*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2003, (pp. 60-71), here pp.67-68. Also see Idem, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement ‘Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,’” pp.358-59.

³¹ Cf. T. Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement ‘Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,’” p.355. Also see J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p.345.

³² Amaladoss, like Pieris, argues that it is God who saves, not the religions. He further states that God who reaches out to people in various ways can save people with or without religions. Therefore, he reminds of the need of a “theology of divine-human encounter” than just a theology of religions (Cf. M. Amaladoss, “Double Religious Identity: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?,” in: *VJTR*, vol.73, 2009, pp.524-25).

³³ Cf. T. Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement ‘Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,’” p.355. See also Langdon Gilkey, “Plurality and Its Theological Implication,” in: J. Hick and P. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1987, (pp. 37-50), here p.37; J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p.253.

Furthermore, Dupuis in particular agrees with Pieris in his insistence that the churches *in* Asia must become *of* Asia by being immersed in the double baptism of Asian religiousness and poverty, that is, they must be engaged in inter-religious dialogue and liberation as a unified process of inculturation.³⁴ Pieris discusses at length and more explicitly the integral unity of inculturation and liberation in the Asian inter-religious dialogue.³⁵ Pieris, who stresses three overlapping concerns that any authentic Asian paradigm of religious pluralism should take into account, and which are not recognized in the traditional three fold typology theology of religions, states:

I am embarrassed when I am asked (. . .) whether I am an inclusivist or a pluralist. The reason is not that I dismiss the paradigm that gives rise to these categories as wrong, but that I have found myself gradually appropriating a trend in Asia which adopts a paradigm wherein the three categories (. . .) [of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism] do not make sense. For our starting point is not the uniqueness of Christ or Christianity, or any other religion. *A fortiori* such a concern would never be a hidden agenda in any interreligious dialogue that may engage us. Furthermore, interreligious dialogue itself is not a conscious target pursued as something desirable per se, as it is a luxury which the urgency of the sociospiritual crisis in Asia would not permit.³⁶

Here, let me highlight some of the theological elements contained within traditional categories of theological investigation that go counter to the interests of Pieris' Asian theological paradigm.³⁷ Fundamentally, for Pieris proclaiming Jesus relevantly in the context of poverty and multi-religions of Sri Lanka can only be dialogical carried out in Triple-Dialogue. Hence for him inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and liberation together constitute the Church's mission of proclamation. As already pointed out for Pieris, culture and religion are overlapping facets of one

³⁴ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.19, and 374-75. See also A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, esp., chapters 7 and 8.

³⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Chapter 8), pp. 87-110.

³⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), pp. 155-56.

³⁷ For a brief overview of Pieris' position on traditional categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, refer A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), pp.154-55.

indivisible soteriology.³⁸ In this background of his basic conviction Pieris rejects the exclusivists' perception of their own religion as exclusively salvific which is reflected in the traditional dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Exclusivism is completely left out from Pieris' consideration because it has excluded inter-religious dialogue *a priori*. He also is not in favour of inclusivists' conviction that the people of other faiths are awaiting *fulfillment* in Christianity for their salvation. In other words, inclusivists consider the people saved by Christ outside the Church as belonging to it in some way. Other religionists are viewed as potential Christians or anonymous Christians. This school accepts that there may be grace and revelation in other religions, so that they may mediate salvation to those who believe in them. But the salvation they mediate is the salvation in Jesus Christ, even if other believers themselves may not be aware of the fact. Here the goal of dialogue is to complete the incomplete. In the context of Sri Lanka this attitude or the language of supremacy of one's religion and its founder can also be seen both in Buddhism and Hinduism. Hence, Pieris concludes that both the exclusivist and the inclusivist theories of theology of religions end up in asserting the supremacy over the Buddha and vice versa.³⁹ It is to avoid the very language of supremacy of any religion or any religious founder, and above all to construct a renewed theology of revelation as the foundation of a new theology of religious pluralism that I argue in this thesis the relevance of the Pieris' notion of the Word-Crucified. Furthermore, Pieris also does not see the relevance of the pluralists' position which says that all religions are "unique ways" to the Ultimate Mystery in their own manner. For the pluralists all these "ways" are independent and more or less equally valid religious traditions. They also reject, as almost irreligious, any attempt at co-opting the other's religion to one's own

³⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 52, 90 and 97. Also see Idem, "Inculturation: Some Critical Reflections," in: *VJTR*, vol. 57, no. 11, 1993, p. 645.

³⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 129-131.

paradigm of soteriology as co-partners.⁴⁰ In addition as already observed, Pieris in his understanding of the universal saving significance of the person and event of Jesus Christ avoids pluralists' total rejection of it. This shows that the traditional line of thought and the discussion revolving around the three traditional categories are not in coherence with Pieris' new Asian paradigm of theology of religious pluralism.

Further clarifying his position on the traditional theology of religions, Pieris argues that all those who study theology of religions under all traditional categories presuppose pluralism, given the fact that there are many religions that claim to be ways of salvation. The first category denies the salvific nature of *other religions*; the inclusivists co-opt *other religions* to be salvific only within one's own soteriology; the third (in its most representative case) gives independent salvific value to *all religions*. So it is illogical to have a separate category called "pluralism" when in fact they are all ways of explaining pluralism.⁴¹ Therefore for Pieris pluralism is not one separate category but *the* basic presupposition in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka/Asia. In contrast, Dupuis, Phan and many other theologians treat pluralism as another separate category.⁴² Hence, Pieris cannot be spoken of as belonging to the category of pluralism or any of the other

⁴⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p.155. See also T. Merrigan, "Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement 'Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,'" p.339.

⁴¹ Here, One needs to differentiate sharply between the terms "pluralism" and "pluralists". The pluralists, who are determined to focus on a reality beyond any particular historical savior (eschatological Future), do not ascribe any salvific superiority or universality to Jesus whom they consider as *another* savior. Hence, they prefer to say that all religions are ways to the Ultimate in their own manner. The religious "pluralism" needs to be understood through a differentiation between the "pluralism *de facto*" and "pluralism *de jure*". Here, O'Collins' explanation of Dupuis' understanding of these expressions is very helpful. He argues that for Dupuis the reality of religious pluralism is a pluralism *de jure* and not a mere co-existence of different religions (*de facto* pluralism) (Cf. G. O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work," in: D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (eds.), *In Many and Divers Ways*, Orbis Maryknoll, N.Y., 2003, p.25).

⁴² Cf. J. Dupuis, "'The Truth Will Make You Free': The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 24, no.4, 1999, (pp.211-63) here pp.226-28. Also see P. Phan, "Jacques Dupuis and Asian Theologies of Religious Pluralism," in: D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (eds.), *In Many and Divers Ways*, p.82.

two.⁴³ Hence, according to Pieris it is an issue of finding a way of understanding pluralism that not only respects the legitimacy of each religion but also sees a possibility of interaction among their adherents without compromising their religious identities.

Moreover, the traditional categories prove to be insufficient within Pieris' Asian paradigm of religious pluralism in pursuing a healthy symbiotic dialogue in the social location of BHCs where Buddhists, Christians, non-believers and especially the poor share life and life's most articulate self-expression: religious experience in Sri Lanka.⁴⁴ Hence, he proposes different categories to understand the interaction between religions within his Asian paradigm in the theology of religious pluralism. This new paradigm of categorization consists of three categories or modes, namely, syncretism, synthesis and symbiosis.⁴⁵ Pieris proposes these three categories only for the purpose of pursuing a relevant discussion to show the suitability and validity of the symbiotic approach in his paradigm of Asian theology of pluralism. Accordingly, Pieris, through a process of differentiation between these three new categories, concludes that the symbiotic approach towards the theology of religious pluralism is the authentic form of interreligious dialogue in Sri Lanka. In Pieris' perception of religious pluralism it is more than evident that because of irreducible differences among religions the goal of such dialogue is neither syncretism nor synthesis but symbiosis. *Syncretism*, as Pieris identifies, is an unsystematic way of mixing of religions according to the preference or convenience of a person or group. He

⁴³ Pieris is aware of the tendency of him and those Asian theologians been considered as pluralists who reject both exclusivism and inclusivism as irrelevant and imperialistic (Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, Chapter 14, p. 155). Frederic Glorieux confirms this fact when he says that Pieris is far more difficult to be classified under the traditional categories due to his unique position on the subject (Cf. F. Glorieux, "Does Christ Have an Asian Face? An Analysis of Aloysius Pieris' Theology of Religions," in: *Louvain Studies*, vol.30, 2005, (pp. 325-49), here p.326).

⁴⁴ Appreciating the social location of Pieris' theology Richard Hardy affirms that such an honest dialogue can take place only in basic *human* communities ('laboratories of hope') where people of both religions (here Buddhist and Christianity) come to know each other as people and not as ideologues (Cf. R. Hardy, "Review of *Love Meets Wisdom*," in: *Église et Théologie*, vol. 21, 1990, pp. 430-32; See also A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 110-124).

⁴⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p.161. Also see Idem, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 31, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004, Chapter VI, (pp. 69-104), here pp.87-88.

describes it as something of a cocktail in which the components change their flavour under their mutual influence. It is a “haphazard mixing of religions” where the original meaning of narratives, practices, creeds and beliefs are altered. Similarly, Pieris call *synthesis*, the creation of something altogether new (*tertium quid*) out of two religions (or more) which destroys the uniqueness and identity of the original religions. Pieris advocates what he calls *symbiosis* instead, in which two religions (or more) meet, and are mutually transformative, but remain distinct traditions. Symbiosis is a movement in which members of different religious traditions live and work together in BHCs, especially in favour of and with the poor, and in the process are taught by the “other” more about what is unique and significant in their own faith. Pieris’ contention of the *uniqueness of Jesus* emerged through his ceaseless baptism into the twofold Asian reality within the context of symbiosis of religions. Thus he states:

What I have been describing as Christian uniqueness in the BHC experience reflects both the process and product of a symbiosis. It indicates one’s conversion to the common heritage of all religions (beatitudes) and also a conversion to the specificity of one’s own religion as dictated by other religionists. You may call it interreligious dialogue, if you wish.⁴⁶

Evaluating Pieris’ contribution, Paul Knitter quotes a personal letter of Pieris to Philip Gibbs, a doctoral student till 1996, in which he mentioned about a positive reception of his rediscovery of the *uniqueness of Jesus* by his Buddhist friends that emerged out of a veritable symbiosis:

They have not renounced even an iota of Buddhism to go along with this explanation of the uniqueness of Jesus. Rather, they have being deeply moved by this Christology, moved to reflect on our obligation as religious people in contemporary society.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p. 161.

⁴⁷ Cf. P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 148. Philip Gibbs, SVD, wrote a doctoral dissertation titled, *The Word in the Third World: Divine Revelation in the Theology of Jean-Marc Éla, Aloysius Pieris and Gustavo Gutierrez*, Gregorian University, Rome, 1996.

4.2.2 The Legitimacy and the Challenge of the Religious Pluralism

Pieris, like many other Asian theologians, grapples not merely with the theology of religions but with the theology of religious pluralism. Pieris sees religious pluralism as the specific character that defines Asia within the Third World and overwhelming poverty as the common denominator that links Asia with the rest of the poor countries.⁴⁸ Pieris, in his paradigm of Covenant Christology, shows that the reality of religious pluralism in Sri Lankan/Asian societies is more a pluralism *de jure* than a mere co-existence of different religions (*de facto* pluralism), to use Dupuis' expressions. This new situation of pluralism *de jure* in Sri Lanka pushes us to search urgently for an alternative method of doing theology starting from the available cultural and religious recourses while being faithful to the Christian Scripture and Tradition. The recognition of the legitimacy of other religions is not equivalent to asserting that all religions are the same or that all religions are equal.

For Dupuis, as for Schillebeeckx, Geffré, Phan, Pieris and the like, the many-religions are not simply a “matter of fact” (pluralism *de facto*) but a “matter of principle” (pluralism *de jure*).⁴⁹ They all uphold it is theologically legitimate to interpret pluralism *de jure* as a pluralism that correspond to God's mysterious plan.⁵⁰ It simply means that the many-religions belong, and belong permanently, to God's way of relating to humanity. It highlights the intrinsic value of non-Christian religions as ways of salvation in the one plan of God. They are not merely a

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 201. Also see E. Schillebeeckx, *Church, The Human Story of God*, London, SCM Press, 1990, pp.171-82, esp.167; C. Geffré, “The Crisis of Christian Identity in an Age of Religious Pluralism,” in: *Concilium*, 2005/3,(pp.13-26), here p.20.

⁵⁰ Geffré and Phan argue that the theologians who are making the distinction between “pluralism *de facto*” and “pluralism *de jure*” by doing so do not question any of the objective Christian truths listed in number 4 of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*: in particular, the complete and definitive character of Christian revelation, the inspiration of Sacred Scriptures, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the uniqueness and the salvific universality of the mystery of Christ, and so forth (Cf. C. Geffré, “From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology,” in: D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (eds.), *In Many and Divers Ways*: (pp. 45-59), here p.50; P. Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” in: *Th. St.*, vol. 64, 2003, (pp. 495-519), footnote no.16, p.501).

“preparation” for, “stepping stones” towards, or “seeds” of Christianity and destined to be fulfilled by it. This implies that “more divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God’s dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian tradition.”⁵¹ In particular, Dupuis locates the foundation of religious pluralism “in principle” primarily in multiplicity of God’s self-manifestation to human beings. He states, “If, however, religion has its original source in a divine self-manifestation to human beings, (. . .), the principle of plurality will be made to rest primarily on the superabundant richness and diversity of God’s self-manifestation to humankind.”⁵² However, this general description of “pluralism *de jure*” is given a specific theological justification by Pieris different from that of Dupuis. This specific difference is clearly reflected when compared with Dupuis’ principle of mutual-*asymmetrical-complementarity* and Pieris’ offer of progressive movement of veritable *symbiosis* of religions. A brief comparison of these two condensed phrases will be taken up later in this section. Pieris who agrees with Dupuis on the principle of pluralism *de jure* gives it a fuller meaning by placing it in the context of the true purpose of revelation, namely, salvation/liberation. Thus Pieris, qualifies his position on pluralism *de jure* by stressing more explicitly the primordial and specific “liberative experience”, the core of any religion, that gave birth to them and that which defines religious pluralism.⁵³ He further insists that the liberative core of any religion is also a “memory of a future” that continues to make a religion available to successive generations. Hence, according to Pieris, religions originate at their core experience, which in any religion is the liberative experience. For example, both Christianity and Buddhism originated from a core experience, that is, Jesus’ proclamation of the inaugurated “Reign of God” and the

⁵¹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 388.

⁵² Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 387. Also see Idem, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 255.

⁵³ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 110-11.

“Enlightenment of Buddha” respectively. Pieris calls the former *agape* or redemptive love, the latter *gnosis* or liberative knowledge. Therefore, Pieris’ acceptance of pluralism *de jure* needs to be taken in the context of his understanding of the liberation of the *victim-poor* in and through the *victim-judge*, the Word-Crucified. The victim-poor in all its perspectives is embodied in Jesus, in whom the Triune God is covenanted with the poor. Here, the religions integrated within one plan of God’s salvation for the humanity find a unity of relationships rather than a mere unity of identity or plurality. This unity of relationship, though pointing to different core experiences, are mutually complementary because neither is in itself an adequate medium to experience or to express our experience of the Divine (the Ultimate Source of Liberation).⁵⁴ Hence, these religious traditions, together with their founders (the poor by choice) form a covenant partnership with Jesus which is essential in his becoming plenitude of Christ. Therefore, Pieris asserts that the religious pluralism belongs to God’s design of *liberation for humanity* and that all major religions are positive means of that liberation for their followers within one single manifold economy of salvation for humankind.⁵⁵ On this basis Pieris insists that it is within this covenantal integrity that the adherents of other religions are saved not *in spite of* but *through* and in their various socio-cultural and religious traditions. Paul Knitter, in his foreword to Pieris’ book *An Asian Theology of Liberation* states: “The theology of religions he [Pieris] has worked out in the context of an Asian theology of liberation makes room for a genuine Christian recognition of religious pluralism, without slipping down the slope of relativism”.⁵⁶ Thus, it is this liberative experience of every religion that brings about an authentic convergence of diverse religious traditions at their deepest level. Hence, Pieris insists that Asian

⁵⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p.111.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican’s *Dominus Jesus*,” pp. 224-26.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. XIII.

theology of religious pluralism must take on board the *liberational thrust* in all religions as the top most priority.⁵⁷ Peter Phan, appreciating the merit of Pieris' contribution to inter-religious dialogue, states: "Because of the twin phenomena of massive poverty and deep religiousness of Asia, Dupuis, following Pieris, argues that inter-religious dialogue must go hand in hand with actions in favour of the liberation of the Asian poor."⁵⁸ Dupuis supports Pieris' insistence that "a combined inter-faith liberative praxis is an urgent task of evangelization – and a *locus theologicus* for a theology of religious pluralism."⁵⁹ However, Pieris is more explicit and assertive in his insistence that a positive evaluation of religious pluralism and the mutual respect for each religion's positive salvific value for their respective adherents is possible only if one perceives the religions as primarily originating from the liberative core of each religion which belong to God. This shows that Pieris' evaluation of the positive value of different religious traditions is more authentic than that of inclusivists or "inclusivist pluralists" who acknowledge the presence of "truth and grace" in other religions and only see in them just a possibility of salvation for their members in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the convergence of religions on the basis of liberation opens up a situation of veritable symbiotic dialogue of religions in the locus of BHCs. In such a context, made up of Christian and others, Dupuis' principle of mutual-*asymmetrical*-complementarity based on his perception of uniqueness of Jesus Christ, derived from Jesus' personal identity as Son of God made man, can prove to be counterproductive. According to Dupuis' principle – though mutual – the complementarity between Christianity and other religious traditions is also *asymmetrical*. According to Dupuis, this means "that the acknowledgement of additional and autonomous

⁵⁷ Cf. J. Haire, "Review of Asian Theology of Liberation," in: *Pacifica*, 3, 1990, (pp. 359-61), here p. 360.

⁵⁸ Cf. P. Phan, "Jacques Dupuis and Asia Theologies of Religious Pluralism," in: D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (eds.), *In Many and Divers Ways*, p.73. See also J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.19 and 374.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.374-76.

values of truth and grace in the other traditions does not cancel out the unsurpassable transcendence of God's revelation and self-communication in the person and work of Jesus Christ."⁶⁰ Hence, Dupuis admits that there is a mutual complementarity between Christianity and other religious traditions in the elements of "truth and grace" (AG 9) present in other religious traditions thanks to the activity of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ But at the same time, theologically speaking, he does not mean to place Christianity and other religious traditions on one and the same level because Jesus Christ by virtue of his personal identity as Son of God made man [is] the fullness of divine revelation.⁶² However, as noted earlier, the principle of asymmetry leads up to inclusivism and therefore to the "fulfilment theory" of religions in the sense of Rahner's phrase "anonymous-Christian." In other words, the principle of asymmetry entails that other religious traditions find their fulfilment in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.⁶³ It sounds imperialistic and haughty to other religionists. Pieris, instead of "fulfilment," talks of "fullness" of God's self revelation to humanity, and the sum and substance of revelation/salvation embodied in Jesus Christ, God's Covenant with the poor.⁶⁴ Paul Knitter evaluating Dupuis' proposal for inter-religious dialogue and the Fulfilment Model in general asks: "Just how deep can enrichment or challenge or conversion go when Christians are convinced that in Jesus they have God's full, final and fulfilling Word?"⁶⁵ Pieris, in contrast to the principle of asymmetry, offers symbiosis of religions that effects one's conversion to the

⁶⁰ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 257. According to Dupuis the expression "additional and autonomous values" should not be understood in the sense that anything is lacking in God's revelation in Christ, since the other religious traditions are oriented towards the mystery of Jesus Christ in whom they can find their fullness. However, at the same time it indicates, Christ-event notwithstanding, that Christianity – the Christian religion – does not possess the entirety of the truth or has the monopoly of grace. Hence Christianity can truly be enriched through the process of dialogue with other divine self-manifestation in various religions (Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.256-257).

⁶¹ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 256.

⁶² Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 135-36, and 255-57.

⁶³ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 255-58.

⁶⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," pp. 193 and 217.

⁶⁵ Cf. P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 103. Also see Idem, "Catholic and Other Religions Bridging the Gap Between Dialogue and Theology," in: *Louvain Studies*, pp.319-354.

spiritual heritage common to all religions (beatitudes, *alpecchatā*, *vairāgya*) and also a conversion to the specificity (uniqueness) of one's own religion as dictated by other religionists in their *common* struggle for total liberation.⁶⁶ In the final analysis, this conversion is a conversion to Yahweh's programme of liberation executed through the Word (whom Christians call Jesus Christ) within specificity of one's own religion, guided by the common spirituality. Therefore, Pieris in his contention that Jesus (*totally* Christ) is essentially and continually becoming the *Corporate Person* called Christ (*totality* of Christ) finds a better *language* of mutual complementarity. It provides for all religionists a level playing field that an authentic inter-religious dialogue requires.

Here, we can draw an implication of Pieris' insistence on the need of "double baptism" of the Church and Christianity in the Sri Lankan twofold reality of poverty and religiosity. Accordingly, to undergo "double baptism" would mean to work towards communion between Christianity and the diverse religions, together with the poor, without homogenizing their distinctive doctrines and practices. The Sri Lankan Church needs to find its unique identity as a credible prophetic sign of the Reign of God in solidarity with the Renouncers of mammon and Victims of mammon in the common struggle for full humanity. Pieris identifies this as the "Kingdom Community."⁶⁷ This is a challenge the Sri Lankan Church faces in her struggle to become a true local church, that is, a credible sign of Divine revelation/salvation. Here, Pieris' conviction is that the true local churches of Asia are those prophetic BHCs which "have been baptized in the Jordan of Asian religions and on the Calvary of Asian Poverty."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p.161. In a dialogical Christology, Pieris proposes one does not engage in dialogue with other religions with a prior "conclusive" understanding of Jesus. It is in and through the symbiotic dialogue one comes to know who Jesus is for us today.

⁶⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 1999, p.61.

⁶⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 50.

The FABC too finds a positive significance of religious pluralism. FABC's First Plenary Assembly in 1974 went beyond Vatican II's openness to the *possibility* of salvation of people of other faiths to affirm the positive or salvific value of non-Christian religions themselves (FABC I, no. 15).⁶⁹ Here, the FABC goes beyond the "fulfillment theory" of Vatican II. However, it never denigrates the role of Christ as savior and that of the Church as sacrament of salvation. The *FABC Paper no. 96, Methodology*, clarifies the difference between relativism and pluralism thus:

Pluralism need not always entail a radical subjectivism or relativism, in the sense of claiming that all points of view are equally valid. ... Today there are persons and groups who hold all reality to be relative. For such persons and groups, pluralism means relativism, in the sense that they claim all points of view are equally valid. Such philosophical or theological positions are to be rejected; and, in fact, all the major Asian religions condemn such relativizing of reality, especially the relativizing of basic human values. However, just because certain persons and groups are misled in their search for truth, and just because they tend to perceive pluralism as relativism, or just because they tend to relativize all reality, we cannot conclude that all pluralism leads to relativism.

It is God, through the medium of the Word, who offers freely salvation to human people who respond to him in freedom through their covenantal relationship in the form of their religions established through working of the Word and the Spirit. Hence, the religious traditions are legitimate *paths* of salvation for their followers. From the perspective of multi-religiousness relativism means to be indifferent to this diversity of religions including Christianity. Pluralism challenges and calls forth people for the praxis of dialogue with diverse religions in responding the Ultimate. What is important is that these religions through their respective texts, symbols, rituals and institutions facilitate, celebrate and express the encounter of God and human beings. There was a time in the past when to talk about pluralism almost always suggested relativism. That was because people in primitive or feudal societies of Asia and Europe knew no other model or world view but their own in perceiving and understanding reality.

⁶⁹ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p. 14. See also Vatican II documents: *LG*. 16-17; *AG*.3, 9 and 11, *NA*.2.

4.3 Pieris' Theological Foundation for "Double/Multiple Religious Belonging"⁷⁰

Pieris' acknowledgement of religious pluralism based on the core liberational thrust of religions – and thus religious pluralism in principle – and his lived experience of symbiosis of religions in Sri Lanka, raises the legitimate issue of "double/multiple religious belonging." It is basically a question of whether and to what extent it is possible to share two distinct religious traditions, making each of them one's own, and living both at once in one's own religious life. In the context of Sri Lanka the question can be formulated as, can there be hyphenated religious identity such as Buddhist-Christian or Hindu-Christian? Some theologians dwelling on the subject such as Dupuis and Phan cite Pieris as a strong proponent, even as a pioneer and a model of this phenomenon.⁷¹ However, this needs to be qualified. Pieris' theological argument on the issue at hand is more compelling and distinct from the type that Dupuis and Phan propose which has the underpinning principle of asymmetry. Their thinking comes closer to synthesis or syncretism.

Here, first of all we need to emphasize, as noted above, that Pieris, as a Catholic Christian, enters into honest interreligious dialogue keeping to the fundamental principle of the integrity of one's faith while being open to the faith of the other in its non-negotiable difference. Pieris upholds the legitimate demand of each religion on its adherents for a total *commitment* to a specific way of life towards total liberation rather than adopting so-called good values found in different religions, detached from their religious tradition of origin. In Christianity it is also a commitment to a Person, Jesus the Word. With these preliminary observations, Pieris'

⁷⁰ I use these phrases "multiple religious belonging" and "double religious belonging" interchangeably. Geffré makes a useful distinction between "multi belonging" and "double belonging" (Cf. C. Geffré, "Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion," in: C. Cornille (ed.), *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (hereafter, *Many Mansions*), Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2000, (pp.93-105), here pp.93-94.

⁷¹ Cf. P. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," in: *Th. St.*, vol. 64, 2003, pp.507-8; J. Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions: Complementarity and Convergence," in: *Many Mansions*, (pp. 59-75), here pp. 72-73.

theological foundation for “double religious belonging” need to be understood within his perception of complementarity and convergence of religions emerged out of the dialectical interplay of “wisdom” (*gnosis*) and “love” (*agape*) through a process of symbiosis of religions. This is in contrast to Dupuis’ principle of “mutual-*asymmetrical*-complementarity”. As pointed out earlier, the principle of asymmetry holds together, at once, the mutual complementarity and asymmetry of God’s revelation and salvation between the Christ-event and other divine manifestations to humankind.⁷² This position of Dupuis runs in the direction of “fulfillment theory” that asserts the elements of “truth and grace” (*AG. 9*) present in other religions finding their fullness in the mystery of Jesus Christ.⁷³ However, Pieris, in contrast, in his approach of symbiosis of religions strictly maintains the irreducible, nonnegotiable and distinct “core” of each and every religion. Here, the uniqueness of each religion is perceived in terms of the specificity of the core experience of liberation expressed in idiomatic languages of “agape” and “gnosis.” Therefore it should not be confused with the superiority of any religion as exclusivists and inclusivists advocate. As already noted, in the movement of the symbiosis of religions mutual enrichment and the rootedness in the uniqueness of one’s religions are clearly respected. Thus, Elisabeth Harris, recognizing Pieris’ rootedness in his Christian faith, comments on Pieris’ position concerning multiple and double religious belonging as follows, with which I agree.

Pieris in fact holds together the need for rootedness in one religious tradition and need for a plurality of insights into Truth. It is not a case of multiple belonging or dual belonging but *a search for the Word* that goes beyond structures, mediated through the *language* of one’s own faith in encounter with that of others. It is this, perhaps, that the Sri Lankan experience can offer to this debate (*italics mine*).⁷⁴

⁷² Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp.136 and 257.

⁷³ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p.257.

⁷⁴ Cf. E. Harris, “Double Belonging in Sri Lanka: Illusion or Liberating Path?,” in: *Many Mansions*, (pp. 76-91), here pp.90-91.

Harris, further analyzing Pieris' personal immersion of "double baptism" in the Sri Lanka realities of religiousness and poverty states that, "what emerged was not a form of Christian-Buddhism but much deeper appreciation of the nature of religion itself and its role in society."⁷⁵ Pieris in addition to his knowledge of Buddhism has learnt its *language*, the idiom, through a lifetime immersion into its cultural ethos particularly through the *encounter* with the poor (Christ's present paschal body) who are of another religious belonging. He uses this *language* masterfully to articulate his Christian faith experience with sensitivity and command as though a Buddhist were speaking through him. In the process of his learning from the poor Pieris also came to realize the openness of the non-Christians to "the Unspoken Speaker, to the Spirit that is not tied down to any dogma, rites, or law; that is, the Word that is larger than any religious institution."⁷⁶ Therefore, we can say that Pieris remains a confessional Christian who crosses over to Buddhism, to bring back new insight and awareness to his Christianity thereby deepening and enriching the Christian faith. In other words, Pieris' practice of temporary crossing over to the other religious tradition reveals to him greater depths of certain dimensions of the divine mystery that otherwise remain hidden and less clear in one's religious tradition. Thus, Harris further commenting on Pieris' theological thought states, "There is a drawing from the well of another tradition [Buddhism] – not to create new religious identities but rather to nurture critical self-evaluation and deep self-knowledge."⁷⁷ Pieris, further argues that symbiosis of religions will also salvage religions and poverty from their sinful and enslaving dimensions to lead the adherents to the soteriological core of respective religions.⁷⁸ Above all, Pieris who argues that it is precisely the two liberative languages, namely, "Wisdom" and "Love", that constitute the core

⁷⁵ Cf. E. Harris, "Double Belonging in Sri Lanka: Illusion or Liberating Path?," in: *Many Mansions*, p.86.

⁷⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 11: Inculturation in Asia), pp.128 and 133.

⁷⁷ Cf. E. Harris, "Double Belonging in Sri Lanka: Illusion or Liberating Path?," in: *Many Mansions*, p.88.

⁷⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 60; Idem, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 27.

of any religion does not see the need to hyphenate his identity or artificially induce so-called double or multiple religious identities.⁷⁹ The identities are already “multiple” at the level of core experience. Nevertheless, each religion legitimately uses its dominant idiomatic language, though not exclusively, to communicate their unique experience of liberation and their religious identity. Strictly speaking, Pieris is not supportive of a multiple/dual belonging or identity in which a sense of being rooted in one religious *language* is lost. Similarly, Pieris rejects any form of “synthesis” and “syncretism”. As Geffré cautions, supported by Phan, Dupuis, Pieris and the likes, we need to reject specially the ‘New Age’ syncretism which is a direct result of the fact of globalization.⁸⁰ The tendency toward this form of syncretism has been succinctly summarized by the phrase, “believing without belonging”, coined by British sociologist Grace Davie.⁸¹

Let me illustrate the dynamics of Pieris’ theological position on this very delicate debate. For Pieris religions by their very existence (pluralism *de jure*) prove that they are dialogical. This dialogue needs to be understood strictly within Pieris’ principle of “veritable symbiosis of religions”. Pieris argues that Christian dialogue with Buddhism is most genuine when it truly springs “*from* the core of Christianity” and engages “*with* the core of Buddhism.”⁸² However, for him, as observed previously, a true inter-religious dialogue embraces three essentially related specific levels in which any religion operates, namely, core experience, collective memory, and interpretation.⁸³ Hence, Pieris in the context of Sri Lanka affirms not only the distinct liberative “core” of Christianity which he calls *agape* but also the corresponding liberative core of

⁷⁹ For a comprehensive theological appraisal of Pieris’ position on multiple religious belonging, see D. Premawardhana, “The Unremarkable Hybrid: Aloysius Pieris and the Redundancy of Multiple Religious Belonging,” in: *JES*, vol.46, no.1, 2011, pp.76-101.

⁸⁰ Cf. C. Geffré, “The Crisis of Christian Identity in an Age of Religious Pluralism,” in: *Concilium*, 2005/3, p.15.

⁸¹ Davie’s expression is cited by Geffré in his article “Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion,” in: Catherine Cornille (ed.), in: *Many Mansions*, p.94; Also see G. Davie, “Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?” in: *Social Compass*, vol.37, no.4, 1990, pp. 455-69.

⁸² Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 110.

⁸³ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 120-124.

Buddhism, namely, *gnosis*. They are two irreducibly distinct core liberative experiences of the two religions that largely determine the major differences between the two religions. However, for Pieris they are not mutually exclusive; rather *agape* and *gnosis* each in itself is inadequate to experience and express the Ultimate and therefore need each other as complementary idioms to mediate the experience of salvation and liberation.⁸⁴ Pieris further sees these two core experiences as legitimate languages of the *human* spirit. He, in theistic terms, recognizes them as two languages that the same *divine* Spirit speaks alternatively in every person.⁸⁵ They are, therefore, two spiritual instincts emerging dialectically from the deepest zones of any human being, be he/she Christian or not, in the “East” or in the “West”.⁸⁶ This is the reason why Pieris holds it inaccurate to call the symbiosis of these two spiritual instincts of human person in terms of a symbiosis of *geographical* divisions, “East” and “West”. As noted previously, *agape* and *gnosis* are two *languages* that constitute the core of both Buddhism and Christianity, each tradition containing as secondary traits the primary tendency of the other.⁸⁷ It means to say that in the depth of our being there is a Buddhist and a Christian engaged in a profound encounter at the level of core-to-core dialogue.⁸⁸ We do find in Christianity love and truth, that is, *agape* and *gnosis* are combined. Pieris, more precisely states, “*loving* one’s neighbour is the Christian way of *knowing* God (1 Jn. 4:7-8).”⁸⁹ However, as far as both religions are concerned an idiomatic exchange is already happening so that in Christianity one can find an “agapeic *gnosis*” and in

⁸⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 9, 27 and 111.

⁸⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 111.

⁸⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 9 and 11. This basic dialectical interplay of “wisdom” and “love” can be expressed in Buddhist terms as the complementarity between *prajñā* and *karunā*. In Hindu terms it is the complementarity between *jñāna-mārga* (sapiential spirituality) and, *bhakti- and karma- mārga* (affective-selfless involvement in human affairs) (Cf. Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 111).

⁸⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 114-119.

⁸⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 113 and 119.

⁸⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p.114

Buddhism a “gnostic agape”.⁹⁰ Hence, Pieris insists on the vital importance of retaining the dialectical interplay of these both poles of religious experience within each religion lest they succumb to decay.⁹¹ It is this profound veritable symbiosis between the core religious experience of “agapeic gnosis” of Christians and the “gnostic agape” of Buddhists that provides the theological foundation for a *form* of “double religious belonging” found typically in Pieris’ theology. I prefer to call it “symbiotic religious belonging”. Here, no *language* is allowed to absorb the other. However, though one can find an essential mutual interaction of *agape* and *gnosis* within the core of both traditions there is a notable difference in the way the two idioms are integrated in each tradition.⁹² It is homologous integration of *agape* and *gnosis*.⁹³ Pieris, theological position, however, cannot be misinterpreted as synthesis and syncretism. He states:

Gnosis is salvific knowledge and *agape* is redemptive love. They are certainly not soteriological alternatives or optional paths to human liberation. They are two mystical moods that can alternate according to the spiritual fluctuations of individuals, groups, and even of entire cultures, without either of them allowing itself to be totally submerged by the other. Nor can they mix to form a hybrid or a “synthesis,” for the “twain shall never meet,” (. . .). They are, in other words, two irreducibly distinct languages of the Spirit, each incapable, unless aided and complemented by the other, of mediating and adequately expressing the human encounter with the Ultimate.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p.27.

⁹¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue*, p.124. See also Idem, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 56; *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 10,11, 27 and 111.

⁹² Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp.117-19

⁹³ In Buddhism *panna* (*gnosis*) and *karuna* (loving involvement) are polarized accordingly as *Nibbana* and *samsara* are polarized; *panna* is oriented towards *Nibbana* i.e. release from *samsara* while *karuna* is oriented towards the world and its spiritual needs. Thus *karuna* does not define liberation; it is either prelude to, or a corollary of *panna*. Thus, the basic thrust of Buddhism remains *gnostic*. Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, does not polarize God-ward and people-ward aspect of *agape* ... nor does it polarize knowledge and love as the Buddhist and Greek philosophy does. He who does not love does not know, says St. John. To know then, is really to love. *Agape* is the supreme form of knowledge. More precisely, one “knows God” by “loving his people” because God and people are hyphenated reality (People-of-God) (Cf. A. Pieris, “God-Talk and God Experience in a Christian Perspective,” *Dialogue* (NS), Colombo Sri Lanka, vol.2, 1975, p. 118. Also see Idem, *Love Meets Wisdom*, esp. pp.114-19.

⁹⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 9-10.

4.4 Pieris' Perception of the Integral Approach to Religious Pluralism

An integral approach to religious pluralism in Sri Lanka is an urgent need since the living context of religious pluralism demands a positive view of and respect for other religions. Moreover, Pieris perceives religious pluralism within one single but progressive and holistic design of God's salvation for humankind. In addition, Pieris, like many others, rightly recognizes a vigorous revival of world religious faiths, particularly a "religio-cultural awakening" among Sri Lankan people, in their multiple forms.⁹⁵

In the context of Sri Lanka the question remains: how do we relate to other religions and their believers? And how do we make sense of their presence in our own tradition? The state of theology, at any given time in the life of the Church depends in large measure on the condition of its pre-suppositions about the nature of revelation and Christology. In turn the Sri Lankan approach to the other religious traditions plays a crucial role in the way we theologize about fundamental Christian beliefs, regarding God, Jesus Christ, Kingdom of God and the Church since the traditional presentation of them is inadequate in our cultures. Here, I shall demonstrate Pieris' perception of the integral approach to Christianity and other religions under five interrelated theological concerns in the context of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka.

4.4.1 Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism

In view of placing our thought pattern in a broad perspective let us draw our attention to a common questions being asked today: What is Jesus' place in this multitude of religions? In what sense, and how, is Jesus Christ the fullness of revelation? Where precisely is this plenitude? According to *DV 4* it is the very person Jesus Christ, his deeds and his word, his life, his death and his resurrection – in a word, the total Jesus Christ-event itself – that constitutes the fullness

⁹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 86.

of revelation. Thus Jesus Christ is *personally* the fullness of revelation. This “fullness” for Dupuis is a matter not of quantity but of quality.⁹⁶ However, in Pieris’ understanding of the fullness of revelation in the Christ-event is a *qualitative jump*⁹⁷ from the present age (*aion*) to another level of existence and at the same time a *quantitative gathering* of all those who have been guided by the Spirit of Christ into totality of Christhood. For him, Jesus the Word-Crucified, sums up or recapitulates in himself the whole of revelation and salvation. Our faith tells us that Jesus not only has the message, he *is* the message, and he is *God with us*. Here Pieris expands the Conciliar vision of the fullness of revelation in Christ.

According to Pieris the term recapitulation needed to be understood in the Pauline sense of Jesus Christ as the Proto-Symbol or the first fruit (Col.1:15-20).⁹⁸ That is, in Jesus many others and things are reconciled and gathered into Christhood which he gained on the Cross.⁹⁹ In this “Corporate Person” called Christ all work as *true co-partners* towards the fullness of Christhood. Hence, Pieris questions the validity of the patristic principle of *preparatio evangelica* where other religions are considered as “pre-Christian” (e.g. historically, Islam is a post-Christian religion) needing to be “fulfilled” through the Church’s missionary endeavour.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Cf. J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 249.

⁹⁷ Pieris says that he has no objection for reading of his position on Christ-event in terms of *quality* and *quantity*. Here, the present writer’s question to him was: “If you say that Jesus (*totally* Christ) did grow into Christhood (*totality* of Christ) on the Cross, does it mean that God’s revelation reached its *qualitative* and *quantitative* climax in Jesus Christ on the Cross?” (letter from Aloysius Pieris to this writer, January 26, 2011).

⁹⁸ Pieris, in a letter dated, January 26, 2011, answering a question from this writer on Jesus as the “first fruit” in relation to other earthly figures of salvation (covenants) has this to say: “Ever present as the Word in creation and in all forms of biblical and extra-biblical revelations (“before Abraham I am”) through its salvific and revelatory Power (which we later came to name as the Spirit), Jesus is the “first fruit”, in the Judaic sense of being that which is not only the first to appear (as a direct revelation of the Salvific Source named, YHWH), but also which ‘contains’ i.e. “represents” the fruits that come later, what you call “other earthly figures” in your question to me. The term “first” is to be understood not in terms of the Aristotelico-Thomistic notion of time as *chronos* (*arithes kineseos kata ton proteron kai ousteron*, which Thomas translates as *numerus motus secundum prius ac posterius*) with its unilinear notion of “before and after”, but as God’s timeless moment or *kairos* in which ‘priority’ points to that which was the prototype conceived eternally in God’s mind.”

⁹⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, 1988, p.130.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 47.

Similarly he is not in favour of its corresponding theory – the “fulfillment theory of religions”¹⁰¹ – in which there is acknowledgement of a hidden presence of the mystery of Christ in non-Christian religions (or inclusive presence of Christ in other religions) as emphasized in Rahner’s theory of the “Anonymous Christianity”.¹⁰² This is the version of the fulfillment theology of religions that is present in the Vatican II Council.¹⁰³ However, as shown, for Pieris it is the Word himself, not its titles or interpretation, who reveals and saves humanity in and through their religious allegiance and their sincere practice of their traditions. Therefore, the consummation or recapitulation that Pieris insists on should not be understood in terms of Christ as a person, combining divinity and humanity in himself, works in all religions as *the* final consummation of all human aspiration for redemption. For Pieris, Jesus is one to be encountered as a “Corporate Person” who is one flesh and blood with all “little ones”, the majority of whom are non-Christians in Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁴

Pieris, reading *DV. 4* in the light of the dictum, *Jesus est totus Christus sed non totum Christi*, says that Jesus is Christ precisely because Jesus recapitulates the whole of revelation and salvation. But the whole of salvation and revelation, which is Christ, the crucified and exalted Word, is larger than Jesus. Therefore, in Jesus (of “the days of the flesh”) who is Christ (“as we know him now”) there is a continuous process of ingathering of revelation and salvation. If Jesus had died and never rose into Christhood, revelation and salvation would have ceased with Jesus.

¹⁰¹ For a brief overview of the development from the “conquest” and “adaptation” theories through fulfillment theory see A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p.33.

¹⁰² However, Pieris appreciates the fact that Rahner’s phrase, “anonymous Christian”, though a condescending appellation, has succeeded in replacing the “pre-Christian” of the fulfillment theory of the medieval ecclesiology which identified Christ with the church. For Pieris, Rahner’s theory also has somewhat emphasized that the Church as well as other religions are in need of redemption (see A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp.33-34).

¹⁰³ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 52. Also see J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p.53.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.208.

But Jesus continues to exist and continues to ingather all other *public revelation*¹⁰⁵ into the final fullness. The death and resurrection which sums up his fullness of Christhood, was an historical event registered in the annals of humanity as public occurrence. Other movements of salvation and revelation are God's authentic covenants that constitute Christhood (or call it by any other name, if it is offensive to others), of which Jesus is the first fruit (Col. 1:15-20). In other words, Pieris does not view other religions as "stepping-stones" to Christianity but as constitutive of the Christhood, or totality of Christ. For Pieris this moment of apex or fullness of revelation was anticipated in the decisive and unsurpassable Christ-event on the Cross. This is what Pieris means by on-going revelation where Jesus continually becomes the Corporate Person called Christ in whom all his covenant partners, especially the poor, and religions are being gathered. This process of ingathering of revelation and salvation is never to be understood as an augmentation of the public revelation of Jesus on the Cross. It is an *actualization* of that inexhaustible and unsurpassable living revelation of God in Christ through the Spirit. John Paul II himself said in *Redemptoris Missio*, "the Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (*RM*. 28).

Pieris argues that, if one were to object to this thesis, it is to ignore the role of the Spirit, who continues Salvation and Revelation in the world. Jesus did not give a complete deposit of faith, like *Tripitaka* of the Buddha as the one, only and the final deposit of doctrines; rather Jesus promised the Spirit *on all flesh*, (on all People, as foretold by Joel and witnessed to in the Acts). The Spirit as Pieris underlines was not merely the Recaller or the Reminder of whatever Jesus

¹⁰⁵ Here the phrase "public revelation" is not used to mean in the sense intended by the Council. *DV*. no. 4 says, "No new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord". That is to say that there will not be another "public revelation" which could abolish or at least relativize the revelation of God's Word, Jesus Christ. The phrase, "public revelation" is used here in so far as other revelations including various religions have a "social" function, guided by the Spirit. Hence, they cannot be reduced to "private" revelations.

said and did, but also the *Internal Teacher who would continue to reveal and save as the Communicative Power* of Jesus-become-Christ (Jn. 16: 12-13).

This theological position of Pieris positively allows us to acknowledge that divine revelation/salvation goes beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rahner asserts that the Judeo-Christian tradition finds its meaning only in relation to the universal history of humankind which is also a salvation history.¹⁰⁶ In acknowledging the strong Judeo-Christian focus of *Dei verbum* he says that the Constitution on revelation which assumes that revelation begins in the Old Testament with Abraham does not exactly present a concept of revelation which is easily accessible to African and Asian cultures.¹⁰⁷ It is with this understanding that Pieris says that the document *Dei Verbum* “is not the final word, but a point of departure for us in Asia.”¹⁰⁸ He further insists that we need to expand the Conciliar vision of the Word of God in the context of the horizons opened up by other Scripture and other traditions.

4.4.2 The Sri Lankan Church and the Religions

In the traditional theology of religions some will view the relationship of other religions to the Church as imperfect to perfect, or partial to full. The debate in the contemporary theology of religion in Sri Lanka needs to face the issue of the salvific value of the non-Christian religions themselves. However, after Vatican II, doubts may no longer be raised regarding the possibility

¹⁰⁶ K. Rahner asserts, “Christian faith is aware of a universal history of salvation, common to all mankind, existing from the very outset, always effective, universally present as the most radical element of the unity of mankind, not first slowly spreading out from a particular and tangible manifestation. The universalism of the one salvific will of God in regard to all mankind, which establishes the final unity of mankind, is the sustaining ground of all particular history of salvation and religion.” (Cf. K. Rahner, “Unity of the Church – Unity of Mankind”, in: *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XX, pp. 160-161).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. K. Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II”, in: *Th. St.*, vol.40, 1979, p. 720. Rahner agrees that the doctrinal decrees, namely, on the church and divine revelation are largely conceived in European horizon of understanding (Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 719).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary,” in: *Logos*, vol.39. no.3, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2000, p.103. Here, Pieris makes reference to, Enzo Bianchi, “The Centrality of the Word of God,” in: G. Alberigo *et al.* (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, CUA, Washington, D.C., 1987, (pp. 115-136), here p. 117.

of salvation of non-Christian religions, even of non-believers. It is with this background that this thesis proposes a sound theological basis of a progressively on-going theology of revelation, with ingathering of covenant partners in Jesus' arriving with them at the fullness of Christhood.

As the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* urges the local churches in Asia need "to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking" (EA.20). Here, Pieris stands out as one of the most important thinkers in Asia who promotes "monastic dialogue" as the most effective and practical way of presenting Jesus as a Sri Lankan/Asian figure.¹⁰⁹ Monastic dialogue has always received a positive support and cooperation from the Official Church, Religious Communities and, lay groups and individuals.¹¹⁰ Pieris' Covenant Christology can provide an adequate theological basis to the Sri Lankan Church to engage in such dialogue and for a relevant theological formation of monks and seminarians. It will certainly facilitate the desired "ecclesiological revolution" through a *participation* in the inseparable and complementary twofold reality of Sri Lankan religiousness and poverty, of *gnosis* and *agape*.¹¹¹ As discussed previously, Pieris has consistently argued that the most appropriate form of inculturation of Christianity in Asia is not the Latin model of incarnation in a non-Christian *culture*, nor Greek model of assimilation of a non-Christian *philosophy*, nor the North European model of accommodation to a non-Christian *religiousness*. What is required of

¹⁰⁹ Cf. F. Blée, *The Third Dessert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* (hereafter, *The Third Dessert*), Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2011, p.190. Pieris served as a resource person at both Monastic Congresses held at Bangalore, India, in 1973 and at Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1980.

¹¹⁰ For valuable note on collaborative effort on monastic dialogue see Fabrice Blée, *The Third Dessert*, pp.188-193.

¹¹¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.63-65. For further discussion on what Pieris call "double baptism in Asian religion and poverty" see *Ibid.*, pp. 45-50. Also see F. Blée, *The Third Dessert*, p.172.

Asian Christians is the monastic model of participation in a non-Christian *spirituality*.¹¹² In other words it is to assume the spirituality of non-Christian religions symbolized by the figure of the *poor* monk.¹¹³ Furthermore, it should be noted that though Asian liberation starts in the heart, in the consciousness of the seeker, its scope is not only spiritual. For it is in relation to mammon that Asian monks and nuns seek liberation of the poor in their voluntary poverty. In Asia monastic poverty is not Christian if it is not practiced in solidarity with Asia's poor.¹¹⁴ However, this monastic spirituality is not to be understood as withdrawal from the world into leisurely prayer centres or ashrams. Asian monks have always been involved in socio-political struggles through their voluntary poverty and their participation in social and cultural activities. Pieris calls this communism of Asian monks founded on meta-cosmic religiousness as *religious socialism*.¹¹⁵ Pieris appealing to the Asian Church for a total identification with monks and peasants in her mission to the poor says, "It is the one sure path opened for the local church to remove the cross from the steeples where it has stood for four centuries and plant it once more on Calvary where the prophetic communities die as victims of politics and religion in order to rise again as local

¹¹² Cf. A. Pieris, "Western Models of Inculturation: How Far are They Applicable in non-Semitic Asia?," in: *EAPR*, 1985/2, pp. 116-124; Also see Idem, *Love meets Wisdom*, Chapters 5 and 8. Pieris' insists on the Asian Church's need to eradicate the traces of conquest, adaptation and fulfillment models of theology of religions by a "participatory" approach of the monks. According to him the conquest theory saw Oriental religions as anti-Christian; for the adaptation theory they were merely non-Christian. The fulfillment theory regarded the other religions as pre-Christian. He points out that the first two models were based on a medieval ecclesiology that identified Christ with the Church, so that salvation impossible outside Christ seemed also impossible outside the Church. This situation paved to development of the fulfillment theory mostly by Western theologians, which regards the other religions as pre-Christian. Precisely, as Pieris notes, this theory was founded on the recovery of the ancient Christian belief that Christ is a greater reality than the Church. But the Western presentation of this theory leaves many loose ends, which its theology has not gathered together (Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p.33).

¹¹³ However, Pieris is aware that monasticism, even in Asia, can be and has been an instrument of oppressive powers, and monastic communities can be and have been oases of wealth and privileges and therefore sinful and enslaving. Hence, his loud and frequent insistence on *poor* religiousness, *soteriological/liberative* dimension of religions is very purposeful (Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.60.-62; Also see P. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y. pp.104-9. Here, Phan uses the expression "poor" as this own shorthand for Pieris' Christology. See *Ibid.*, Footnote, 22).

¹¹⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 58.

¹¹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 43.

churches of Asia.”¹¹⁶ Pieris, an advocate of monastic dialogue in inculturation points out that the “monastic encounters” have led to a shared religious experience with those called “to the Kingdom of God but perhaps not necessarily to the Church [institutional].”¹¹⁷

Pieris also challenges the Sri Lankan/Asia theologians to be equally in touch with the praxis of the Buddhist and Christian *poor* monks who empathetically participate in the Eastern ethos. He notices a marked distance between theology [of religions] and theopraxis, between monks who profess their religion and academicians who make theology their profession.¹¹⁸ This point is aptly expressed when Pieris highlights a Sri Lankan/Asian dilemma by stating that “the theologians are not (yet) poor; and the poor are not (yet) theologians.”¹¹⁹ He insists that the theology of religions should go beyond the desks of academicians to participate in the praxis of the monks. As noted, he finds in the monastic model, both in the “East” and the “West”, an authentic locus for a symbiosis of *gnostic* and *agapeic* spiritualities. For Pieris, therefore, the disconnection between the theologians and the monks, either in the “East” or “West”, will negatively impact on the Church’s mission.¹²⁰ He also makes a special request from the Western monks, to continue to do what Thomas Merton did through his pioneering work at the monastic congress, in Bangkok (1968). Merton by turning Eastwards (Asia) sharpened the Church’s monastic instinct blunted by centuries of neglect.¹²¹ Through such exercise, Pieris says,

¹¹⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 45. See also *Ibid.*, p.47.

¹¹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 34. Gerald Carney, an American theologian sees the value of the shared participation as Christians and Buddhist in the soteriological core of each religious tradition where the core elements of *agape* and *gnosis* are found. In this method of Buddhist-Christian Mutual “baptismal immersion” dialogue can move beyond the conflicting theological position to a creative understanding of the basic symbols that preserve and evoke the saving experience of each tradition (Cf. G. Carney, “Review of *Love Meets Wisdom*,” in: *Horizons*, vol. 16, no.2, 1989, p.415).

¹¹⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 32-33, and 35.

¹¹⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 41.

¹²⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “Western Models of Inculturation: How Far are They Applicable in non-Semitic Asia?,” in: *EAPR*, (pp.116-124), here p.121.

¹²¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Western Models of Inculturation: How Far are They Applicable in non-Semitic Asia?,” in: *EAPR*, pp.121 and 123; Also see *Idem*, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 32; F. Bl e, *The Third Dessert*, pp.24-25.

They [Western monks] can be interpreters for us to the Western patriarchate and defuse interecclesial tensions that invariably occur when we announce the Good News *in our own tongues* to our own people (i.e. the content of inculturation), namely, that Jesus is the new covenant of the defense pact that God and the poor have made against mammon, their common enemy (i.e. the content of liberation).¹²²

This *participation*, as Pieris would say, is the “baptismal immersion” into the twofold Sri Lankan/Asian reality.¹²³ It is the process through which the Sri Lankan Church will be acknowledged as a voice worthy of being heard by all: “*Hear ye him*”. Based on this principle, Pieris argues against those missiologists who speak of the need to “baptize” Pre-Christian religions and cultures rather than of the prophetic imperative to immerse oneself in the baptismal waters of Asian religions that predate Christianity. Pieris holds that out of this baptismal immersion Christology arises as an explication of the many hidden theologies issuing out of the soteriological premises of Asian religions.¹²⁴ Unless this “ecclesiological revolution” takes place there will only remain mere “Christological reflections” focused either on the problem of the poor or on religions and the ‘political’ standpoints and the “mystical” viewpoints of the theologians. It is in this plunge into the liberative streams of both religiousness and poverty that the Sri Lankan Church meets and relates to other religions in their soteriological nucleus. At the same time Pieris suggests that the *participation-explication* approach to Asian Christology be complemented by the non-Christian sages telling their own story of Jesus in their search for the saving truth. Pieris is appreciative of how some devout Indian Hindus have been grappling with

¹²² Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p.58; Also see Idem, “Western Models of Inculturation: How Far are They Applicable in non-Semitic Asia?,” in: *EAPR*, p.123.

¹²³ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.45-50

¹²⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 64.

the mystery of Jesus based on their own cultures particularly during the Hindu renaissance.¹²⁵

Here, Pieris does not refer to the intellectuals or their theories of religions but rather to “those *religious* seekers, who have opted to be poor in their search for the saving truth and who, during their pilgrimage, encounter Jesus within their own soteriological perspective”.¹²⁶ This process of radical inculturation will bring us to a meeting point to appreciate the salvific role of other religions guided by the Spirit and letting Jesus enter into a given Sri Lankan/Asian ethos. Pieris sees a few attempts of this desired ecclesiological revolution already begun in the periphery of the Sri Lankan mainline Churches. Appreciating the need of such peripheral dialogue Pieris says:

My surmise, therefore, is that a meaningful discourse on the “Son of God” will come about in Asian cultures mainly through an in-depth dialogue between *those* peripheral Christian communities and *these* non-Christian disciples of Christ trying to retell the story of Jesus to one another in terms of the one, absolute triune mystery of salvation.¹²⁷

Theological reflection that emerges out of an immersion in the Sri Lankan realities of religiousness and poverty in the periphery certainly requires a different lived understanding of the Church and mission. Such experience eventually shapes a relevant image of the Church and thus the universal necessity of the Church for the salvation of humankind as claimed by the Council. Pieris sees that the “ecclesiological revolution”, which is at its infant stage in the periphery of Sri Lankan Church, as an attempt to translate into practice the Vatican II’s vision enshrined in the image of the Church as “people of God” (LG.9; 1 Peter 2:9-10) with a ‘universal

¹²⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 65. Many Hindus who are critical of or even opposed to Christianity as a religion have positively acknowledged and respected Jesus in their zeal for religious reform. These claims to experience Christ outside the official meditation of the Church awaken our minds to the richness and diversity of our Christological heritage. For examples, for Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) a socio-religious reformer Jesus was a Moral Teacher, for Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-86) Jesus was an Avatar or incarnation of God, and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) looked upon Jesus as *The Ideal Satyagrahi* (one who clings to the truth, God himself). Sawami Vivekananda (1863-1902) called Christ a *yogi* and a *jivanmukta*; that is, someone who has realized ultimate liberation already in this life. For an excellent theological appraisal made on the images of Christ presented by selected Indian Hindu thinkers, see S. J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1974; M. Amaladoss, *The Asian Jesus*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2006; J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991, Part I.

¹²⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 64.

¹²⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 65.

call to holiness” (LG.39-42).¹²⁸ In this new notion of the Church the Council places the ministries and the hierarchy as an important dimension of that common priestly peoplehood (LG.9-17).¹²⁹ Pieris, qualifying this notion of “people of God” within the vast majority of non-Christian in Sri Lanka, identifies the Church as the true “body of Christ” which consists, for the most part, of the non-Christian Renouncers of mammon and the non-Christian Victims of mammon.¹³⁰ Christ gathers both these categories of the poor, whatever their religious belonging, as his own *Corporate Person*. This Church of all, particularly of the poor is truly a Catholic Church. More insistently Jesus confessed that the victims of the nations are his “Me,” his “Person,” his true body (Mt. 25:31ff). Therefore, Pieris insists that the Church’s claim to be the body of Christ must be tested against Christ’s claim that the victims of injustice are His Body, in its becoming the Church of Christ.¹³¹ For Pieris a Holy Church is essentially a poor Church, that is, a Church that has renounced mammon’s rule for the sake of God’s Reign. Hence, he argues that the Church in Sri Lanka needs to “stretch itself beyond ecclesiastical frontiers to embrace the holiness, which God and the poor covenanted as was offered in Christ.”¹³² Furthermore, the Council also along with the universality of God’s salvific will (LG. 13, 16) affirms in

¹²⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican’s *Dominus Jesus*,” in: *EAPR*, p.215.

¹²⁹ Pieris views the Vatican II Council’s redefinition of the Church as the people of God, as the first ever official attempt to offer a non-pyramidal concept of the Church in diametrical opposition to the medieval ecclesiology. He identifies four major characteristic of the medieval church as follows: “a church perceived mainly in terms of the hierarchy, i.e., the episcopate; a sacramental life revolving round a clerical priesthood; holiness focussed on ‘perfection’ sought through the observance of evangelical councils and exemplified by the life of consecrated Religious; faith understood by the laity merely as adherence to the teaching of the magisterium (bishops and theologians)” (Cf. A. Pieris, “The Priest, the Liturgy, and the Church,” in: *EAPR*, vol.46, no.3, 2009, pp.221-24).

¹³⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “Two There Are, Your Holiness: Suggestions for the next Pope’s Agenda in Line with John Paul II’s Invitation in *Ut Unum Sint*,” in: *EAPR*, vol.41, no.3, 2004, (pp. 288-309), here p.309; Also see idem, *God’s Reign for God’s Poor*, TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 1999, p.61.

¹³¹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, pp.210-11.

¹³² Cf. A. Pieris, “‘I Believe in the Holy Spirit’: Ecumenism in the Churches and the Unfinished Agenda of the Holy Spirit” (hereafter, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*), in: *EAPR*, vol.42, nos.1/2, 2005, (pp. 96-121), here p.107.

unmistakable terms the *necessity* of the Church for salvation (*LG. 14; AG.7*).¹³³ However, as many theologians observe, Vatican II does not explain the exact nature of the universal *necessity* of the Church.¹³⁴ Strictly speaking, according to Pieris the necessity of the Church for salvation is essentially to be viewed in terms of what he sees as the specific mission of the church: to proclaim through dialogue and witness that Jesus is God covenanted with the poor. Therefore, for Pieris, the relationship between the Church and the other religions is determined in terms of this specific mission of the Church (*Formula 2*) and in its sharing in the basic common spirituality of all religions as expressed in the idiom of each religion (*Formula 1*). This is a symbiotic relationship of religions or more specifically covenantal partnership in God's plan of salvation. However, according to the Council this relationship is seen as non-Christians' "orientation" towards the Church (*LG. 16*). That is, to say non-Christians can be saved through Jesus Christ without belonging to the Church in any manner; they are, however, "oriented" towards it, inasmuch as in it is found the fullness of the means of Salvation. In other words those who have not yet received the gospel are, "ordained" (*ordinantur*), in various ways, to People of God" (Church). Pieris points out that in the Sri Lankan context this Christian assertion creates another rival claim on the part of Buddhists. Appealing to their belief in "solitary Buddhas" (*Pacceka Buddha*) Buddhist, postulate the possibility of a non-Buddhist attaining nirvana outside institutional Buddhism but never outside the truth that the Buddha has discovered.¹³⁵

Furthermore, Pieris points out that the Church is *a seed* of the Reign of God (*RM.18; EA.17*).

¹³³ However, this affirmation of Vatican II does not exclude but rather includes the possibility that non-Christians and non-believers may be saved. See *LG.16*: It is however, observed that this text reaffirms traditional doctrine. But it seems to limit itself to interior, personal relationship between God and an individual in the secrecy of his conscience. The same line of thought is further deepened in a Trinitarian context by *GS.22*. See also John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), no.14.

¹³⁴ J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 207-210. Also see L. Thumma, "Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia," in: *Ind. Th. St.*, vol.37, no.3, 2000, p. 232; P. Plata, "Jacques Dupuis and a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism", in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2006, (pp. 52-78), p. 76.

¹³⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 60.

Therefore, he argues that the Church is not the fullness of the *realized* Reign of God, which only can be predicated of Jesus the Risen One. The Church is only a sacramental expression of God's Reign. He further points out that according to Vatican II the Church itself needs to grow in maturity through continually testing itself against its ideal, Gods' Reign (*LG. 5*).¹³⁶ He further shows that it was Vatican II's conviction that the Reign of God stretches beyond the Church that made it possible for John Paul II to acknowledge with assurance the soteriological character of Buddhism and Hinduism (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 30; EA. 2*).¹³⁷ Here, Pieris is quick to remind that "God's Reign" is a gospel term for salvation. Thus he concludes that salvation is available outside the Church, in those religions.

Pieris, further states: "the vocation to the Church [institutional], I believe, is a ministry conferred on a few ("little flock") to confirm and strengthen in others the universal thrust of the Kingdom already operating in them."¹³⁸ Here, the question is no longer how the other religious traditions are "oriented" or "ordained" towards the Church but rather how God's Reign was and is concretely present in these religions through the working of the Word and the Spirit. It is made evident through lived experience in Sri Lanka how the Kingdom preached by Christ has already germinated in the adherents of other religious traditions. This new paradigm in Asia is rooted in the conviction and experience that the religious traditions are primarily God's search for humanity, rather than a human search for God.¹³⁹ This positive appreciation of the presence of God's Reign in other religions is not a denial of anything that is truly valid in the framework set

¹³⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican's *Dominus Jesus*," in: *EAPR*, p.226.

¹³⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican's *Dominus Jesus*," in: *EAPR*, p. 224.

¹³⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 34.

¹³⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 33.

by the dictum, “The Church is necessity for salvation”.¹⁴⁰ As such, therefore, other religions may be called “ways”, or “channels,” or “means” through which salvation in Christ reaches their adherents. Hence, salvation is seen as being channeled to people of other religions not in spite of but in and through their various socio-cultural and religious traditions.¹⁴¹ It is God, who saves humanity through the Word and the Spirit, and not the religious traditions or their institution as such. Pieris insists that the Church and even the Bible do not exhaust salvation and revelation, respectively, but are normative guides and sacramental pointers to God-in-Christ.¹⁴²

Furthermore, Pieris, points out that all religious traditions being co-pilgrims offer one another not salvation (which is already available to all) but mutual encouragement amidst sin and failure, which is the purpose of interreligious dialogue.¹⁴³ However, Pieris accepts that the religious traditions and their institutions play an important role in God’s one plan of salvation though not free of human error and sin, no more than the “pilgrim Church”. The Church has a specific role in her specific mission to witness to the fact that “no salvation outside God’s covenant with the poor” and *thus* proclaim it.¹⁴⁴ Hence, it gives all the more reason for Christians to safeguard the legitimate obligation of the Church to foster the “Kingdom of the Lord and his Christ”

(Rev.11:15), at whose service it is placed (*DP*. 35; see also no. 59).

¹⁴⁰For a brief current Asian discussion on this point see M. Amaladoss, “Is There an Asian Way of Doing Theology?,” in: *EAPR*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2008, pp.14-17.

¹⁴¹ Vatican II, notwithstanding its openness to the positive values contained in other religious traditions, did not recognize them as “ways” of salvation. The Council nevertheless seems to incline in that direction by implication in its recognition of elements of “truth and grace” contained in other religious traditions “as a sort of secret presence of God” (*AG*. 9). However, the closest to the affirmation that other religions may constitute paths to salvation for their followers is found in the postconciliar magisterium document *Dialogue and Proclamation* jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples (1991). Undoubtedly, the statement is a guarded one (no. 29): (Cf. P. Phan, “Doing Theology in the Context of Cultural and Religious Pluralism: An Asian Perspective,” in: *Louvain Studies*, vol. 27, 2002, (pp. 39-68), pp. 43-44).

¹⁴² Cf. A. Pieris, “The Church, the Kingdom, and the Other Religions,” in: *Dialogue* (OS), SCRS, Colombo, Sri Lanka, no.22, Oct. 1970, (pp.3-7), here p.3.

¹⁴³ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Roman Catholic Perception of other Churches and other Religions after the Vatican’s *Dominus Jesus*,” in: *EAPR*, p.229.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.220.

4.4.3 The Sri Lankan Church and its Mission

Pieris points out that the theological reflection emerging out of participation in the twofold reality of Sri Lankan religiousness and poverty, of *gnosis* and *agape*, requires a different lived understanding of the Church and its mission. A new orientation for the Sri Lankan Church's mission based on the Word-Crucified and *kenotic* spirituality of Jesus has been already discussed in the Third Chapter under the section, "Some Ecclesiological Implications". Here, let me highlight the urgency and the validity of the Church's prophetic mission, within the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka, to challenge people to transformation of life. It is nothing but bearing witness to Jesus' mission of building up the Reign of God based on his love for humanity.

Since Christianity in Sri Lanka is present in the midst of dehumanizing poverty, of immensely rich in cultural diversity and religious pluralism, the mission of the Church can no longer be primarily conceived as saving souls (*salus animarum*) and planting the church (*plantatio ecclesiae*).¹⁴⁵ These pre-Vatican mission principles based on conquest and adaptation theories of religions operative during the colonial period of Sri Lanka have created bitterness, suspicion and competition with other Christian Churches and religions, particularly with Buddhism.¹⁴⁶ In addition to such bitter memories of the Christian past, the present Sri Lankan Catholic Church is saddled with the burden of resolving the situation created by "unethical conversion" and missionary activities carried out by some evangelical groups and the

¹⁴⁵ Traces of this double concern as the central aims of mission can be identified in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (1990). See, for example, no. 49.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. I. J. Kodithuwakku, "Christian Mission in the Context of Sinhala Buddhist Fundamentalism and Competing Minorities in Sri Lanka (Part I)," in: *VJTR*, vol. 75, 2011, (pp. 835-849), here pp.836-38. Pieris identifies three periods of Buddhist-Christian dialogue and distrust in the post-independent era of Sri Lanka as follows: 1.A Period of bitterness and suspicion (1950s and 1960s); 2.A period of incipient dialogue and co-operation (1970s); 3.A period of bitterness and suspicion (1980s and 1990s) (Cf. A. Pieris, "Dialogue and Distrust Between Buddhist and Christians: A Report on the Catholic Church's Experience in Sri Lanka," in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. 22, 1995(pp. 104-121), here p.105).

fundamentalist Christian sects.¹⁴⁷ The bitterness and suspicion between religions leading up to a possible religious conflict would prove disastrous to Sri Lanka after its thirty years of internecine ethnic war between in two major races, namely, Sinhala and Tamil. The situation is so volatile that even today those who are genuinely engaged in dialogue at various levels are held in suspicion by the Buddhist, as an extension of the aggressive evangelization in the colonial past. This situation demands of the Church that she redefine *Proclamation* of the Gospel, *Conversion* of heart, and interreligious *Dialogue* along a missionary vision that repudiates all proselytism and respects Buddhist sensitivity.

For Pieris the primary mission of the Sri Lankan Church is to become a credible “prophetic sign” of the Reign of God by proclaiming the gospel through the Triple-Dialogue (*RM.17*).¹⁴⁸ As already observed, for Pieris the Triple-Dialogue, which constitutes the process of inculturation, also constitutes the Church’s task of proclamation. Therefore for him inculturation is the same as the Church becoming *proclamational*.¹⁴⁹ Felix Wilfred brings out the same conviction as upheld by the bishops of FABC. Commenting on the overall Christological vision of the FABC he says that, “there is a distinctive way of understanding and practicing proclamation: it derives from the Asian context to which the church needs to respond in terms of dialogue, inculturation and liberation. (. . .). Dialogue does not become simply an instrument of

¹⁴⁷ Cf. I. J. Kodithuwakku, “Christian Mission in the Context of Sinhala Buddhist Fundamentalism and Competing Minorities in Sri Lanka (part I),” in: *VJTR*, p. 839.

¹⁴⁸ The Triple-Dialogue rooted in the living Sri Lankan/Asian experience of being church was first formulated as a fourfold dialogue in a Roman document, *Dialogue and Proclamation (DP)*, as follows: *a. dialogue of life* (common living as good neighbour), *b. dialogue of action* (collaboration for development and liberation), *c. dialogue of theological exchange* (understanding of different religious heritage), *d. dialogue of religious experience* (sharing of spiritual riches) (see *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Rome, 19 May, 1991, no. 42; also see *FAPA* (1997) pp.21-26). Jacques Dupuis, a Belgian Jesuit priest one of the main theologians of the FABC was instrumental in forming the document *DP*, out of his over four decades long lived-working experience in India.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Inculturation as a Missionary/Evangelical Presence in a Religiously Plural Society: Two Examples from Sri Lanka”, in: *EAPR*, vol.32, no. 1/2, 1995, (pp. 81-86), here p.81.

proclamation.”¹⁵⁰ Though dialogue and proclamation are considered as two distinct activities, in the Asian context of religious pluralism they are two moments in one conversation or relationship. It is a mutual proclamation in dialogue between religions. The goal of mission in the dialogical context of Sri Lanka, as Pieris says, is not to provide a place for the *displaced* Christ of Asia¹⁵¹ (this will be discussed below), but to be ministerially involved with him in building up of the Reign of God which was proclaimed and inaugurated by him.¹⁵² Thus the specific mission of the Church of Sri Lanka should consist in proclaiming the *Second Christological Formula*: that Jesus is God covenanted with the poor, through a dialogue of life and witness. To be precise, according to Pieris, the Church’s mission is to usher in God’s Kingdom *on earth* through a transformation of God’s creation into a new world/age of loving service (or responsibility) in collaboration with the poor. It is a new world order where love and service would replace the current system of oppression and domination, allowing equity to eliminate injustice, and communion to cancel divisiveness.¹⁵³ However, Pieris finds two basic complementary trends or groups in this ministerial involvement with Christ which should merge into one christopraxis in realizing God’s Reign on earth. As noted already, one group seeks to participate in the prophetic ministry that the Asian Christ exercises (ministry of the Word)

¹⁵⁰ Cf. F. Wilfred, “Images of Jesus Christ in the Asian Pastoral Context: An Interpretation of Documents from the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences,” in: *Concilium*, 1993/2, pp.54-55. The Asian perception of proclamation differs from that of the Vatican declaration *Dialogue and Proclamation* which holds that while dialogue and proclamation are both necessary for the Church’s mission, they are “not on the same level,” for dialogue always “remains oriented towards proclamation” (*DP*. 77, 75). The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* voices the same reservation (*RM*. 44, 34). In Asia dialogue is not subordinated to proclamation as preparation or means.

¹⁵¹ Pieris distinguishes between three images of Christ claiming Asia’s allegiance, namely, the Euro-ecclesiastical Christ of the official Church; the non-Western Christ of scholars and intellectuals; and the Christ of Asia (Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7: Does Christ Have a Place in Asia?:A Panoramic View), pp.65-73).

¹⁵² Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), p.76.

¹⁵³ Pieris points out that according to biblical faith Kingdom of God is not *another world* called “heaven” but rather *another age (aion)*, in biblical terms “new heaven and new earth”, dawning for this world-order. Josef Neuner says that God’s kingdom, inaugurated by Jesus through his life death and resurrection does not replace our earth by a better planet but means the transformation of God’s creation (Cf. A. Pieris, “The Holy Spirit and Asia’s Religiousness,” in: *Spiritus*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, vol., no.2, 2007, p. 130. Also see Idem, “What on Earth is God Doing with Us?,” in: *Gleanings*, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, January-June, 2008, p. 4; J. Neuner, “Listen to the Spirit: God Speaks to us,” in: *VJTR*, vol. 60, 1996, (59-63), here p.63.

towards the Church and society. The other group exercises the Church's *ministry of healing* towards the Asian Christ. The *healing ministry* consists of works of charity as represented in the work and the person of Mother Teresa. In Pieris's conviction these two ministries taken together, constitute evangelism.¹⁵⁴ He, following the 32nd General Congregation the Jesuits held in 1978 and the bishops' Synod of 1971, defines evangelism as *integral evangelization* in which proclamation of faith and promotion of justice are integrated.¹⁵⁵ However, Pieris offers a biblical formulation of *integral evangelization*, based on twofold Love-Command, to make it more appealing to Sri Lankan/Asian society which is predominantly non-Christian.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, the first principle spells out the spirituality of Jesus in his mission and consequently the spirituality of his disciples. As already observed the spirituality of discipleship is the common denominator between Christianity and all non-biblical religions. The second principle illustrates the mission of Jesus and, therefore also describes the mission of his disciples. It spells out the Church's specific evangelical vocation and the missionary identity among other religions in Sri Lanka. Hence, in this biblical orientation of Pieris the integral *proclamation* is not mere speech, but the Word made credible by visible signs of transformation such as miracles of human wholeness in a broken world. The *conversion* of heart is to a new world order, that is, Yahweh's programme of liberation executed in and through Jesus, the Word. This vision will provide a new direction to the traditional debate on dialogue and proclamation in the Catholic Church. It will also clarify

¹⁵⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, "Whither New Evangelism?," in: *Pacifica*, vol.6, 1993, (pp. 327-34), here p. 328. Also see Idem, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), pp.76-77.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, "Whither New Evangelism?," in: *Pacifica*, p.328. The phrase "integral evangelization" was coined by the Jesuits in reformulating their evangelical vocation and missionary identity at their 32nd General Congregation held in 1978. They were inspired by the Synod of 1971 at which the bishops declared that the promotion of justice is a constitutive part of preaching the gospel. For Pieris' perception of biblical notions faith and justice see Idem, *God's Reign for God's Poor*, (Chapter II: The Faith-Justice Paradigm), pp. 19-25. Also see, Idem, "I Believe in the Holy Spirit," in: *EAPR*, pp.111-12.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Whither New Evangelism?," in: *Pacifica*, pp.329-30.

the Sri Lankan Church's position on *proclamation* of the gospel and ethical conversion of individuals to the Church.

Further sharpening the prophetic mission of the Church, Pieris speaks of the Church's true objective of the mission mandate to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19). He argues that the mandate to "baptize nations" is not a charter for proselytism to expand the Church and its structures in order to expand and exert the Church's social power at the expense of the placeless Asian Christ. But rather, the Church needs to be a true instrument of the Reign of God of which the *Church is a seed* (RM.18; EA.17). To be precise, the mandate to *baptize nations* consists of "making disciples of nations" along the *via crucis* of greedless sharing so that the life of each nation will be radically transformed into a new order of love and service.¹⁵⁷ Pieris states: "No nation can be 'baptized' into discipleship unless it dies as a nation with all its idols and rises as a people enjoying peace through justice. This death and resurrection of a nation is its baptism."¹⁵⁸ This spirituality that is imbedded in the mandate to "baptize nations" can be described in theistic idiom as beatitudes, and also in non-theistic idiom, as for instance, *alpecchatā* in Buddhism and *vairāgya* in Hinduism. Pieris points out that in all these idioms the conversion to the right world order (the order of Christ) is described as humans' rejection of every form of idolatry.¹⁵⁹ Hence, Jesus' call through this baptismal mandate is to change one's ways (*shub*) or change one's mentality (*metanoia*), and not to change one's religion. Pieris further insists that the mandate to "baptize nations" should be taken in the context of Jesus' own mission-manifesto recorded in Lk. 4:18-19. It is a context of total liberation directed clearly towards *all the poor*: the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. More importantly, the mission mandate of the Church directly flows from Jesus' own mission spelt out

¹⁵⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), p.77.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "I Believe in the Holy Spirit," in: *EAPR*, p.116.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, "I Believe in the Holy Spirit," in: *EAPR*, p. 115.

in the Synagogue of Nazareth in the words of Isaiah.¹⁶⁰ The crowning point of Jesus' own liberative manifesto, proclaimed in the words of Isaiah, is the declaration of the "acceptable Year of the Lord", that is, the Jubilee year of the poor (Lev. 25). Thus Pieris states:

Our prophetic mission, in other words, is not geared to the conversion of the others to our religion (which is 'proselytism' condemned by Jesus in Mt. 23:15) but conversion in the sense of "a change of direction" (*shub*) or "a change of mentality" (*metanoia*) which allows Christ's living Body – the suffering poor – to preach the good news to those who worship the Powers that crucify them; to turn the cynicism of those who serve the Money-Demon (Mammon) into God's last laugh heard in the life-struggle of God's poor.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, as noted, the local church is the "acting subject of mission" living and acting in communion with the Universal Church. The Church, always the local church in a given religio-cultural context, has to be the sacrament of salvation in that particular locality. The word sacrament is a relative term. Something absolute cannot be sacramental. The Father (absolute Silence) is not a sacrament. Therefore, the Church in each little place has to witness to Jesus by absorbing all that is of Christ, the Word, the medium of revelation and salvation, as revealed there in that locality, so that Jesus *grows into Christ*, through that witness. As we become the body of Christ in *that place*, Jesus grows into Christ in that place. The ideal is achieved when the "little flock" scattered all over the place *becomes* the body (sacrament) of Christ. The Church as the seed of the Kingdom of God needs to grow as the body of Christ to stretch itself beyond the ecclesiastical boundaries to embrace all that is of Christ, particularly the poor. Pieris stresses this point highlighting the specific mission of the Church by playing with the old Catholic dictum, "no salvation outside the Church" to replace it by "No salvation outside God's covenant with the

¹⁶⁰Cf. A. Pieris, "I Believe in the Holy Spirit," in: *EAPR*, p. 114.

¹⁶¹Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 38.

Poor.”¹⁶² For him the Church or people who call themselves religious are missing something essential in their religious experience if they do not in some way reach out to the victims of the earth and/or the victimized earth. For Pieris, “The Church of all, (not merely a Church for all) particularly of the poor (not merely *for* the poor) is a truly Catholic Church. All as all, and the poor as poor; no religious label attached. The Church is called to embrace all in order to embrace Christ”.¹⁶³

Let me clarify an issue mentioned early in this section: Why is it that the Church in Asia should engage in a prophetic mission of transforming its societies bearing witness to Christ rather than finding a *place* for him? Here, Pieris’ basic argument is that people who have already accepted a meta-cosmic religion will not, in general, seek to embrace another meta-cosmic religion.¹⁶⁴ It indicates that Christians in Sri Lanka/Asia must come to terms with the fact they are destined to remain for the foreseeable future a “small remnant”. They need to learn to journey with people of other religions in covenantal partnership towards the eschatological Kingdom of God. Thus according to Pieris, given the fact that Sri Lankan society has already a well rooted major meta-cosmic religion, namely, Buddhism, the Church in Sri Lanka should not waste its energy in a mission trying to *procure a place* for the displaced Christ in the Sri Lankan society. He rather insists that the Church in Sri Lanka wears itself out in transforming the society

¹⁶² Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 220. Here, Pieris adopts the traditional catholic dictum, “There is no salvation outside the Church” to elaborate on his main theological axiom of the twofold love command which he also calls *Kraista Sūtra*. Accordingly he says, “If the first *sūtra* implies the principle “no salvation Outside the Reign of God,” the second *sūtra* sharpens it as “no salvation outside God’s covenant with the Poor”! It is this further sharpening of the mission that constitutes the specific evangelization entrusted to Christians. It is their calling to witness to it and *thus* proclaim it” (see *Ibid.*, p.220). According to M. Amaladoss this traditional Catholic dictum has been positively framed as “The Church is necessary for salvation” (Cf. M. Amaladoss, “Is There an Asian Way of Doing Theology,” in: *EAPR*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2008 (pp.10-27), p.14.

¹⁶³ Cf. A. Pieris, “I Believe in the Holy Spirit,” in: *EAPR*, p. 107.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), pp. 66-67. However, Pieris does not rule out the possibility of a well rooted metacosmic religion being replaced by another, that is, “by exerting prolonged and persistent political or military pressure or even through demographic changes (i.e., through migratory colonization)” (See *Ibid.*, p.67).

that has no place for the Sri Lankan Christ.¹⁶⁵ Accordingly, the Sri Lankan Church, as her mission priority, should endeavour to discover the Christhood of the Sri Lanka's placeless and religious (mostly non-Christian) poor.¹⁶⁶ These poor, like Jesus, have no decent place to be born (Lk. 2:7), no reputable place to live and work (Jn.14: 6), no safe place in their own country to hide from oppressive rulers (Mt. 2:13-14), or no honorable place to die (Lk. 23:23), and no place of their own to be buried (Mt. 27:60). Hence, given the Sri Lankan religio-cultural phenomenon, Pieris identifies social transformation through witness to Christ as the specific prophetic mission of the Church *in* her becoming the Church *of* Sri Lanka rather than competing with other religion for a place for Christ. For Pieris, this is basically the new way of being Church *of* Sri Lanka, that is, being the Church of the poor.

4.4.4 'Trinal' Nature of the Mystery of Salvation and Religions

Christianity distinguishes three dimensions of the *mysterium salutis* - "economic trinity". They are *Source* of salvation (Theos: Father), *Medium* of salvation (Logos: Son) *Force* of salvation (Pneuma: Advocate/Consoler). Pieris argues that this "triune" or Trinitarian mystery of salvation constitutes the basic soteriological datum of all major (metacosmic) religions, both theistic and non-theistic, that have survived up to this day in Asia.¹⁶⁷ However, we cannot ignore the irreducibly distinct idioms of each religion. This has to be readily accepted to eliminate a major obstacle in a core-to-core dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity in Sri Lanka. However, Pieris succinctly demonstrates the implicit acknowledgement of the tridimensional character in the soteriology of major religions:

¹⁶⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), p.78.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), p.76.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp.131-132.

(1) Salvation as the salvific “beyond” becoming the human person’s salvific “within” (e.g., Yahweh, Allah, Tao, Nirvāna, Tathatā, Brahman-Ātman), (2) thanks to a salvific mediation, which is also revelatory in character (e.g., tao mārga, dharma, dabar, image), (3) and a (given) human capacity for salvation or a saving power paradoxically inherent in the human person (*purusa*, *citta*, *ātman*, etc.), despite being sheer “nothing”, mere “dust”, “sole-less” (anātma), a part of created “illusion” (māyā), immersed in this cosmic “vale of tears” (samsara) from which one yearns for perfect redemption.¹⁶⁸

However, in the Sri Lankan context we have to make certain distinctions and qualifications when speaking of *sources* of salvation in relation to Buddhism and Christianity. At the same time, in talking of Buddhism we need to be aware of the two main streams, namely, Mahayana and Theravada (the stream prevalent in Sri Lanka) which have their own emphases on the soteriological role of Buddha. Accordingly, Pieris makes his observation as follows:

In the orthodox Theravada Stream, Buddha is never regarded as a Savior. His soteriological role is restricted to his discovering and preaching the dhamma (the eternal salvific truth that pre-exists him) and to the forming of the sangha (a community that, emulating him, realizes this truth and continues to preach and practice the path that leads to it). But once the dhamma was equated with Buddha, and the sangha was devalued (as happened in certain Mahayanist schools, e.g., in Amidism), Buddha became the Savior who grants the grace of salvation to those who invoke him in faith. An agapeic religiosity using a personalist idiom has become a characteristic of such school of Buddhism.¹⁶⁹

Pieris, further admits that there are non-negotiable differences between Buddhism and Christianity derived mainly from each religion’s stance vis-à-vis the existence of, and faith in a Personal and Absolute Creator-redeemer God.¹⁷⁰ Christianity believes in an Absolute Personal Creator-redeemer God. It sees the source of salvation not only as the Alpha but also as the Omega point of history. It also perceives the *eschaton* as the consummation of the collective history of humankind and the cosmos. In contrast, in Theravada Buddhism there is no belief in a personal creator-redeemer God. Hence its source of salvation is not positively affirmed. Instead

¹⁶⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p.62.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 128.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 131-132. See also Idem, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.44.

it talks of the final meta-cosmic destiny of an individual's cosmic and human history: Nirvana. In Buddhism there is no primordial source of salvation, there is no doctrine of creation (*ex nihilo*), and consequently no doctrine of eschatological consummation, nor a theory of grace. Buddhists see Nirvana as the utter *cessation* rather than the consummation of all that constitutes reality as we now know and experience it. It is the final release from the round of becoming. It is never equated with a transformed state of the universe, that is, a 'new heaven and earth'.

However, in general there is a significant point of convergence in terms of mutual partnership between the Absolute Future (God) and human persons in 'arriving' at the final liberation. Here, Pieris' argument is based on his belief that the essential experience of Christianity is not mere *agape* but *agape* in dialogue with *gnosis*, and that the essential experience of Buddhism is in turn not mere *gnosis* but *gnosis* in deep dialogue with *agape*.¹⁷¹ Accordingly, both religions while acknowledging positive human effort as a necessary condition for the arrival of final liberation insist that it is far beyond mere human effort. For Buddhists Nirvana is beyond the categories of *phala* (fruit) and *aphala* (non-fruit): consequences of human deeds as good and bad.¹⁷² It defies being identified as an end-product of mere human causation, while Christian faith similarly sees *eschaton*, the Ultimate Future, "breaking into" the present from the other side of the human horizon through Jesus Christ, the Word. This means, as Pieris argues that the Trinity through the corporate person, Christ, enters into solidarity with our flesh

¹⁷¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 119.

¹⁷² Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp. 125 and 132; See also Idem, "Christ Beyond Dogma," in: *Louvain Studies*, p. 214. Pieris is quick to observe that we cannot however find an exact equivalent to the Judeo-Christian belief in and understanding of *the Future* "breaking into" the present in Buddhism. The movement of the *Future coming towards the human* is never asserted in the non-biblical religions. In Buddhism one is said to move towards the goal along the path; the goal does not move towards the seeker. Hence, Judeo-Christian notions of Hope and Future find only homologues in Buddhism. The homologues are found in the person's *certitude* that there should be a wholesomeness to be sought in order to gain freedom and in his inner *given potentiality* to discover it. A person becomes a Buddha when this *hope* is fulfilled; when Nirvana which is this Absolute Future becomes his abiding 'Now' (See A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 34-35).

together with the whole cosmos to redeem it into a “Body fully transfigured by the Spirit.”¹⁷³

This divine-human encounter and the participation in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity is our salvation (*DV. 2*), the ultimate purpose of divine revelation. This salvation or fellowship is embodied in the Christ, the Word, as an anticipation of the Ultimate Future (Age-to-Come) on the Cross through the resurrection.

There is however, still a greater agreement or a significant point of convergence with regard to the *medium* of salvation and *force* of salvation in Buddhism and Christianity. The inaccessible, invisible and incomprehensible Absolute is brought within the human horizon by mediatory and revelatory self-expression, an accessible dimension: *dharma/logos*.¹⁷⁴ Pieris underlines that this is made possible only because the Word-medium belongs to the nucleus of the Absolute Self. The Word-medium is also interpreted as a “way” (*mārga/tao/hodos*) in different paradigms of religious thought leading towards the Absolute. The innate force as all religions would postulate is a certain “given capacity” within us to seek and find the transcendent truth which we Christians call the Spirit.

¹⁷³ Cf. A. Pieris, “Christ Beyond Dogma,” in: *Louvain Studies*, p.230.

¹⁷⁴ However, Jesus, the Word, in the New Testament, is both the saving truth and liberating path. In contrast Gautama of the Tripitaka did not seem to have clearly claimed that the saving truth or the liberating path was identical with his own person. He was only the path-finder and truth-discoverer. However, it is a grave mistake to consider him more as a mere founder of school of thought than a holy man which wrong conception colonial powers carried with them. In finding some common grounds between Christianity and Buddhism in terms of Medium of Salvation and Force of Salvation we need to identify and respect the differences in Buddhologies such as “Southern Buddhism” prevalent in Southern/Southeast Asia (usually considered to be synonymous with Theravada Tradition) and “Northern Buddhism” prevalent in East Asia (usually considered to be synonymous with Mahayana Tradition). For further explanation on this point refer, A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, pp.132-133.

4.4.5 Integration of the Cosmic and the Meta-cosmic Dimensions in Asian Religiosity

In talking about the relationship between Christianity and other religions we need to discuss Pieris' neologism of *cosmic religion* and *meta-cosmic soteriologies*.¹⁷⁵ The neologistic terms "cosmic" and "meta-cosmic" emerged at the third international conference of the Ecumenical Association of the Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held in Sri Lanka in 1979 after Pieris' major paper at this conference. He observes these two levels or layers of Asian religiosity as two complementary elements within which the institutional framework of Asian religiosity operates.¹⁷⁶ Pieris states:

Meta-cosmic soteriologies [Buddhism and Hinduism] are never found in abstract "textual" form but always "contextualized" within the worldview of the "cosmic religion" of a given culture, creating a twofold level of religious experience well integrated into each other. Here the Asian context differs from the African because, due to this superimposition, cosmic religions, unlike in Africa, are not regarded as salvific. This is of great consequence for Asian theology.¹⁷⁷

Pieris uses the term "cosmic religions" to identify religions that have evolved through and associated with *cosmic forces* such as heat, fire wind, water and earth.¹⁷⁸ In Asian Cultures these natural forces appear in various guises in various regions as invisible powers: "devas" in Sri Lanka and India, "naths" in Burma, "phis" in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, "bons" in Tibet,

¹⁷⁵ Pieris, derives these two terms, "cosmic" and "meta-cosmic", directly from a Buddhist self-understanding of the two dimensions of Buddhist religious experience: *Lokiya* (cosmic) and *Lok'uttara* (meta-cosmic). The term "cosmic" (from Greek *kosmos*) means pertaining to this *world-system*. He prefers the term "cosmic" to "secular" (from Latin *saeculum*, also meaning the world) since the latter connotes what is non-sacred or non-religious in Western literature. For Pieris sees this world as the sacred theatre in contrast to seeing the world as secular. The Pali word *lokiya* in Indic literature does not carry the connotation of de-sacralization proper to the word "secular" in its current Western usage. The Pali word *Lok'uttara* means *meta-cosmic* or "beyond the world". It should not be confused with *acosmic* (non-worldly or other-worldly). It is the World carried to its ultimate horizon beyond itself, a 'beyond' already within it since transcendence ("the beyond") and immanence ("the within") imply each other as co-incident correlatives. This neologism in Asian theology, first introduced by Pieris, found its way into John Paul's *Redemptoris Missio* (Cf. A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, p. 79. See also V. Fabella, and R. S. Sugirtharajah, (eds.), *DTWT*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y. 2000, pp. 59-60).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, pp. 78-80; Idem, *Love Meets Wisdom*, (Chapter 2), pp. 8-16. Idem, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), (Chapter VIII - pp. 105-134), here p. 128-129.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, p. 79.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 71.

“ancestor” in China’s and Korea’s Confucianism, and “kamis” in Japan’s Shintoism.¹⁷⁹ Pieris observes that many tribal and clannic religions (primal religions) have a cosmic religiosity marked by a belief in these cosmic forces. These natural cosmic forces have given rise to various religious rites and rituals forming into a constitutive element of people’s religiousness together with meta-cosmic soteriologies. In the final analysis cosmic religiosity includes all living conditions including the poverty and religiousness of people. For Pieris, therefore, cosmic religiosity also includes health, food, marriage and family, and social well-being of humanity. It also includes “popular religiosity” with regard to all the major religions: popular Buddhism, popular Hinduism and popular Christianity. In this understanding religions are not an escape from this world, but worthy means for the transformation of this same world.¹⁸⁰ For Pieris the cosmic religion, which has been pejoratively named as “animism” by certain Western anthropologists, certainly represents the basic subconscious attitude that the *homo religiosus* (residing in each one of us) adopts toward the mysteries of life, related to cosmic forces.¹⁸¹

Furthermore, it is these cosmic forces that are being used to explain human origin, ecological diversity, and tamed to make technological advancement. Thus Pieris concludes that it is at the cosmic level that both technological and socio-political activity affects the major religions in Asia. However, he sees a danger of unwise use of technological advancement that would result in taking away cosmic religions and their rites from the masses. This is, in a way, a process of desacralizing cosmic religion, which could be interpreted as the liberation of humanity from superstition. This process can consequently enslave humans with a host of evils such as environmental pollution, consumerism and secularism, and the like. However, this should not be

¹⁷⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue* (NS) p. 129.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Asian Reality and the Christian Option”, in: *Dialogue* (NS), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vols. 32 and 33, 2005-2006, (pp. 158-196), here p. 190-91.

¹⁸¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 71. P. Phan quoting Pieris affirms this interplay of two levels of Asian religiosity (see P. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y. 2003, p.101).

understood as denouncing technological advances but as an appeal for a healthy blend of scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom for the well-being of humanity. Hence, Pieris joins hands with Pope Paul VI who in his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (no.20) appealed for a reciprocation or bipolarity between secular knowledge and spiritual wisdom for an authentic socio-human progress.¹⁸²

By contrast, according to Pieris, all major religions that have survived up to this day have posited a meta-cosmic horizon (or a transcendental horizon) as the ethos of salvation. This is true of both *gnostic* religions (*Brahman-Atman* in Vedantic Hinduism, *Nirvāna* in Buddhism and Jainism, and *Dao* in Daoism) and of *agapeic* religions (*Yahweh* in Judaism, *Abba* or Reign of God in Christianity, and Allah in Islam).¹⁸³ It is important to note that in the contention of Pieris the word meta-cosmic means “beyond the world”. Therefore meta-cosmic should not be confused with *acosmic* (non-worldly or other-worldly). For him the world is the sacred theater where the poor with their distinctively this-worldly spirituality¹⁸⁴ approach God and religion for the transformation of the same universe. This reflects Pieris’ belief that it is this same universe that will be transformed into “new heaven and new earth.”

In reality a *cosmic religion* functions as the foundation, and a *meta-cosmic soteriology* constitutes the main edifice of the functional framework of Asian religiosity. This explains the cosmic or popular base of all meta-cosmic soteriologies of Asia, namely, Hinduism, Buddhism and to some extent Taoism. Therefore, according to Pieris, unlike in Africa or in Oceania this cosmic religiosity is generally not found in its pure and primordial form in Asian religiousness.

¹⁸² Cf. A. Pieris, “Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁸³ Cf. A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in *Dialogue* (NS) p. 128.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), pp. 156-57. It is through This-worldly spirituality of the poor (or cosmic spirituality) that the poor cry for justice on earth and for their basic needs totally depending on God’s love. Pieris wittily observes that for those who have all their material needs met, the legitimate cry of these poor for basic worldly needs and human dignity may appear materialistic.

However, very rare exceptions to this general phenomenon are found in isolated pockets in Asia, such as Laos and Cambodia, and tribal regions of India, as well as certain parts of Korea.¹⁸⁵ In Asia this cosmic religiosity of a given culture has been well integrated into one or the other of the three meta-cosmic soteriologies mentioned above. It is by sinking their roots in a brand of cosmic religiosity of a given culture that most meta-cosmic soteriologies in Asia have inculturated themselves in human living conditions and spread further. Christianity's failure to domesticate the cosmic religions in Sri Lanka made Buddhists look upon the Church as foreign to the Sri Lankan scene in its religious expression, symbolism and organization. Pieris sees this as a more valid or even as the primary reason for the failure of Christianity to enter into the Sri Lankan ethos than Christ's colonial appearance.¹⁸⁶ For he sees Christ's "Euro-ecclesial" figure being successfully enthroned in cosmic cultures that are being Christianized today.¹⁸⁷ Pieris articulating a lacuna in the inculturation process of Sri Lanka Church, states:

For too long a time we Christians have dialogued too exclusively with the meta-cosmic religions (i.e. the so-called higher forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, etc.) and tried to create a theological language to communicate our common experience of the Absolute. Cosmic religiosity (i.e. tribal and clan religions, as well as the popular forms of meta-cosmic religions, e.g. popular Buddhism, popular Hinduism, and popular Christianity etc.) was looked upon as an immature and infantile stage of spiritual development.¹⁸⁸

Pieris, who acknowledges the interplay of the cosmic and meta-cosmic dimension of Asian religions, talks about the "cosmic" religiosity of the Asian poor.¹⁸⁹ The "cosmic"

¹⁸⁵ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 72; also see Idem, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), pp. 66-67. The importance of embodying the cosmic religion by the meta-cosmic soteriology in Asia is well demonstrated by Pieris. He compares the easier establishment of biblical religions in Indonesia (Islam) and in the Philippines (Catholicism) with the same biblical religions facing greater challenges in Sri Lanka, India, Burma and other countries where *gnostic* soteriologies had already domesticated cosmic religion into a well-integrated cultural system.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 7), pp. 65-67.

¹⁸⁷ Pieris identifies certain locations where Christianization might be possible where cosmic religiosity still prevails, for example, Oceania and certain pockets of Laos and Cambodia and tribal regions of India, as well as certain parts of Korea where Buddhism is more Confucianist than meta-cosmic.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p. 157.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), pp. 156-57.

religiosity included their life's basic needs, total dependence on God, and cry for justice. These poor, whatever be their religion, are the covenant partners of Yahweh in Jesus' mission of love, and are the majority non-Christians in Asia. This Asian poor whom Pieris identifies as the *Third Magisterium of the Poor* together with their specific cosmic religiosity provides the school of learning for Christians in becoming the Church of Asia. Pieris is a strong advocate of persuading the Pastoral Magisterium and the Academic Magisterium in the Church to be in a permanent learning relationship with the poor of Asia.¹⁹⁰ Pieris, articulating his contention, states:

The poor (. . .) who form the bulk of Asian people, plus their specific brand of cosmic religiosity, constitute a school where many Christian activists re-educate themselves in the art of speaking the language of God's Reign, that is, the language of liberation which God speaks through Jesus.¹⁹¹

4.5 Overview of the Ongoing Discussion on Religious Pluralism in Sri Lanka

The purpose of this section is to appreciate Pieris' theology in relation to the ongoing debate on theology of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka. With this point in focus I will study briefly the theological contribution of three prominent theologians of international repute under specific theological concerns we need to pursue in dialogue in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka. The choice of these theologians is also based on the importance of the Christian ecumenical thrust in dealing with the religious pluralism in Sri Lanka. The three who will be discussed here are: Lakshman Wickremesinghe (an Anglican Bishop), Lynn A. De Silva (a Methodist pastor), and Michael Rodrigo (Catholic priest-martyr). These three theologians, from different Christian Churches represent the major contextual theological perspectives that are being evolved within the process of veritable symbiosis of religions in Sri Lanka.

¹⁹⁰ For and elaborative study of the *Magisterium of the Poor* see, A. Pieris, *Give Vatican a Chance*, TRC, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 2010, pp. 47 and 112- 117. Pieris finds support from Pope John Paul II who challenged the traditional dichotomy of the church into a teaching church and learning church (Cf. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1994. p. 175).

¹⁹¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Fire and Water*, (Chapter 14), p.156.

Wickremesinghe attempted to construct a common religio-cultural dialogical base for a new socio-economic order. De Silva sought to use Buddhist categories as the texture to articulate biblical doctrine. Rodrigo endeavoured to evolve a theology within the Buddhist rural-poor.

4.5.1 Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe (1927-1983)

Bishop Wickremesinghe was one of the leading Anglican thinkers in Sri Lanka. He was born into a Sinhala aristocratic family in Kandy. He graduated in political science from the University of Ceylon and had his early education at Oxford, England. He was ordained in England as a priest in 1953. He served as the Anglican Bishop of Kurunagala, from 1962-1983. His leadership was appreciated not only in his Anglican communion, but also in ecumenical circles in Sri Lanka, in the EATWOT and in the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).¹⁹²

He was involved in social concerns of Sri Lanka in the 1950s at a time the Sri Lankan Church lacked socio-cultural involvement. His pioneering work among English speaking, white-collar Christian workers in Colombo city to address the problems and concerns of the workers gave birth to the non-denominational lay movement called “Christian Workers’ Fellowship” (CWF) in 1958. This movement, by its non-denominational nature, is open to all the churches and to inter-communion among them, and is committed to inter-religious dialogue, action and worship.¹⁹³ He was also one of those who pioneered the Civil Rights Movement in Sri Lanka (1971) and who later became its president. Just before his death in 1983 he initiated the ‘Christians in Struggle for a Just Society’ movement. For him, dialogue that recognized *receptive*

¹⁹² Cf. F. Balasundaram, “The Prophetic Voices of Asia,” in: *Logos*, vol. 33, nos. 1 and 2, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1994, p.141.

¹⁹³ Cf. T. Balasuriya, OMI, “The Christian Workers’ Fellowship of Sri Lanka”, in: *Concilium*, 1993/2, (pp.121-130), p.122.

plurality was the way forward in the search for truth and nation building.¹⁹⁴ It is an attitude of openness to and acceptance of the working of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Church.¹⁹⁵

Wickremesinghe's theology was a result of his deep involvement in the lives of people in Sri Lanka especially in the areas of human rights, plantation workers, ethnic conflict and interreligious dialogue. He made religiosity and poverty his starting point and matrix of theological thinking.¹⁹⁶ In the wake of revival and cultural renaissance of the ancient religions, particularly Buddhism, in Sri Lanka in the 1950s Wickremesinghe saw the irrelevance of the triumphalistic Church inherited from the colonial past. He, following in the steps of Pieris', succinctly states his ecclesiological vision as follows:

We are called to take our inherited forms of Church life, worship and witness and immerse them in the turbulent waters of contemporary Asian history, and go on to experience suffering and desolation within its oppressive realities. What will emerge from such a baptism and crucifixion, by the power of the Spirit, will be the resurrection to a new life and life-giving form of Christianity which will have some continuity with the Christianity we have inherited.¹⁹⁷

He acknowledged the *foreignness* of the Sri Lanka Church when he said the Church itself is alienated from the masses.¹⁹⁸ Showing the way to overcome this unhealthy situation between the Sri Lankan Church and its masses, he stated:

The alienation of the masses from the church can be overcome, (. . .) not merely by improving their living standards and empowering them with skills through a variety of development projects, but primarily by taking their side against their oppressors, and organizing with them to establish a just social system.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Cf. P. Niles (ed.), Special Wickremesinghe Issue of *CCA-CTC Bulletin*, vol.5, nos.1-2 (April-August), 1984, p.4.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *FAPA*, (1992), p.261. Also see *Ibid.*, p.300 (BIRA/IV, 1987, no.3) and p.322 (BIRA IV/11, 1988, no.20).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. S Batumalai, *An Introduction to Asian Theology: An Asian Story from a Malaysian Eye for Asian Neighbourhoodology*, ISPCK, Delhi, 1991, p. 216.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. P. Niles (ed.), Special Wickremesinghe issue of *CCA-CTC Bul.*, p.2. According to Preman Niles of the United Reform Church of the United Kingdom, a Sri Lankan theologian of international repute, Wickremesinghe in some way is indebted to the theological thinking of Aloysius Pieris (Cf. Preman Niles, "Asian Religiosity and Asian Poverty: An Asian Protestant Comment," in: Robert Cruze *et al.* (eds.), *A Festschrift honouring Aloysius Pieris*, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004, (pp. 89-116), here p. 91).

¹⁹⁸ Cf. L. Wickremesinghe, "Alienated Church and Signs of the Times," in: *VTW, CSR*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, vol. 9, no. 3, 1986, (pp. 14-17), here 15.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. L. Wickremesinghe, "Alienated Church and Signs of the Times," in: *VTW*, p.16.

He asserted that the mission goal of the Church is the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom of God is made a reality on earth when the Church promotes values of the Kingdom, through witness to Jesus Christ and by being with the people in their human struggles for a just society.²⁰⁰ He rejected any form of absorption of other religionists or religions to the visible church, for he saw the legitimacy of religious pluralism.²⁰¹ He argued that the mission of Jesus Christ was to usher in a new order of life and not merely to gather a company of disciples who acknowledge his name. Hence, the mission of the Church is not merely to save individuals or only the Christians as a group.

Wickremesinghe has a strong base of Christology that remained central in his theological thought. For him Christology was not the starting point but was the conclusion of every form of struggle and journey of the poor. He argues that a Christology relevant to Sri Lanka would see Jesus as a friend of sinners and the outcast, the self-sacrificing *satyagrahi* (“one who holds fast to the truth”) and, a prophet and martyr. In all these portraits, Wickremesinghe saw Jesus primarily as one who denounces the oppressive structures and works towards a righteous society.²⁰² He also talked of the Cosmic Christ (totality of Christ) that includes all religious traditions with their varying degrees of effectiveness and autonomous contribution to the salvation history of humankind. However, his notion of the centrality of Christ, which he termed as “Christ-centered reciprocity,”²⁰³ seems to view other religious traditions and their salvation

²⁰⁰ Cf. L. Wichremesinghe, “Christianity in the Context of Other Faiths,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1980, p. 33.

²⁰¹ Cf. L. Wichremesinghe, “Christianity in the Context of Other Faiths,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, pp. 32-33.

²⁰² Cf. P. Niles (ed.), Special Wickremesinghe Issue of *CCA-CTC Bul.*, p. 101.

²⁰³ The “Christ-centred reciprocity” towards other religions and their adherents yields greater mutual enrichment and helps the Christians to appreciate and assess the positive value other religions within God’s creating, saving, and transfiguring purpose.

histories as prologues to Christianity.²⁰⁴ The positive side of his notion of “Christ-centered reciprocity” is that it acknowledges other religions’ relative autonomy and effectiveness in the salvation history of humankind. Nevertheless, it is observed, that Wickremesinghe did not have a systematic and detailed exposition on Christology to his credit.²⁰⁵ Yet, the Christological basis of his theology emerged out of his dialogue with the poor in their living situations and other religions.²⁰⁶ For Wickremesinghe, the poor include the economically poor, and all who are deprived of their share by social structures and who are made either submissive, or alienated by psychological pressure. Hence, for him the poor in Sri Lanka are precisely the racial and ethnic minorities, women, unemployed youth, the disabled, the displaced and dissenting groups deprived of civil rights. His basic concern, it would seem, is more than theological propositions.

Wickremesinghe identified two conflicting ideologies, namely, “Welfare capitalism” and “Marxist Socialism” that provide a sense of direction for the socio-economic political reconstruction of society in the post colonial situation of Sri Lanka.²⁰⁷ He saw them as deficient ideologies. Hence, to redeem this prevailing situation he proposes that the Church opt for ideology, programme, and strategy covered by the term “indigenous Marxian socialism.” However, he would not place any ideology above the gospel. Wickremesinghe’s brand of socialism is primarily shaped by the Bible and the lived religious values of the other great religions in Sri Lanka. It is an ideology influenced rather than dominated by Marxism. It assures a better opportunity for the vast majority of people, to secure personal dignity, to be treated justly, experience well-being and fulfillment both personally and in community.²⁰⁸ The Marxist

²⁰⁴ Cf. L. Wickremesinghe, “Christianity in the Context of Other Faiths,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, pp. 31-33.

²⁰⁵ Cf. F. Balasundaram, “The Prophetic Voices of Asia,” in: *Logos*, pp.146 and 149.

²⁰⁶ Cf. P. Niles (ed.), Special Wickremesinghe Issue of *CCA-CTC Bul.*, p.10.

²⁰⁷ Cf. F. Balasundaram, “The Prophetic Voices of Asia,” in: *Logos*, p. 143-44.

²⁰⁸ Cf. L. Wickremesinghe, “Living in Christ with People”, in: *Quest*, vol. 81, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1984, p. 101.

analysis of social structures based on class cannot really remove the oppressive structures of racism, sexism, elitism and authoritarianism. For Wickremesinghe it is only through the liberation from greed and an interiorized relationship with a Transcendent which all religions strive to facilitate that one can find a way out of evil prevalent in society.²⁰⁹ He further pleads for a necessary dialogue between Christianity and ideologies and certain socio-political values. Thus he states:

I do assert the necessary connection between Christianity and certain socio-political values. Some sets of socio-political ideals are morally better than others, because the Christian understanding of man's nature and his destiny is implied in them (...). But I also see that both the creative power released through forgiveness and renewal in Christ and the ultimate worth of human ideals give a solid worthwhileness to human efforts to build a better life here and now on earth.²¹⁰

While there are many areas of agreement between Pieris and Wickremesinghe the specific insistence that the Sri Lankan Church should strive to become the Church of the poor stands out. As noted, Pieris appeals to the Church in Sri Lanka and other religions to side with the poor to fight the common enemy, mammon. This insistence by both Pieris a Catholic, and Wickremesinghe an Anglican, clearly reflects the urgency of the Sri Lanka Church to become the Church of the poor in her mission towards all people. However, compared to Wickremesinghe, Pieris has a more comprehensive exposition of Christology to his credit. Wickremesinghe did not directly enter into a dialogue with Buddhist doctrine either. But he was very appreciative of the *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) movement of Sri Lanka based on the fundamental principles of Buddhist philosophy founded by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne.²¹¹ He accepted with legitimate corrections the ideology of the *Sarvodaya* movement. It is a movement that

²⁰⁹ Cf. L. Wickremesinghe, "Togetherness and Uniqueness - Living Faiths in Inter-relation," in: *Quest*, vol. 81, CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1984, pp. 49-66.

²¹⁰ Cf. L. Wickremesinghe, "Mission, Politics and Evangelism," in: Preman Niles (ed.), Special Wickremesinghe issue of *CCA-CTC Bul.*, p. 55.

²¹¹ Cf. N. Abeyasinghe, *The Radical Tradition: The Changing Shape of Theological Reflection in Sri Lanka*, (hereafter, *The Radical Tradition*), EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1985, pp. 141 and 146. Also see F. Balasundaram, "The Prophetic Voices of Asia," in: *Logos*, pp.144-46.

begins with the awakening of individuals, families and communities to their own potential particularly in the rural villages in Sri Lanka. Both were very critical of Marxist Socialism and Capitalism, very precisely, as Pieris would call the *European form of capitalist industrialization*.²¹² Furthermore, according to Pieris, Marxism cannot be taken as it is for it basically sees religion and poverty as major obstacles to liberation understood in term of socio-economics.²¹³ On the contrary, Pieris highlights the liberative dimensions of religiousness and poverty, taken together has a positive value in Asia. Pieris further points out that according to Karl Marx's *Manifesto*, "the idea of 'progress' and 'civilization' is simply equated with westernization of the East, urbanization of the countryside, and proletarianization of the peasantry – all in the name of socialism."²¹⁴ Hence he argues that Marxism has to be indigenous in terms of *religious socialism* of the poor monks in monastic communities who assume voluntary poverty to remove the forced poverty of many.²¹⁵

4.5.2 Rev. Lynn A. De Silva (1919-1982)

Lynn De Silva was one of the most creative pioneers in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Sri Lanka. He studied theology at United Theological College, Bangalore, India. He was ordained a minister in the Methodist Church in 1950. He became the first director of the "Centre for Religion and Society" which later assumed the name of "Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue." He is another theologian along with Pieris who has the ability to speak from within Buddhism thus avoiding some other Sri Lankan approaches which follow the comparative religious method. He was clear about the need for a firm theological foundation lest dialogue

²¹² Cf. A. Pieris *Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 81 and 91-93.

²¹³ Cf. A. Pieris *Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.43 and 91.

²¹⁴ Cf. A. Pieris *Asian Theology of Liberation*, p.92.

²¹⁵ Cf. A. Pieris *Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp.43-45.

become a deceptive pretense. Despite the differences of the idiom and language of the two religions he believed that Christian revelation could be communicated in Buddhist concepts. It is at the level of doctrinal concepts that he has made his most notable contribution to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue.²¹⁶ Accordingly the most original contribution to theology is well demonstrated in his exposition of the relation between the Buddhist the doctrine of *anatta* (non-self) and the Christian teaching of the *pneuma* (Spirit).²¹⁷

De Silva in his indigenous Christian theology first draws our attention to the fact that Buddhism begins with an analysis of the human condition. The human condition is reflected in Prince Siddhartha's experience of three sights – an old man, a sick man, and a corpse – signifying the fact of negativity, nihility, or mortality inherent in all existence. This analysis gave rise to the *Tilakkhana* concept which sums up well the essence of Buddhist teaching and thus formed the conceptual framework of Buddhism.²¹⁸ The Pali term *Tilakkhana* connotes the three fundamental characteristics or marks of all conditioned existence (*samsaric* existence). De Silva finds a comprehensive analysis of human predicament in the *Tilakkhana* – namely, *anicca*: impermanence, *dukkha*: all aspects of suffering and, *anatta*: non-self, non-being, or nothingness. Accordingly he states: “all existence in its absolute entirety is but a flux-in-process (*anicca*), having nothing permanent or enduring in the process of change (*anatta*), and hence inherently

²¹⁶ De Silva, however, identified three inter-related levels of dialogue: the intellectual (conceptual clarification), experiential (spiritual experience), and socio-political (common search for a just and stable society) (see De Silva, “The Understanding and Goal of Dialogue,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 4, nos.1-2, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1977, (pp. 3-26), here pp.3-4. Also see Idem, “Dialogue in the context of Sri Lanka Buddhism,” in: T. D. Francis (ed.) *New Approaches to inter-Faith Dialogue*, The Church of Sweden Mission, Uppsala, Sweden, 1980, p. 93).

²¹⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 48. Also see N. Abeyasinghe, *The Radical Tradition*, p. 121.

²¹⁸ Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1976, p.40. Also see T. Brian de Alwis, “Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in the Writings of De Silva,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 9, no.1, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1983, (pp. 33-38), here p. 35. This is the synopsis of Brian de Alwis' doctoral dissertation, presented at Andrews University, Michigan, USA in 1982.

incapable of producing any lasting satisfaction (*dukkha*).²¹⁹ Here, he sees that there is much in the Buddhist *Tilakkhana* which Christian theology can accept. However, De Silva saw the urgent need for a systematic analysis of the doctrine of *anatta* which may present some difficulties from the Christian point of view.²²⁰ According to the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* there is nothing real or factual in human beings, which corresponds to such words as “I,” “me,” “mine.”²²¹ They are all conventional terms. All in all, the *Tilakkhana* emphasizes human’s non-egoity (*anatta*-ness). This is a rejection of all eternalistic notions of the self (*sassataditthi*) such as an immortal, immutable soul, an unchanging entity, or an undying essence. At the same time, according to Buddhism, this does not amount to annihilation of the self (*uccedaditthi*).²²² For De Silva this is a baffling paradox that Christian theologians have to address particularly in the pluralistic context of Sri Lanka. He proposed a solution to this paradox in terms of the biblical understanding of the self as existing only in living relationship with other individuals reaching its perfection in communion with God, the Transcendent.

De Silva argued that a great deal of the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* has biblical support, for instant, Ps.90:3-5; Rom.8:18-25.²²³ However, it is usually assumed to be in complete opposition to the Christian belief because the notion of an immortal soul is deeply embedded in popular or conventional Christian thinking. He underscored that modern biblical scholarship rules out any dichotomous concept such as body and soul but affirms the reality of the integral

²¹⁹ Cf. De Silva, “Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, p.97.

²²⁰ De Silva sees no difficulty in accepting the Buddhist doctrines of *anicca* and *dukkha* since there are number of biblical passages such as Ps.11:3-4; Eccles.10:8-11; Ps.32:6; 2Cor.4:18 that speak of the transitoriness and suffering and anxiety of human life. However, he points out that there is no systematic exposition of these human conditions in the Bible as is found in the Buddhists texts (Cf. De Silva, “Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, pp.98-99).

²²¹ Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, pp.42.

²²² Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, pp.42 and 44.

²²³ Cf. De Silva, “Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, p.99.

person. The dualistic notion of body and soul is an alien infiltration from Greek philosophy into Christianity. Therefore, De Silva pointed out that the “biblical view of human person is holistic and not dualistic, and the notion of “soul” as an immortal entity that enters the body at birth and leaves it at death is quite foreign to it.”²²⁴ He further saw a close resemblance between Buddhist analysis of *nāma-rūpa* (name-form) and biblical view of psyche-sarx (psycho-physical), aggregations which constitute a person.²²⁵ Thus he stated that “just as in Buddhism man is a unity of *nāma-rūpa*, so in the Bible man is a [non-separable] unity of psyche-soma; just as Buddhism says there is no soul entity within the *nāma-rūpa* complex, so the Bible leaves no room for a notion of an immortal soul within the *psyche-sarx* unity of man.”²²⁶ Having identified this close resemblance De Silva went on to speak of a biblical doctrine of *anatta*. Accordingly, he first pointed out that the major difference is found in the solution that Buddhism and Christianity offer to overcome the hallmarks of existence, namely, impermanence, suffering and non-self. The Buddhist solution is found in the complete extinction of the notion of the self, by the eradication of its cause, *tanha* (craving, desire, thirst for existence) and thus upholding the doctrine of *anatta*.²²⁷ To be precise, the human person must realize his non-egoity, and free himself from the false notion of “I”, “me” and “mine” if he is to gain final liberation. Here, the Buddhist doctrinal teaching is that the human person, while denying the self, has the moral capacity or sufficiency by a natural right to determine his destiny and to “save” himself.²²⁸ This shows that Buddhism begins with an inward examination of self and realizes its non-egoity, and

²²⁴ Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, p.42. Also see De Silva, “Buddhism and Christianity Relativised,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 9, nos. 1-3, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1982, (pp. 43-72), here p.64.

²²⁵ Cf. De Silva, “Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context,” in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, pp. 99-100.

²²⁶ Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, pp. 42-43.

²²⁷ Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, p.44.

²²⁸ Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, p.43.

then something beyond is sought. In contrast, Christianity begins with the realization of God's greatness in relation to which human beings are insignificant, and apart from whom they are nothing at all. The human person, according to Christian belief, is absolutely nothing by/in himself and can do nothing by himself without the Unconditioned (God) to earn his salvation. Hence, the Christian understanding of the non-egoity derives within the context of a relationship between human beings as the creatures and God as their creator.²²⁹ Here, we also notice a difference of emphasis: Christianity emphasizes *mutuality*, the "I"-*"Thou"* relationship (right-relatedness); Buddhism emphasizes *non-egoity* or *anatta*-ness; and both emphasize *transcendence*, an ultimate reality towards which humans are oriented. Thus De Silva proposed a biblical doctrine of *anatta* his most original contribution to theology.

Here, the basic argument of his theology of biblical *anatta* is that the self only exists in the communion of selves.²³⁰ A human being is not an island. To be is to be related. This communion of human selves will be progressively sanctified until it reaches perfect communion with God. He stressed that this communion is not absorption into a distinctionless union. Communion is participation in which a person retains his differentiation as a person (personal identity) without a mark of exclusive individuality that the notions of "I", "me" and "mine" entails, for human beings become person only in relationship.²³¹ It is an identity within totality. In his biblical understanding of *Tilakkhana* De Silva points out that a person loses his exclusive individuality completely through participation but discovers authentic selfhood or personal identity through communion. Thus De Silva emphasized the undeniable reality of the person in every human being. He extends this argument to say that *authentic* self or the human "I" is found

²²⁹ Cf. De Silva, "Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, p. 100.

²³⁰ Cf. De Silva, "Buddhist and Christianity Relativised," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.65.

²³¹ Cf. De Silva, "Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, p. 104.

only in relationship with divine “Thou” (God). That is to say that “I” is not in me or in thee, but in the relationship between me and thee. It is within this “I”-“Thou” relationship that De Silva understood biblical *anatta* which denies the self without yielding to a nihilistic view, and which affirms the authentic self without yielding to an eternalistic view. This language of participation, communion and dialogue in the Trinitarian fellowship without losing one’s personal identity is well articulated in *DV. 2*. It speaks of revelation as basically an invitation of God, extended to human beings to share in the divine nature, which in fact is the sole purpose of divine revelation. Accordingly, our salvation is to share in the divine nature of the triune God; to enter into supernatural fellowship with the Father through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit.

This relationship between “I” and “Thou” is drawn upon the relation between *anatta* and *pneuma*.²³² The Christian solution to overcome the human predicament, in contrast to the Buddhist solution of complete extinction of self, consists in an understanding of authentic selfhood constituted in a relationship signified by the term “spirit”. According to De Silva, this human spirit has no immortal quality nor does it exist independently. It can exist only in a relationship. He recognized this human spirit as a dynamic quality of the human being, constituent of personality or selfhood and the bearer of individual life. The human spirit embodies the whole psycho-physical (or the psychosomatic) reality of the human person which is a unity of ‘soul’ (*psyche*), ‘flesh’ (*sarx*), and body (*soma*). This human spirit comes to an end with death. It cannot itself survive death. Nevertheless, for De Silva the human spirit is that dimension in a person that links it with the Divine Spirit which has the power to take the human spirit into a new sphere of existence after death. He described the human spirit as follows:

The human spirit is that dimension in man which makes him more than psychosomatic being or a physical organism and distinguishes him from animals; it is that which enables the born (*jatam*) to have an intuition of the Unborn (*ajutam*),

²³² Cf. De Silva, “Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context,” in: Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *AVCTh*, p.44.

which animals do not have. It is that which links the born with the Unborn, the spirit with SPIRIT.²³³

It is only through the recreating power of the Divine Spirit that the human spirit can survive death. This is what, according to De Silva, Christians mean by resurrection or recreation.²³⁴ De Silva's contention is that if *anicca* and *anatta* are real, that is, if human beings are absolutely nothing there can be nothing in us that can survive death. Hence, for a Christian the truth of *anatta* requires the truth of resurrection which enables human persons to transcend *anatta* or non-being.²³⁵ He concludes that the biblical understanding of *Tilakkhana*, especially *anatta*, can enable us to understand why we need God. He finds meaningfulness in the reality of *anatta* in relation to the reality of God. He states:

Because human beings are *anatta*, God is indispensable; because they are absolutely *anatta*, God is absolutely necessary. The conditioned (*samkhata*) has nothing to hope for unless there is an unconditioned Reality (*asamkhata*). It is in relation to the Unconditioned (God) that the full depth and significance of *anatta* can be understood.²³⁶

Pieris appreciates De Silva's cross-scriptural reading of the Pāli Tripitaka and the Hebrew Bible in his well known study on the 'Self' in Buddhism and Christianity. He considers this cross-scriptural exegesis of the symbiotic type as a creative and useful exegetical principle in the context of inter-religious dialogue.²³⁷ He states, "In this symbiotic approach, no room is left for diluting or distorting the basic teaching of either religion; and no effort is made to indulge in easy equation or odious comparisons."²³⁸ De Silva states: "The goal of dialogue should be to discover, through a process of re-conception or reassessment, Faith in relation to Faiths. Such a

²³³ Cf. De Silva, "Buddhism and Christianity Relativised," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.65.

²³⁴ Cf. De Silva, "Buddhism and Christianity Relativised," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp.64- 66.

²³⁵ Cf. De Silva, "Buddhism and Christianity Relativised," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.66.

²³⁶ Cf. De Silva, "Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context," in: V. Fabella (ed.), *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, p. 101.

²³⁷ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp. 88-100.

²³⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 100.

relation, the core of which is love, will be the basis of community in a pluralist world.”²³⁹ Pieris, endorsing De Silva, further says that Biblical Christianity too subscribes to the three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhana*) in its own way.²⁴⁰ Thus Pieris quotes the letter to the Hebrew to show the impermanent characteristic of the cosmos: “Here we do not have a permanent city” (Heb. 13:14). He further says that the notion of “immortal soul” is non biblical and such theory was adopted by Westernized Christianity from Greek philosophy in the post-biblical period. He points out that the most liberating experience of God for a Christian gnostic is to experience one’s own creatureliness, the “dust-ness” of one’s origin and destiny (Gen.3:19) – and to the Christian this is the practical fruit of the *gnostic* path of the Buddha.”²⁴¹ However, complementing De Silva’s conceptual dialogue, Pieris says that the concepts and epithets such as God, Person, Creator, Redeemer and “Tripersonal unity” should be regarded as *icons* and not as formulae with clearly defined human concepts which binds on one’s faith by reason or authority.²⁴² They can harm us if we turned them into *idols*. Pieris argues that a formulatory theology, unless aided and complemented by the evocative idioms, such as song, dance and drama, painting and sculpture, narratives and parables, can run into the claws of idolatry. The *icons* do not offer us a true and definitive description of God but are signs by which we may reach God. They are neither God nor images of God but “a vehicle of his presence and power, means by which he comes to us and acts on us. However, Pieris does not rule out the legitimacy and necessity of doctrinal dimension in the expression of our faith.”²⁴³ Pieris argues that his

²³⁹ Cf. De Silva, “The Understanding and Goal of Dialogue,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 8.

²⁴⁰ Cf. A. Pieris, “Two Mission Mandates Calling for Conversion,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vols. 32-33, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2005-2006, (pp.1-57), here p.18.

²⁴¹ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 118.

²⁴² Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 119.

²⁴³ Cf. A. Pieris, “The Christhood of Jesus and the Discipleship of Mary,” in: *Logos*, p. 82.

complementary thought can provide a successful breakthrough to appreciate a possible Christian understanding of Buddhism's denial of God and soul.

4.5.3 Michael Paul Rodrigo, O.M.I. (1927-1989)

Michael Rodrigo was a religious priest who belonged to the order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He held two doctorates in theology and was a professor at the National Seminary, Kandy, Sri Lanka for sixteen years before he opted to live the rest of his life with poor peasants at Alukalavita, Buttata, Sri Lanka. He was regarded as the leader of liturgical renewal of the sixties in the Catholic Church of Sri Lanka.²⁴⁴

Rodrigo developed a new model of Christian-Buddhist "Dialogue of Life at the Village Level". He made a pioneering effort to take the dialogue into the rural interior of Sri Lanka from its comfortable zones of conferences and seminars. This dialogue of life goes beyond the mere dialogue of religions as systems of dogmas, rituals, and institutions to encounter persons in their life reality. For Rodrigo, dialogue in Sri Lanka with the religions, cultures and people means basically a dialogue with the poor. Commenting on the Triple-Dialogue spelt out at the FABC's Tokyo session, 1979, Rodrigo emphatically supported *Dialogue of Life*, distinguished from the Dialogue of Understanding, and that of Prayer and Religious Experience, as the most practical and cogent in any part of the world.²⁴⁵

Rodrigo's dialogical theology was born of the concrete experience of living in the periphery of the Church where he met the religious poor, mostly Buddhist, with their living situation. This voice of the poor was brutally killed on the 10th November, 1987 while

²⁴⁴ Cf. B. Fernando, "Michael Rodrigo: a Controversial Priest," in: *Dialogue* (NS)-Michael Rodrigo Memorial issue, vol. 15, nos.1-3, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1988, (pp. 7-10), here p.7.

²⁴⁵ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "Towards a More Intensive Dialogue with Buddhists," in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 12, nos. 1-3, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1985, (pp. 5-16), here p.6.

celebrating the Eucharist at his mud-hut named “Subaseth Gedara” (good wishes house) at Buttala, a rural and a 99% Buddhist village. He described his mission and vision as follows:

I came out to the village (Alukalawita) in July 1980, also as an act of reconciliation and recompense for the damage British Christians did to our peasantry in 1818. I have learnt at the feet of the people, the poor masses, and at the feet of the Gurus of the village whom I always revere – the Buddhist monks who slowly but surely try in many places in Sri Lanka to lead the people to the living out of the *Dhamma* in practice. Everyday I learn from the people, farmers and peasants specially, patience, renunciation, acceptance of their lot, suffering, hope in solidarity and what are generally called the *Sāradharma*, virtues of sharing, brotherhood, rejection of greed (*tanha*, or avarice). Through our Village Effort at Dialogue, (. . .), may there be a saner approach to Dialogue, to the poor, to the liberation thrust that we may move slowly but surely to the future of removing as best as we can, the milestones to Armageddon.²⁴⁶

His vision was to create self sustainability in all spheres of life through religious harmony, educational empowerment, leadership training in leadership qualities and information technology skills. Rodrigo strongly urged that if the Sri Lankan Church wants to become truly a liberated local church she should learn to look at society from the viewpoint and the stand-point of the poor.²⁴⁷ Only such a Church will safeguard its universal, catholic character. The following simple words of a village youth leader sum it all in brief what Rodrigo envisaged as the local church of Sri Lanka and her mission to be.

I accept Jesus as a founder of a noble religion, one who showed sincere affection for people. He loved all as equals and showed it by his life (...). At the start, some young people watched you carefully; how will you act towards us? Did you come to turn us to your ways somehow? Were you an international spy-group or spying to eventually sell out our village? – were questions harassing us youth. But we went beyond observation, worked with you as you worked with the people. There we discovered the true face of what you call ‘sabhāva’ the church.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ From “Fr. Michael Rodrigo’s Mission in his own Words,” in: *Fr. Michael Rodrigo: Prophet, Priest and Martyr*, (A Christian Workers’ Fellowship pamphlet), Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1989, p.14.

²⁴⁷ Cf. M. Rodrigo, “Bible and the Liberation of the Poor,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol.15, nos. 1-3, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1988, (pp.61- 83), pp.74-75. This was the major Christian position paper presented at the international conference on “World Religions and the Liberation of the Poor” organized by EISD and held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in August 1987. This was also the last paper the late Fr. Michael Rodrigo read at an international conference prior to his assassination in November of the same year.

²⁴⁸ Cf. M. Rodrigo, “Buddhism and Christianity: Towards the Human Future,” in: *Dialogue* (NS), vols.13&14, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1986-1987, (pp. 94-110), here p.101.

A key concept in Rodrigo's theology is the idea of Christ's Passover and our moral Passover from selfishness to selflessness. This Passover is commonly spoken of in the Sri Lankan/Asian context as a Passover from death to life, darkness to light, from self-love to selflessness, from bondage to captivity, from ignorance to knowledge. According to Rodrigo, Christ by his life-giving death and resurrection transferred all Passover symbolization to himself. Christ, by what He is and what He did and what He does is the Universal and primordial Symbol. Christ, therefore, is the Symbol of the true Passover, which is human beings' liberation in its deepest form. Rodrigo pursued this concept as the theme in a doctoral dissertation.²⁴⁹ Rodrigo showed that the reality of Passover is central to Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism (Saivism) and Islam interpreted according to each religious tradition. Thus he viewed self-sacrifice (self-emptying) and selflessness as the basic matrix of all religions.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, he made a radical point when he recognized self-sacrifice and selflessness as truly and fully human. The falsely human is the tendency to egoism and self-aggrandizement because of human being's proneness to evil in many ways. Thus, for Rodrigo, unless the basic human traits of self-sacrifice and selflessness are operative in societies and religions they cannot be considered as truly human and liberative. When these Passover elements are ignored by any society or religion it plunges the world into chaos and violence. According to Rodrigo this is exactly what happened in Sri Lanka under the colonial powers which promoted greed (*tanha*) and selfishness. This trend is being perpetuated even after the colonial era through the subtle mechanism of neocolonialism which operates on Capitalist principles. The Sri Lankan Church should take the lead to make this moral

²⁴⁹ Cf. M. Rodrigo, *The Moral Passover From Selfishness to Selflessness in Christianity and Other Religions in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)*, Doctoral Diss., Institut Catholique, Paris, January, 1973. This dissertation was in two volumes. Volume-I was published as *Quest*, vol. 54, 1979, and Volume-II as *Quest*, vol. 65, 1981 by CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Also a summary form of the Volume-I was published as *Logos*, vol.27, no.3, 1988 by CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The *Quest* and *Logos* are two publications of CSR, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

²⁵⁰ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "Buddhism and Christianity: Towards the Human Future," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p. 96.

passover or transition realized not only in individuals but also in society through authentic inter-religious dialogue.

Rodrigo built this theological argument on the radical self-emptying love of Jesus, the *kenosis* (Phil. 2:5-11). This spirituality of radical self-emptying or selflessness is an eminent need that must be fostered by both Christians and Buddhists for them to grow together in true brother/sisterhood in Sri Lanka. Thus he strongly urged that in the common search for truth in the religio-pluralistic context of Sri Lanka the *kenosis* of the Christian community must be matched with the *anatta* (selflessness) of the Buddhist *sāsana* as closely as possible.²⁵¹ Here, Rodrigo appreciated Lynn De Silva's contribution to the study of *anatta* and *kenosis*.²⁵² Rodrigo maintained that if Jesus who emptied himself is the Truth, the Way and the Life, Christians who profess to follow him must lose themselves as the leaven in the dough. For Rodrigo, the self-emptying of Christ is a model for imitation rather than a proposition for theological debate. Hence self-emptying always demands a radical discipleship of service. If Christians do not join Jesus in his *kenosis* they are not Christians. Rodrigo maintained that it is in the measure that a Christian loses himself that he will evangelically find himself, in the process of being and becoming, "all things to all men" (1Cor 9:19-23).²⁵³ In such a radical self-emptying process a Christian will begin to see the humility of the hidden Christ in the religious aspirations of the people who belong to various religious traditions. As Rodrigo believed it is also in the same process that a true Christian will see the glory of the Risen Christ as He emerges from His hiding place, for He is essentially a God risen but hidden.

²⁵¹ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "Buddhism and Christianity: Towards the Human Future," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.95.

²⁵² Cf. M. Rodrigo, "A Basis for Dialogue in Community: A Christian Point of View," in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol. 4, nos. 1 and 2, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1977, (17-26), here p.21.

²⁵³ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "A Basis for Dialogue in Community: A Christian Point of View," in: *Dialogue* (NS), pp.20-21.

Rodrigo explains his theological insight on *kenosis* based on the Trinity as source of relationships. He sees this communitarian image of God (*imago Dei*) in human beings. He argued that life in communion is the essential nature of human beings. This implies that the *imago Dei* in human beings is basically the relationship for which they are created with their neighbor before God. Here we observe the dynamism of God's free self gift or revelation to humankind and its orientation towards that Transcendent God, to the cosmos and to one another in the human community. However, while the Trinity is the source of our unity in diversity, the *kenosis* of Jesus in birth, life and death is the unmistakable "How" or the "Channel" of our relationship restored and the community recreated. Hence, for Rodrigo as a Catholic Christian, the Trinity of persons is the remote foundation of dialogue in community while the *kenotic* incarnation of Jesus is its proximate foundation.²⁵⁴ Rodrigo's insistence on the Holy Trinity, something that is not intelligible to Buddhists and Muslims, should not be a barrier for dialogue. Here, he attempted to explain the relational reality as having a primordial source. Thus the Christians' self-emptying moral passover will lead them to appreciate God's revelation (self-communication) in other religions and their scriptures, in Peoples' Community built on *kenosis* and *anatta*, and in the organic unity of ecology.²⁵⁵ For instance, *kenosis* will open the eyes of Christians to the Pure Being, the Pure Thought, and the Pure Joy of the Hindu *Saccidananda* (*Sat-cit-ānanda*), to the qualities of Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, to the *avatars*, to the radical oneness of reality.²⁵⁶ In his own lived experience, Rodrigo finds a common value in the Christian reality of *kenosis* and in Buddha's radical selfless approach to the reality of life while respecting non-negotiable differences between the two traditions. Buddha opted for a life of wise detachment

²⁵⁴ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "A Basis for Dialogue in Community: A Christian Point of View," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.18.

²⁵⁵ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "A Basis for Dialogue in Community: A Christian Point of View," in: *Dialogue* (NS), p.21.

²⁵⁶ *Saccidananda* is a compound of three Sanskrit words: 'Sat' (being) 'Cit' (knowledge), and 'ānanda' (the absolute bliss of divine union). It is a Hindu name for the Godhead the Christians have adopted to refer to the Trinity particularly in India.

from the lure of land, possessions, in the search of truth. His leaving home and luxury symbolizes a deep self-emptying nature, or more aptly selflessness (*anatta*) of Buddha himself. In his life of radical renunciation of material goods and worldly allurements Buddha found real power, real humanness, and real newness of life. Rodrigo viewed this selflessness of Buddha as his departure into the ranks of the voiceless poor (struggle to be poor) by equalization (*Upekkha*: Equanimity or even mindedness on all beings). It was also seen as a rejection of the power of the sword wielded by the *kshātriya* (warrior) caste of Brahmanism to which Siddhārtha Gautama who later became Buddha, belonged.²⁵⁷

Pieris recognizes Rodrigo most of all for his pioneering efforts in opening the Sri Lankan Church to its periphery. He cites Rodrigo as an example of a theologian who, through a dialogue with the peripheral and the powerless people, mainly Buddhists, had been schooled in the art of speaking the language of the poor, that is, the language of liberation. He also sees him as the major figure in the post-conciliar liturgical renewal in the Church of Sri Lanka.²⁵⁸ Pieris, by his thesis of twofold Word-Command, makes explicit what is implicit in Rodrigo's perception of Passover as the total vision of the mission of Christ. According to Pieris what makes the paschal event salvific is that Jesus embraced death on a Cross in loving *obedience* to the Father (Phil. 2:8) as required by the First Love-command, and equally out of his abundant *love* for humankind (Eph.5:2) in conformity with the Second Love-Command.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, for Pieris Jesus' *kenotic* spirituality is well articulated in theistic terms in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Here Pieris brings out clearly Jesus' voluntary option for the beatitude values which he demands in turn of his disciples through his covenantal partnership. However, Rodrigo prefers to

²⁵⁷ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "Buddhism and Christianity: Towards the Human Future," p.96.

²⁵⁸ Cf. A. Pieris, "The Revered Father Michael Rodrigo"(editorial), in: *Dialogue* (NS), vol.15, nos. 1-3, EISD, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1988, (pp.1-6), here p.3.

²⁵⁹ Cf. A. Pieris, "Christ Beyond Dogma," p.225.

see the content of the Beatitudes not so much as an ideal proposal to Jesus' disciples, but as a tragic human situation crying out for God's justice and mercy.²⁶⁰ Jesus, as Rodrigo would say, will side with, and act in favour of those in that situation. Pieris, complementing Rodrigo's perspective, insisted on the necessity of opting for the Beatitudes as the common spiritual basis to fight the common enemy, mammon, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka.

4.6 Pieris' Contribution to the Development of the Church of Asia in the Sri Lankan Context

Here, let me identify four main premises of Pieris' theology of revelation and Christology which guide us through his major contributions to the development of the Church of Sri Lanka.

1. That the multifaceted religiosity (specific characteristic defining Asia within the poor countries) and overwhelming poverty (the common denominator between Asia and the rest of the Third World), taken together, form the matrix of any authentic Asian theology. Pieris is the first to propose this thesis.²⁶¹ This basic premise led Pieris to discover the paradigm of Covenantal Christology which has the Word-Crucified as its foundation, a key notion of Pieris' theology. This Covenant Christology, in turn, provides the basis for his brand of Liberation Christology of Religious Pluralism. As Amaladoss (Indian) and Sergio Torres (Chilean) would affirm this theological premise had a direct impact in changing the EATWOT's Latin American perspective of the poor and their struggle for

²⁶⁰ Cf. M. Rodrigo, "Bible and the Liberation of the Poor," p. 70.

²⁶¹ Cf. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1994, p.141.

liberation which was rather dominant in the association till its international conference in 1979.²⁶²

2. The second major premise in Pieris' theology can be identified as the overwhelming presence of non-Christian soteriologies in Asia. According to Pieris, every Asian culture has grown around a soteriological nucleus which is not yet assimilated into Christian consciousness. In Sri Lanka it is predominantly Buddhism. It is there, Pieris believes, in Asia that the theology of revelation/liberation, and the purpose of religious pluralism lies hidden waiting to be discovered. However, to engage in such a laborious and complex task a credible *language* is demanded.
3. The third premise, therefore, is the need of a common Asian linguistic idiom to discover a truly Asian theology since the common Latin idiom of European and liberation theologies makes little sense in Asia. Hence, Pieris highlights the relevance of the idiomatic languages of Christianity and Buddhism, namely, *agape* and *gnosis*.²⁶³ However, according to Pieris the dialectical interplay of these idiomatic languages are necessary for a fuller understanding and experience of liberation that religions and poverty have combined to produce. Here, he identifies the monastic communities as visible communities of the authentic dialectical interplay of *gnosis* and *agape* sustained by voluntary poverty or beatitudes that Asian *poor* monks assume. It was noted that the acknowledgement of the reciprocity of these two liberative idioms on the part of both Buddhists and Christians is a condition *sine-qua-non* for a core-to-core dialogue.

²⁶² Cf. M Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1997, p.93. Also see S. Torres, "A Latin American View of the Asian Theological Conference," in: V. Fabella (ed.) *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, pp. 191-197.

²⁶³ Cf. A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, p. 111.

4. The fourth premise is his insistence that meta-cosmic soteriologies are never found in abstract “textual” form. In Asia the meta-cosmic soteriologies already taken root in Asia have invariably accepted and built upon the cosmic religions which they encountered.²⁶⁴ This is another unique theological contribution of Pieris that redefines the Sri Lankan Church’s specific mission in the context where Buddhism is well rooted in the culture.

4.7 Conclusion

In this Chapter we saw how the theologians in consideration differ but are complementary in their dominant perspective and interpretation of Jesus to Sri Lankan society. We also elaborated how Sri Lankan theologians, in the light of the risen Jesus and the cosmic Christ, are convinced that nothing prevents God’s self-revelation to all God’s people. Salvation is seen as being channelled to all human beings not in spite of but through and in their various socio-cultural and religious traditions. They all agree that the message of liberation is not demonstrated by rational argument or scientific proofs, but by a life’s witness, an example of commitment.

This common conviction is well respected in Pieris’ approach of Covenant Christology to religious Pluralism. Here he elaborates on the identity and saving function of Jesus Christ, the Word, beyond the confines of Christianity. He brings out clearly the one path of salvation in Jesus’ becoming the cosmic Christhood without giving into the fulfilment theory while maintaining the unique and decisive role of Christ. Pieris’ integral approach to religious pluralism based on his Covenant Christology takes us beyond the traditional arguments and questions the theology of religions would raise. The most challenging question and mission here is how to proclaim to Sri Lankans the truth about Jesus as the unique and universal saviour. This

²⁶⁴ Cf. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 64.

demanding prophetic mission can be carried out with honour following Pieris' proposed guiding principle of the twofold Word-Command. Accordingly, first and foremost we need to safeguard our fidelity to our own Christian identity. This identity, as explained, is enshrined in the twofold Love-Command spelt out as love of God and love of neighbour. Hence, to safeguard our Christian identity it requires that we proclaim Christ as the One who demands conversion from mammon-worship (Mt 6:19-24) rather than conversion from other religions (Mt 23:15).

Secondly, in keeping with our *Christian uniqueness*, we must confess, both by word and deed, in liturgy and life that the Word-Crucified and Risen is God's defence pact with the poor. This confession of the unique feature of our faith would drive us to a relentless struggle for/with the poor, as the mission of the seed that must die to bring forth life, rather than a weed that kills the religious identity of others in the name of evangelization. The other religionists in Sri Lanka can join the struggle for/with the poor without compromising their faith, based on the spirituality common to all religions which was supremely revealed on the Cross. Thus I propose that this integral approach to religious pluralism would best serve the Church *in* Sri Lanka in her struggle to become a Church *of* Sri Lanka.

General Conclusion

I intend to evaluate and assess the major elements of Pieris' Christian theology in the light of the hypothesis of this thesis and propose further needed elucidation and theological elaboration. My aim is not to evaluate the legitimacy of the whole project. At the end I will propose a theological orientation towards building up a relevant local Church *of* Sri Lanka.

General Evaluation and Appreciation

As discussed, what brought us to the theme of this dissertation is that in the eyes of the Buddhist majority and the Hindus the Church in Sri Lanka still has a foreign image even after over five hundred years of presence in the country. However it would be an exaggeration to say that all Christian missionaries were slaves to the imperialistic notions. The history of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka bears witness to missionaries who had a commitment to servanthood. Nevertheless, in general, the concerted missionary effort of colonial times planted an imperialistic church alienated from the Sri Lankan religio-cultural ethos.

The Second Vatican Council, as a Council of renewal with a pastoral and ecumenical orientation, spoke of the need for the Church to become a local church and of the universal Church as a communion of local churches. This insistence has been made by the FABC since its first meeting in 1974 and was reiterated by the Synod of Asian Bishops in 1998. In the same spirit we demonstrated that the Church *in* Sri Lanka cannot credibly evangelize if it is not authentically *of* Sri Lanka. However, though the outcome of the Council was, in a way, a compromise between the progressives and the conservatives or the traditionalists and renewalists, it certainly opened up new perspectives and a new vision. But unfortunately the Council did not have at her disposal a new theological idiom to express its new vision as a Council of renewal. Hence, the Church in Sri Lanka is at a crossroads of "constructing" a

relevant theological language or idiom that would correspond to the Council's intention and not to the mere literal interpretation of the theological language used in it. This urgent need demands of the Sri Lankan Church a renewed theological thinking. It calls for an evaluation of the Sri Lankan Church's pre-suppositions of her theological base for her to advance imaginatively through a process of critical fidelity to the creative Word of God, that is, Jesus himself. More precisely, it requires a critical study of her present understanding of the theology of revelation/Christology in view of building a firm foundation for a relevant Church *of* Sri Lanka that considers the contextual realities of poverty and religiousness as *resources* of the theology of revelation together with the *sources* of Scripture and Tradition.

With this background in mind we asked how the Church can be a Church *of* Sri Lanka and not merely a Church *in* Sri Lanka in its lived context of religious pluralism and abject poverty. We argued that it is in becoming authentically a local church of Sri Lanka that it can become a Church *of* Sri Lanka. In the light of this dissertation, it is a call for the Church in Sri Lanka to be radically inculturated in the religio-cultural ethos by participating (as in the "Monastic model" of inculturation) in the liberative dimensions of Sri Lankan religiosity and poverty. It implies that the local church needs to be proclamational in her life and ministerial praxis in identifying with the Sri Lankan poor, Christian or otherwise, rather than serving her traditional goal of the mission – *plantatio ecclesiae*. For this natural process of inculturation to be authentic and effective the Sri Lankan Church needs to develop for herself a strong theological foundation.

Thus in this thesis we attempted to demonstrate the significance of the Word-Crucified, a key notion in understanding Aloysius Pieris' theology, in constituting a relevant and renewed thinking of theology of revelation as the foundation for a new theology of religions in the Sri

Lankan context. In other words, throughout this dissertation this basic notion, the Word-Crucified, undergirds our search for a relevant *language* to communicate the credibility of revelation in the Sri Lankan context. We demonstrated how the formulation of such a credible *language* is possible, with proper guidance, by acknowledging the *one path* of liberation on which Christians join Buddhists in their *Gnostic detachment* or “voluntary poverty” and Buddhists join the Christian *agapeic involvement* in the struggle against “forced poverty” to mediate the self-transcending experience called salvation. It is this credible *language* of revelation that found its supreme expression in Jesus, the Word, on the Cross which is recapitulated by the twofold Word- Command: Love your God and your neighbour (Mt. 22:37-40) or love [God in] your neighbour (Rom. 13:8-10). Jesus, the Word-Crucified, is the representative embodiment of both God and neighbour. However, with the emphasis on the Word-Crucified, the revelatory medium of salvation, it was asserted that all religions, ideologies, theologies and cultures need to be transcended by the Truth they try to articulate while respecting their legitimate existence.

The creative approach of Pieris requires the Sri Lankan Church to participate in the local cultural ethos and soteriological nucleus of its religions. This would provide the point of re-entry to Christ while the Church would regain its lost ‘authority’ and local recognition that comes with being a Church of the poor. However, if the uncontainable, limitless perspective of the creative Word of God is not safeguarded we might let this proposed contextual approach degenerate into the possible risk of “cultural captivity” or a “religio-cultural fundamentalism” within the universal Church. That is, there is the danger of identifying the Gospel too closely with a particular religio-cultural setting. It is a fact that the Word of God, the content of revelation which is infinite, cannot be contained in finite vessels and not even in the written Holy Book of

the Bible. At the same time, as pointed out, it is the Word that saves humanity through imperfect earthly realities in given cultures and religions. This brings us to our realization that running the risk of cultural captivity is inherent in the Church's mission. Pieris too is aware of this danger of cultural captivity when he stresses the soteriological and liberative in contrast to the sinful and enslaving dimension of Sri Lankan/Asian religions and cultures.

The most practical way of salvaging religions and cultures from their perverted forms is to engage in a symbiotic dialogue of religions, cultures and poor (Triple-Dialogue). These three dialogues form but a three-pronged single approach to the Christian mission in Sri Lanka. Such a dialogue would bring the Church to the realization that it is only the authentic liberative core of Christianity that will provide the indigenous idiom for meaningful Christ-talk in Sri Lanka. However, leading to this highest level of core-to-core dialogue, Pieris identifies a framework which includes two other integral levels in which each religion operates, namely, the *collective memory* and the *interpretation* of that core liberative experience. This analysis of religious structure in terms of three levels provides the advantage of incorporating various levels of theological thinking into an integral whole recognizing their legitimate worth. Here, in avoiding "religio-cultural fundamentalism," I would add that the Sri Lankan Church should take up the challenge of maintaining the unity and integrity of the Church worldwide while letting it be redeemed by the Word- Crucified and its Spirit. This is basically a challenge to keep a balanced interface between the global and the local through exchange and communication. The Church's ultimate guide in any local context should be God's revelation culminated in the Word-Crucified.

Pieris, in comparison to many other Sri Lankan/Asian theologians, finds a more credible and a relevant dialogical *language* of revelation because his dialogue takes place *within* and *among* the social location of the BHCs and not simply *between* the Christian community and

other non-Christian communities. He calls such dialogue a veritable *symbiosis* of religions within the one single ongoing liberative process moving towards the Ultimate Future (God's Reign). Within his *symbiosis* of religions, Pieris views the mutual complementarity and convergence of all religions. Here, each religion is discovering and renaming itself in its specificity while converting itself to the common heritage of all religions, in response to the other approaches to total liberation. This opens up a path for the Sri Lankan Church to engage in a theology of dialogue, and not merely to build a "theology for dialogue" without losing her religious identity. Pieris' version of liberation theology which combines both core experiences, namely *agape* and *gnosis*, produced a brand of Christology of religious pluralism that does not compete with Buddhism but complements, challenges and mutually transforms each other. Thus a guiding principle for an authentic *symbiotic inculturation* between *agape* and *Gnosis*, the core spiritualities in Sri Lanka, can be found in the Covenant Christology which has the twofold Love-Command as its foundation. Here, I call this process a *symbiotic inculturation* to mean that the goal of all attempts at inculturation should be a symbiotic fusion of culture and religion into a common but new vision of spirituality acknowledging the specificity of each culture and religion. The Covenant Christology emerging out of the social locations of BHCs in Sri Lanka has the rightful legitimacy to guide the Sri Lankan Church through the process of the symbiotic dialogue of religions (cosmic and meta-cosmic), cultures and their people, especially the poor.

This process of renewed thinking for a desired renewed "Catholic" church takes place in its germinal levels very much in the periphery of the mainline churches with Triple-Dialogue as its essential mode. In this sense theology is a discovery rather than an invention. It is in that perspective we asked in this dissertation: what is the universality and uniqueness of Jesus in the context of religious pluralism? How could we present Jesus Christ in a religiously pluralistic

situation, particularly in the predominantly Buddhist context of Sri Lanka? What does it mean to be a Church of Jesus Christ in Sri Lanka? Sri Lankan Christians need to renew their Christian vision. They need to redefine their historical self-consciousness within the culture they live in if they truly wish to be faithful to the *spirit* of Vatican II. The Sri Lankan problem is not a dogmatic problem, but a problem of a meaningful Christian life. It is the reason why I propose the Word-Crucified as the point of departure for a meaningful dialogue on God's revelation in Jesus with the Sri Lankan people.

This dissertation does not claim to be an exhaustive Sri Lankan systematic theology of revelation. It has its focus set on the reformulation of the traditional theology of revelation and Christology to make it relevant in the Sri Lankan context based on the twofold Word-Command which recapitulates the whole teaching of the Scriptures. This dissertation is primarily an effort to develop a new Sri Lankan Christian identity as the Church *of* Sri Lanka by entering into the religio-cultural ethos that operates through the interplay of cosmic and meta-cosmic religions. More precisely, it is an attempt to formulate a credible *language* mode to enter into the Sri Lankan religio-cultural ethos through renewed theological thinking using the soteriological idiom of non-Christian religions in Sri Lanka, especially Buddhism. The soteriology or the liberative thrust is common to all scriptural religions in Sri Lanka. This is a natural process of inculturation through which the Church will find solidarity not only with Sri Lankan monks and nuns in their quest for the meta-cosmic reality, but more so with the Sri Lankan poor who aspire for a cosmic order that is more just and holy. The Church inculturated in Sri Lanka becomes the Church *of* Sri Lanka when liberated from mammon and therefore composed of the poor. Hence, it is such a process of inculturation that will result in projecting the true image of Jesus, the

Word-Crucified and thereby remove the impression of *foreignness* attached to the Church in Sri Lanka.

Critical Reflections and Suggestions

Pieris' theology of revelation and Christology do not present a complete portrait of the New Testament Jesus but his "symbiotic exegeses", namely, his cross-scriptural reading of certain texts with a liberational thrust is innovative and contextual; for example, his interpretation of Jesus' prophetic mission begun at the waters of Jordan as a baptism in the "Jordan of Asian religions" and the death of Jesus as a baptism on the "Calvary of Asian poverty." I propose that Pieris' major thesis on Jesus' double baptism more appropriately be linked to the resurrection of Jesus as a constitutive aspect of his death as evident in Pauline theology (Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 2:11-13; Eph. 2:4-6). However, we do not deny that Pieris does elaborate on the inseparable unity between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the out-pouring of the Spirit, particularly when he argues that it is the uniqueness of *Jesus* and not the uniqueness of *Christ* that makes sense in Sri Lanka/Asia.

In the Sri Lankan context of religious pluralism the issue of fast growing Christian Fundamentalist Sects and Evangelical groups need serious study since "unethical conversion" has negatively affected the credibility of the Sri Lankan church in general, and particularly the Catholic Church which forms the religious majority among the Christian mainline churches. Today in the era of the ever-increasing phenomenon of globalization the activities of these groups with the open aim of conversions refresh old memories and wounds of colonial aggressive mission. This volatile religio-cultural situation together with the onslaught of consumerism spread by the proponents of globalization produces a backlash of religio-cultural

fundamentalism. There is a Buddhist religious-resurgence taking place in Sri Lanka and is often a very positive movement. But the merging of religious fundamentalism and narrow ethnicity is creating new forms of violence, hatred and divisions. I suggest that these new Sri Lankan social realities together with poverty and religiousness be considered as an indispensable context for any interreligious dialogue in the 21st century. However, globalization is a double-edged sword, both a blessing and a curse, but it is here to stay. Here, the Sri Lankan Church needs to take a courageous stand for justice and compassion in favour of all the poor and disadvantaged.

Furthermore, as for a future study I wish that the Buddhist-Christian dialogue be further developed, taking the cue from what we proposed in this thesis, to meet the challenging demands of nation-building, reconciliation, and human responsibility and rights after thirty long years of internecine ethnic ‘war’ ending in 2009. The Catholic Church with its large representation of major ethnic groups, namely, Sinhala and Tamil should work it to her advantage to break grounds for ethnic reconciliation. There are many socio-political and religious misconceptions that need correction based on facts. As scholars would admit, according to the great historical chronicle *Mahavamsa*, the major national conflicts ignited by the Chola-invasion from the South Indian Tamil State or the internal domestic conflicts between kings before the 19th century were mainly motivated by greed for political power and wealth, and not by a racio-linguistic attitude. It was especially with the arrival of the British in the 19th century as a colonial power, that the Sinhala Buddhists of Sri Lanka seemed to have shown racial and linguistic bias in their revolts. As discussed in the First Chapter, the self-understanding of the Sinhala Buddhists in the pre-colonial times was that they were a “chosen people” rather than a “chosen race” by the Buddha to conserve and spread his true message. However, there should be also an honest acceptance of the darker side of the religio-cultural element in Sri Lanka in the pre-colonial times.

Furthermore, Pieris' paradigm of Covenant Christology needs to be enriched with a serious study of Islam, the most widespread representative of the biblical religiosity in Asia.¹ According to the 2001-Census and Statistics, Muslims have a higher religious percentage of 8.5% compared to Christianity's 6.9% in Sri Lanka. Pieris is aware of the Islamic monotheism that rejects Trinitarian theology which rules out any possibility of Pneumatology as the starting point of the dialogue. However, he briefly talks about a possible common ground for Islam and Christianity found in the advocacy of a non-idolatrous commitment to life, and hope in the resurrection of the body.

Guiding Theological Orientation

Here, I propose a theological orientation towards a building up of the Church *of* Sri Lanka from the point of view of my research.

- a) The revelation of the infinite love of God in the self-emptying Christ, the Word-Crucified, alone is credible. Hence, the credibility of Christianity and its institution, the Church, lies in partaking in Jesus' mission of love. Love is the all-pervasive mission of Jesus. As this dissertation demonstrated, we consider the twofold Word-Command, namely, love of God and love of neighbour, as the sum and substance of God's revelation and salvation since it recapitulates the whole teaching of the Scriptures, according to Jesus himself. Furthermore, the Covenant Christology, proposed by Pieris, based on the twofold Word-Command brings Christianity and other religions to one common platform in our attempts to make sense of divine revelation in Sri Lanka. Since mammon is the common enemy who competes with God for our allegiance, then whoever is anti-

¹ Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are defined as biblical religions because of their roots in the Semitic context that produced the Bible.

mammon cannot be anti-Yahweh. Thus, as argued, the conflict in the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka is not with atheism as such but with *idolatry* (mammon-worship). Accordingly, the conversion to which Jesus calls us is primarily a change of allegiance from the forces of the anti-Kingdom to God.

- b) It is the talk of the *uniqueness of Jesus*, and not the *uniqueness of Christ* that make sense. Christ is the name by which Jesus' uniqueness is expressed most consistently in Scripture and Tradition. It is in the fact of becoming Christ that Jesus makes his uniqueness manifest. In this process he continually engages in forming an irrevocable defense pact between the poor and Yahweh. In fact, it is this datum of revelation, namely, the irrevocable covenant relationship between *God and the poor* – the foundation of *the struggle for the poor* – that gives a Christian specificity to a monastic vocation and gives an added relevance to it in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Jesus, the Word-Crucified is at once the epitome of God's self revelation and salvation for humankind, and of the human response to our covenant with God. Biblical soteriology enfleshed as Jesus, that is, God's covenant with the poor is a non-negotiable essential element of Christian revelation. It advocates the total liberation of humanity and the cosmos into God's Reign. It demands liberation of the whole body rather than the mere salvation of souls. Here, the God of the poor demands a change of unjust social structures rather than a change of religion as the condition for salvation.
- c) Religions and poverty, each in its liberative dimension, coalesce to provide both the cultural context and the liberational thrust required in any authentic Sri Lankan theology of revelation and Christology. In other words, the soteriological or liberative form of religions and poverty will provide the indigenous idiom for a meaningful dialogue on

God's revelation in Jesus, the Word-Crucified. Religions and poverty together forge a common front against mammon, the common enemy of all scriptural religions. Hence, as Sri Lanka Christians, while we rely on Sacred Tradition and Scriptures as the sources of revelation (*DV.9* and *10*) we need to evolve a theology and *a fortiori*, a theology of revelation together with the Sri Lankan contextual realities as resources, insofar as we discern in them God's presence, action and the work of the Spirit. The contexts or contextual realities are considered as resources of revelation theology rather than merely a background against which one does theology as did the missionaries of the colonial past. According to our argument in this dissertation theology is not a way of adapting and applying the Gospel message to people in response to the questions and challenges thrown up by concrete socio-religio-cultural situations. Instead, theology is the articulation of the lived experience in the light of the Scriptures. The basic argument is that 'history' is not just a setting for God's word to be expressed (as in scholastic theology); rather history is itself revelatory. This 'history' is made up of the people, especially the poor, their culture, and religions. God's Word is heard even today in and through this history. He still speaks. History illuminates the text (the Scriptures), testifies to it, that it is born of a milieu and makes the text a criterion for discernment today. Here, we read the text from and within our historical situation. It is in this sense that the Church needs to stress that the Bible text frees us and liberates us.

- d) In the context of religious plurality and poverty in Sri Lanka theology is an inter-religious task. It evolves through a symbiotic dialogue in the social location of basic human communities. These are the common platform where the Christian minority of Sri Lanka retells the story of Christ as a Sri Lankan drama of liberation to the Buddhist majority.

However, this story will be truly a Sri Lankan narrative of liberation if the narrator, the Christian faithful, abide by the truth that though all of Jesus is Christ, not all of Christ is Jesus (*Jesus est totus Christus, non totum Christi*). Jesus, the Word-Crucified, is the ever growing Word to its full stature as the *totality* of Christ with the “poor by circumstances” and the “poor by choice” together with the whole cosmos. It is among these poor, who are predominantly non-Christian that we find, as Pieris would say, the Sri Lankan/Asian “non-Christian Christ.” It is in this “non-Christian Christ”, the “Spiritual Body”, in whom the Sri Lankan religious poor are reconciled with one another and with God. These religious poor, together with the cosmos, struggle unto death to usher in God’s Reign on earth. As observed earlier, “the poor by choice” who usher in God’s Reign on earth, include the co-agents of liberation, guides in the path of righteousness, discoverers and announcers of the Saving Truth, founders and advocates of other religions.

- e) Going by the historically observed general pattern of religious expansion in various parts of Asia, one observes that the success of establishing any given meta-cosmic religion in a particular country is basically dependent on its success in sinking its roots in the given cosmic religiosity. Accordingly, the Sri Lankan Church first of all needs to be aware that the primary root cause of her foreign impression lies in her failure to strike roots in the cosmic religiosity of Sri Lanka. Therefore, Christ’s colonial appearance is not as such necessarily and primarily the cause for Christianity’s foreign impression as widely thought. This was due to the insensitivity of the missionaries to the dynamics of the Sri Lankan religio-cultural pattern. The missionaries of the colonial times did not see the significance of cosmic religiosity in establishing Christianity in Sri Lanka. This insensitivity was largely due to missionaries’ lack of exposure to the reality of religious

pluralism which is the defining character of Sri Lanka/Asia among the other poor countries of the Third World. In the Sri Lankan context, culture, and religion are overlapping facets of one indivisible soteriology, which is at once a view of life (a philosophy of life) and a path of deliverance.

- f) Sri Lanka will always remain a Buddhist Country. However, this does not bar the Church from proclaiming Jesus Christ to the Sri Lankan people nor should anyone find fault if someone wants to be a Christian ethically, out of conviction and free choice. Here, mutual respect and complementarity among religions should be upheld. In the light of this dissertation, Christianity's attempt to sink its roots into the cosmic religiosity of Sri Lanka should not be viewed in any way as an attempt to replace already established meta-cosmic religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Nor, should it be viewed as an attempt to procure a noticeable *place* for the *displaced* Christ in Sri Lankan society side by side with other religions. Hence, as one of her basic principles, the Sri Lankan Church should not consciously target an ecclesiastical expansion into non-Christian culture but should endeavour towards forging an indigenous ecclesial identity from within the soteriological perspectives of other religions. Accordingly, the present mission of the Church in Sri Lanka is to look for her credibility within the Buddhist majority by ministerially getting involved with Jesus in his conflict with mammon and in his covenant partnership with the poor. This is what authentic inculturation of the Church in Sri Lanka means. There the Church will be seen as a lamp on a stand that lights up all. This self emptying missionary attitude of the Church should inspire the adherents of all religions to articulate their own liberative aspirations more clearly. More precisely, it is the Church's mission to accompany the poor or the victims of organized greed in their

paschal journey towards full humanity. At the same time, the Sri Lankan Church that is part of this same struggle should endeavour to participate in and to appropriate the liberative core of other religions in making the Word-Crucified recognizable as the Word of liberation and as the Word of protest against the rule of mammon.

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The writings of Aloysius Pieris: his books, articles in various periodicals, his contribution to edited works and his unpublished material form the primary sources; and works on Pieris from the secondary sources. The third section is divided into four subdivisions, namely, Church documents, dictionaries, and other books and articles.

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